Part 1
World Affairs in Perspective
Introduction to Part I

What are world affairs, that we may know them?

The modernist answer to this question, and the one preferred by most contemporary analysts of what we might call the disciplinary mainstream, is to stand back to look in an objectifying way at ‘the world’, prioritizing the use of reason. Given the contemporary penchant for rationalist thinking, not as a means with which to explore prior beliefs or conventions, but as an untrammelled end in itself, this comes as no surprise.

The politico-cultural context

Why is it that standing back mentally to look at world affairs in rationalist terms should be prioritized, however? Where did the contemporary penchant for doing so come from? Who says that distancing ourselves from ‘reality’, and casting it in the light of the mind alone, is the best way to know?

Answering these questions is not simple. What we can say, though, is that for the last three or four hundred years, and most intensively for the last one hundred fifty, Westerners in both the Old and New worlds have been engaged in a profound and far-reaching politico-cultural experiment. Whether they happen to be aware of the fact or not, a critical number of those who belong to these societies have been part of a sustained and systematic attempt to inculcate one particular mental capacity, namely, rationalism, that is, the use of human reason, as an end in itself. This capacity is seen to be superior to all others in knowing the world and predicting and controlling how it works. This includes, of course, the knowing and controlling of ‘world affairs’. This
politico-cultural experiment is what is called the ‘modernist project’, of which modernist world affairs are one component.

What does this project entail? All human beings have the capacity for reason. In some people this capacity may be impaired for physical reasons that are readily apparent. In others, it may be impaired (a modernist might argue) for non-physical reasons that may be harder to appreciate because they are culturally induced. If the capacity for reason can be impaired by cultural means, however, it should be possible to augment it by cultural means as well – to ‘cure’ the culturally blind, as it were, that they might ‘see’. The modernist project is based on this assumption.

Participation in the modernist project requires us to believe that consciously educating the capacity for reason allows us to know more about the world. It requires the belief in this as a universal potential, whose realization involves only the appropriate cultural means.

Why a critical number of Euro-Americans first undertook such a project, and ultimately on a whole-cultural scale, is far from clear. Determining the cause of any pattern of significant human practice is not easy, and determining the cause of rationalism is no exception. We do know that rationalism was given cultural priority, however, because we live with its consequences today, not the least of which is the current construction of world affairs.

We do know that some of the ancient Greeks set a luminous precedent in this regard, though theirs was not the only culture to value the life of the mind in a systematic way, as witnessed by the medieval centres of learning in the Mediterranean rim that kept their legacy alive and by ancient Chinese, Indian and other examples too. The Euro-American mind-move was deemed a success only once it began to deliver large amounts of new knowledge of a relatively reliable and practical kind, however. This it began to do in copious amounts by the end of the nineteenth century, and the confirmation process has not faltered since. Once its success became self-evident, rationalism began to be used for everything, in accordance with the so-called ‘law of the hammer’, which predicts that a small child, given a mallet to wield, will begin to pound whatever is within its reach. As an ideology, rationalism seemed to justify itself in terms of its extraordinary technological outcomes, and the question of whether or not it was the best way to know seemed to become irrelevant. What else could match its puzzle-solving power? What other cultural construct could deliver similar amounts of such replicable and useful information? What rival method could better
predict how the world works, or provide better for its technological prediction and control?

So, how do world affairs seem when objectified rationally for no other purpose than the act of objectifying itself? As argued at the outset, they seem first of all to be made of objects. Wherever the objectifying mind-gaze is turned, we see ‘things’, like ‘states’ or ‘firms’, ‘Japan’ or ‘IBM’. Wherever we look by reason’s light, we also differentiate and compare, however. Standing back to look at world affairs as a world apart, as it were, we observe their different dimensions, we contrast them, we name them, all the better to describe, explain, predict and prescribe for what we think we ‘see’.

‘World affairs’ in three dimensions

Standing back to look at world affairs objectively, the first dimension we tend to notice is the politico-strategic one, that is, state-making. Confronting world affairs full on, as it were, we find the international news as reported in the newspapers, or as shown on TV. These reports typically feature statesmen and stateswomen doing the business of ‘the state’, that is, both ‘the state’ in general and their own states in particular. It features diplomatic initiatives and armed force. It is the stuff of International Relations (IR) as traditionally conceived, and as such it is the dominant disciplinary concern. It is the diplomatic–military dimension to the discipline, and home ground to every world affairs analyst.

Standing back to look at world affairs objectively, the second dimension we tend to see is the politico-economic one, that is, market-making. As we turn from the international news pages to the business news pages, for example, or as the TV news progresses to the part before the sport and weather reports, we find not diplomats and military personnel but entrepreneurs and investors. We find stories about producers and consumers, traders and investors, managers and workers, doing the business of ‘the market’ in general and of their own markets in particular (whether these be capital markets, labor markets, money markets, or commodity markets – primary, secondary or tertiary). All these people deal with the supply and demand factors that define market affairs. All deal with the consequences of having the means of production in private or public hands, and the consequences of labor being for sale for a wage. This is the stuff of the International Political Economy (IPE) as currently conceived. It is of key disciplinary concern today, though it is mostly considered subordinate to the
politico-strategic dimension. It is the material aspect to world affairs, the realm of capital and property, and though it is not exactly home ground yet to most world affairs analysts, it is usually acknowledged to be of cognate significance.

Standing back to look at world affairs objectively, the third dimension we tend to see is the politico-social one, that is, self-making. As we turn from the diplomatico-military and market news to the life-style and sport pages, for example, we find the dominant figures in our field of vision changing. Instead of states, for example, or firms in markets, we find the individuated individuals who constitute the rationalist/modernist world. This dimension features the struggle to establish a sense of self appropriate to modernist world affairs. This identity will be different from that shared by non-modernists, since rationalist objectifying and standing back to look requires a self-in-the-head to do the looking with. A detached self like this one is only established after years of persistent training. It is a self that can look at reality as ‘reality’, as something at a distance, and with itself as part of that consciously pictured place.

A certain amount of intellectual schizophrenia is involved in making such a radical mind move. If enough people do it at the same time, however, we get a very significant result. We get an intellectual revolution, no less, that results in Science and all that this extraordinary project entails.

Some valorise individuation even further, promoting, for example, a consciously individualistic ideology of self-realization and self-maximization. They are the advocates of the doctrine of liberalism, in all its different forms.

Some seek to compensate for the alienation and anomie they come to feel, seeking solace in solidarist alternatives like that of the nation, for example. Others opt for more collectivist alternatives, like those that contemporary social movements represent.

All this is the stuff of the International Political Society (IPS). As such it is not yet recognized as a dominant disciplinary concern, though there is no reason other than intellectual myopia for not giving it such recognition. It is what might be called the social identity dimension to world affairs (as opposed to the material and diplomatico-military ones noted above). It is not home ground to most analysts in the discipline, though it ought to be, given the global significance of the issues and practices it involves.

Standing back to look at world affairs we tend to see it, first of all, in these three dimensions – we see it, as it were, from the front, from the side, and from up above.
Why three dimensions, and why these three dimensions?

Why do we see world affairs in three dimensions only? And why these three dimensions? Why do we see the first two in particular? And why is the third only now beginning to get the attention it deserves from analysts of world affairs? What is more, why don’t we highlight the politico-cultural context in which all three of these dimensions are to be found? Why is the politico-cultural context only now beginning to get the attention that it deserves? Why, in addition, don’t we acknowledge the significance of those marginalized by the modernist experience? What of the roles played worldwide by women, for example, or wage-workers, indigenous peoples, ethnics, environmentalists, or religious believers? All of these are evident to reason’s questing eye. They rarely get ‘seen’ as readily as the other issue areas do, however. Why is that?

The answer to all these questions is simple: we do see these other aspects to world affairs. We do see the social dimension, for example, and the cultural context, and those made peripheral, particularly if we are concerned with identity, or modernity, or happen to be on the margins ourselves. The ‘we’ that does this kind of seeing is a side-stream ‘we’, however. It is not usually a mainstream one. Those aware of the significance of more than politico-strategic and politico-economic analysis, in other words, are not those who currently get much of a hearing. They are outside the discipline’s core concerns as currently described by those who articulate them. They mostly get ignored or encysted or otherwise silenced. Indeed, how else are such preferred dimensions to prevail, if not despite such competing points of view?

For most analysts this is merely a matter of learning what the mainstream concerns are as they grow up. Most accept the current construc-
tion of events because they are successfully taught to prioritize this construction. They then go on to help legitimize and perpetuate the predominance of politico-strategic and politico-economic affairs, whether wittingly or not. The objectifying mind-gaze of reason can be quite helpful in this regard since it can be used to foster a particularly virulent form of a-historicity, that is, to describe and explain how the world works in terms of some seemingly eternal and universal Truth.

This still begs the question posed above: why three dimensions, and why these three? Granted that most analysts learn to see world affairs this way, and granted that those analysts who know about other dimensions get marginalized or otherwise rendered hard to hear, how did the first two dimensions start getting taught in the first place? And why do other disciplinary voices tend to get put on the mainstream’s periphery?

A comprehensive answer would require a detailed discussion of the history of world affairs, and of the study of world affairs as a discipline. It would require a detailed discussion of how these affairs have been described and explained over time, that is, since these particular world affairs, and the attempts to describe, explain and prescribe for them, have taken place together. They have helped to constitute each other as they have gone along.

Very briefly, it was the advent of the contemporary state system in the seventeenth century that prompted this system’s analysis in politico-strategic terms. Since then this dimension to the discipline of world affairs, and this dimension to world affairs practice, have evolved together.

Along with the state system, we find the advent at the same time (and again for interesting and related historical reasons) of market capitalism. This prompted a political economics that has continued to evolve in symbiotic fashion with the subject of its enquiries as well.

The difference between politico-strategic and politico-economic affairs was actively fostered by liberals in the nineteenth century, and it was a very great victory for them when they ultimately managed to detach conceptions of economy from conceptions of polity, and of society too. This was part of the liberal program. It was part of an ideologically driven attempt to make markets more free from government controls. By dichotomising ‘economy’ and ‘polity’, liberals were able to put economy over polity as their preferred way to organize the world. We have been living with the consequences of this radical doctrine ever since.

The liberal program suffered a severe set-back in the twentieth century with the advent of state-centric socialism. With the end of the
main socialist experiments – in the Soviet Union and in China – liberal hegemony was re-confirmed, however. This, in turn, allowed full liberal endorsement of political economy as a discrete disciplinary dimension. This dimension had rather languished during the Cold War. It only began to get an independent hearing with the post-war growth in international inter-dependencies, the oil price hikes of the 1970s, and the collapse of the Bretton Woods agreements about how the world economy should be run.

The politico-cultural context for the emergence of both of the above was that of the European Enlightenment, and one key cause and consequence of rationalist thinking was individuation. This provided the sense of Self that was the basis for the liberalist project. It was radically reinforced by liberalism’s global success. It had its competitors, however. There are those, for example, who did not want to pay the social and emotional costs required by this way of thinking and feeling. And many made individualistic subsequently defaulted, taking solace either in the nostalgic form later known as nationalism (and most radically, fascism), or in the more forward-looking form later known as collectivism.

Individualism and its alternatives constitute the third main dimension to world affairs (the politico-social one, or IPS). This dimension is not about guns or money. It is, instead about people’s sense of social identity. This makes it relatively less apparent to the objectifying mind-gaze, despite the fact that it is a product of this mind-gaze itself.

Individualism itself has been radically associated since the seventeenth century with politico-economic market-making. The nationalist alternative to individualism has been radically associated since the nineteenth century with politico-strategic state-making, while collectivism (most notably in its socialist- and communist-party forms) has been associated in the twentieth century with attempts to transcend both of these other two dimensions (IR and IPE). None of this, despite its scope and significance, has impinged much to date upon the analytic consciousness of most students of world affairs.

The larger point to note is that enough people have for long enough been acting as if state-making, market-making and self-making actually did matter for anyone standing back to conclude that they actually do. These key liberalist practices have had a self-fulfilling effect, and the fact that we can talk about three discrete dimensions to world affairs is due in large part to the construction liberals have succeeded in placing upon the subject. This is why, in looking at world affairs, we find ample evidence to confirm what we ‘know’ about it already. We find
enough state-making and market-making (and if we look closely, enough social self-making too) to warrant a belief in a state-made, market-made, socially self-made world.

This is clear from the way we map politico-strategic affairs. Most world maps are characterized by nearly two hundred states. They each show sharply delineated borders, a capital city, transportation systems and the like. This is the main way most of us learn to read the world, in fact, and by behaving as if this kind of reading were the dominant reading, we do our own small part in bringing it about.

The second dimension to world affairs is also clear from the way the politico-strategic map of the world does not, in the main, depict politico-economic affairs. A map drawn specifically to document politico-economic affairs would tend to get hung behind the politico-strategic one. It would tend to be obscured by that map, presuming we decided to draw it anyway. If we did draw it though, we would graphically depict global patterns of trade and investment, plus comparative productive practices and the main migration routes of the world’s wage-workers.

The third dimension to world affairs, the politico-social one, does not feature on maps of either the politico-strategic or politico-economic kind. The politico-social map hangs, as it were, behind these two. If we did try to draw it, however, we would find, for example, graphically located and graphically displayed, the world’s main nations (potentially thousands of them), the global distribution of human rights adherents, and the networks that major global collectives create.9

**Nine analytical languages – and Marxism**

In describing and explaining what each dimension to world affairs involves, analysts differ as to what they ‘see’. Put, very crudely they fall into ten main camps. These camps derive from the three main assumptions people make about the fundamental of human nature, plus marxism.

As modernists we tend to assume that all people are at least potentially rational. Beyond that, however, we are either pessimists, assuming that human nature is tragic or ‘bad’. Or we are optimists, assuming that human nature is utopian or ‘good’. Or we assume that our rational faculties will prevail regardless of what else we might be. Or we eschew any such essentialist assumption altogether.
Those who are pessimistic about our characteristics as a species tend to highlight the destructive aspects of how we behave. They tend to believe the worst about what we might achieve, and about how world affairs might be crafted as a consequence. They are the least progressive when it comes to predicting what can be done.

Those who are optimistic about our characteristics as a species tend to highlight the creative aspects of how we behave. They tend to believe the best about what we might achieve, and about how world affairs might be crafted as a consequence. They are the most progressive in their expectations as to what might be done.

Those who see us as being essentially rationalistic tend to highlight the application of our rational intelligence. They tend to think not in terms of optimism or pessimism but in terms of our capacity to maximize our individual or collective self-interest. They are progressivist, but not as much as the ‘utopians’ tend to be. They have a more ‘scientific’, less ‘tragic’ sense of what is to be done.

Applied to each of the three dimensions of world affairs described above, these three assumptions about human nature provide us with a three-by-three matrix. Hence nine camps.

There is, however, another analytic language that is equally modernist (in that it prioritizes the rationalist mind-move) but does not make assumptions about human nature of the essentialist sort noted above. This language is that of the marxists. Liberal matrix makers place this ideology in the dimension of political economy. It represents to them a utopian alternative to liberalist marketeering. To marxists themselves, however, human nature is determined extrinsically. They see human nature determined more by the material circumstances in which particular humans find themselves, than by any intrinsic potential – good, bad or rationalistic. This puts marxists radically at odds with the rest of the matrix. It also allows them to highlight the way those who own the means of production dominate all three dimensions. It allows them to characterize the attempt to distinguish between dimensions like these as an attempt to obscure the class power of those who own or control the factories, the service firms, and the land. It allows them to emphasize the significance of private possession wherever one looks in world affairs – at states, at markets, or at senses of the self. And it allows them to imagine the advent of a new kind of non-alienated, non-individuated individual, the ‘species-being’, who is at home in humanity as a whole, and is fully human as a result.
The nine analytical languages (plus marxism) in more detail

Those who constitute the nine camps that make up the above matrix – plus marxism – use their own analytic languages to articulate their beliefs and observations. These languages describe and explain how the world looks in the ways peculiar to those in each camp. Taken together, they make for highly diverse accounts that are not commensurable. Thus, while analysts from different camps may use the same or similar concepts, they will mean different things by them. How world affairs appear to work will differ markedly, in fact, depending on the particular analytic language used to account for them.

In terms of the politico-strategic dimension, for example, analysts clump as follows. Those who (in the modernist way) see people as rational, but who are basically pessimistic about human nature and practice, tend to be realists. Those who see people as basically and predominantly rational, tend to be internationalists. And those who see people as rational, but who are basically optimistic about human nature and practice, tend to be globalists. Each group of analysts speaks an analytic language of their own.

In terms of the politico-economic dimension to world affairs the same three assumptions about human nature characterize three more camps. Those who (in the modernist way) see people as rational, but who are pessimistic about us as well, tend to be mercantilists (that is, economic nationalists). Those who see people as basically and predominantly rational tend to be liberals. While those who see people as rational, but who are optimistic about us as well, tend to be market universalists. There is an analytic language appropriate to each of these three groups as well.

In terms of the politico-social dimension to world affairs, the same three assumptions about human nature characterize three further camps. Those who (in the modernist way) see people as rational, but who are pessimistic about us as well, tend to be nationalists. Those who see people as basically and predominantly rational tend to be individualists. While those who see people as rational, but who are optimistic about us as well, tend to be collectivists. There is an analytic language appropriate to each of these three disciplinary camps.

So, put very crudely, there are three dimensions to world affairs and three assumptions about human nature (each applicable to each of these dimensions), which results in a matrix of nine analytic languages. There is the marxist alternative to the whole matrix. And these world affairs make margins as well, where different assumptions often obtain, and consequently, so do different analytical languages.
All attempts to analyze world affairs will be found somewhere in the table above. Every study in the mainstream of the subject will be found in one part of the matrix or another, though mostly somewhere in the first or second dimensions of it (IR or IPE). Analyses done on the periphery tend to be found right there – on the margins.

Which suggests that any particular piece of analysis will be easy to assign, which may well not be so. Thinkers may make more than one assumption about human nature. Analyses may involve more than one analytic dimension and so on – the matrix is a model, after all. It is a map of the discipline, not the discipline itself.

We should note at the outset that each analytic language represents a group of analytic dialects, as well. There are classical or extreme and moderate or more contemporary versions of most of these languages, while even within a particular dialect, there can be sub-dialects that represent yet other ways of talking about world affairs. Thus mercantilism can be outward looking and even imperialistic, or inward looking and autarchic, and though both of the dialects that account for these kinds of economic nationalism speak the same language of state autonomy, they do so in rather different ways. Liberalism, likewise, either sidelines the state (as in neo-liberalism), or countenances state intervention (as in ‘hegemonic stability theory’). Classical marxists and neo-marxists also speak very different versions of the same analytic language (marxism), while neo-marxism has sub-dialects of its own that include neo-Leninism, neo-Gramscianism, dependency theory, and world systems theory. Each one of these sub-dialects talks about the world in a recognisably different way, despite its general neo-marxist affinities.
It should also be said at the outset that the ‘lines’ between the nine camps the matrix makes, as well as the lines between the matrix and marxism and between the matrix and its margins, are zones at best, not lines at all. State-making, market-making and self-making, for example, are radically entangled practices, if only because any particular individual or group will be a mixture of all the fundamental traits of human beings, and is also open to change. Separating out different aspects of world affairs or human nature can only be done analytically, in other words. It can only be done for the convenience of having a systematic way to understand the minestrone of ideas and arguments, events and practices, that is the discipline of world affairs. No such frame-working exercise will fit the world very well or for very long, while using such a frame-work will always involve both imposition and interpretation. That is why, applied uncritically, it will eventually come to hinder not help our attempt to know about world affairs.

This said, the matrix, plus its marxist alternative, plus the margins to it, does correspond to the main ways in which world affairs can currently be described, explained and understood. People have struggled for many years to say what they see when they stand back rationally from world affairs to look at what is happening. Though no one agreed way of talking has emerged in the process, nor has a babble of analytic tongues. Thus while no analytic Esperanto has been found, except in the minds of those who would want to impose their particular view as a universal one, or those who would want to quantify the analysis of world affairs (seeing in mathematics the language ‘reality’ speaks), analytic chaos has not resulted either. What we find in practice is a discrete number of languages of the sort just described, each with its committed critics and all with their diehard devotees.

World affairs are constantly being made as well as found. Enough people act as if the analytic languages they use are tangible and true, that is, to bring their key features about – at least in part. Which is why we can say that world affairs does have the three dimensions characterized above, and the marxist counter-dimension to them, and margins. As we seek to know world affairs, in other words, we also help to make them. And as we make world affairs, so we find what we think we ‘know’ about them too.10

The margins to the modernist project

The matrix as made up of the mainstream analytic languages not only has a radical and critical marxist alternative to it. It also has margins,
both exterior and interior, and it is to subalterns like these that we need to turn for ‘outsider’ views of what the languages do not say. So significant are these margins, in fact, that they merit consideration in their own right.

In terms of the exterior margins, there are those, for example, who persist (from the perspective of modernist world affairs that is) in the ‘premodernist’ penchant for not prioritizing reason. Many indigenous peoples come into this category. From their point of view the modernist project, as manifest in world affairs, is not the conceptual core, since modernity impinges upon the centre of their world from their periphery, and usually as a destructive more than a constructive force. Many religious fundamentalists think and act likewise, seeing reason not as a priority in and of itself, but as one way to get to God. In other words, non-rationalist assumptions have an on-going appeal, particularly among those who live in cultures and societies where the belief prevails that reason should be used for purposes other than the untrammelled pursuit of rationalist truths.

Because of the contemporary power and importance of the modernist project (which includes modernist world affairs of course) premodernist critiques often have to speak in modernist, rationalist terms to get a hearing. This can be misleading. It can also put premodernists at a distinct disadvantage, since it obliges them to make a key concession from the outset. This is one reason why the politics of language-usage can be so intense under these circumstances.

In terms of the margins exterior to modernist world affairs, there are also those ‘postmodernist’ people who once practiced, but have subsequently repudiated, what they consider to be rationalism’s more universalistic, ahistorical and reductionist ploys. These people typically employ a more relativistic and holistic approach. In doing so they sanction and endorse diverse non-modernist alternatives to modernity, alternatives that some would see bound to proliferate as modernity proceeds apace. Gray, for example, argues that the growth of a world economy (very much a modernist project again) does not inaugurate a universal civilization, as both Smith and Marx thought it must. Instead it allows the growth of indigenous kinds of capitalism, diverging from the ideal free market and from each other. It creates regimes that achieve modernity by renewing their own cultural traditions, not by imitating western countries. There are many modernities, and as many ways of failing to be modern.

(Gray, 1998: 195)
Postmodernists basically turn reason back on itself to provide the modernist project with an auto-critique, questioning in the process the most fundamental assumptions the rationalist mind-move makes. From their point of view it is they, not modernists, who are at the centre of world affairs. From their point of view, modernity impinges in the form of a powerful, but highly presumptuous attempt to reduce human diversity to the singular experience that rationalism requires.

Feminist postmodernists consider rationalism to be not only reductionist but gender-specifically so. They consider it a masculinist ideology. They reject the whole project as one designed to reduce world affairs to what suits masculinist concerns, and therefore as anti-female.

Environmentalist postmodernists see rationalism and its reductionism as causing the ecological problems we currently face. They repudiate it likewise.

Rationalists reject all such criticisms in turn. In doing so they reconfirm the position they see such critics holding on their, that is modernity’s, periphery, and the legitimacy of their doing so is seemingly endorsed by the fact that, to get a hearing by modernist rationalists, postmodernists are obliged to use the language of rationalism. This puts them, like the premodernists, at a distinct disadvantage. A thoroughly consistent postmodernist would not use speech at all. They would find it too limiting and linear as a way of articulating their awareness of the world. They would likely make use of the performing arts instead. To the modernist this would be further evidence of their marginality, and a gross dereliction of our analytic duty, though to the postmodernist it might well be a sincere attempt to transcend the limits set by speech on how we know world affairs.

In terms of the modernist project’s interior margins we find those who do subscribe to that project, since they do prioritize rationalism, but who have opted for or been consigned to modernity’s peripheries anyway. These people can be part of modernist world affairs, but they don’t get seen or heard as loudly or as clearly as those who inhabit modernity’s global core. They are in it but not of it, as it were.

There are rationalists, for example, who are feminists because they see themselves being marginalized, despite their rationalism, on grounds of gender or sex. As rationalists they might be realists or liberals, marxist or nationalists even. A liberal feminist, for example, might highlight our identity as autonomous selves, deserving of equal rights to self-determination and self-realization. A marxist feminist might highlight the role women play in sustaining the capitalist mode of production, and the exploitative nature of that role. They will critique the
modernist project rationally, and they will do so as this project is manifest in world affairs. They will be obliged to do so, nonetheless, from the internal margins of that project, not from its mainstream or core.

There are rationalists who are environmentalists also. They see themselves being marginalized by the modernist project because of its ecological prejudices (in this case, its prejudice in favour of economic growth). A liberal environmentalist might highlight our capacity to plan our way rationally out of ecological trouble, using international treaties for example. A marxist environmentalist might see ecological sustainability as only possible once we have universal socialism. Both will critique the modernist project rationally, but from its internal margins, not its core.

Then there are rationalists who are indigenous peoples. They argue for their cultural survival, though they accept the cultural significance of the rationalist mind-move as a means to this end, despite the threat it may pose to their own cultural premises.

There are even rationalist religionists, who see God, for example, as having set the universe going like a cosmic watchmaker. A god of this kind can be seen as having endowed human beings with reason as part of his/her/its/their overall design, and as having left it up to sentient creatures like these to make of the world what they will.

‘Multiple working hypotheses’

Since all the analytic perspectives cited above – modernist, premodernist and postmodernist – are involved in the making of world affairs, it can be said that only by including them all can we provide a comprehensive account of the subject. Some may well be involved more than others, but none will be irrelevant.

No such perspective can be ignored, in other words, though only eclectics are likely to accept such a broad-ranging conclusion. Only eclectics are likely to try and use ‘multiple working hypotheses’ to describe and explain world affairs. And yet world affairs are patently multi-dimensional. They are comprised of complex sets of repeated human practices that enact more than one sort of human nature. They would seem to require multi-faceted understanding, therefore, and the sort of analysis able to do justice to the complexities involved. Trying to reduce world affairs to fit only one or two particular analytic languages is likely to result in violence to these complexities. Indeed, it can be argued that the present discipline is considerably impoverished by the fact that this is not immediately apparent to all who undertake
to describe and explain world affairs. Indeed, the discipline ‘has a [long] history of slashing its wrists with ... Occam’s razor’, and it has been well said elsewhere that if ‘human thought is as complex and multi-dimensional as everyone believes, then it must be madness to follow one line of paradigm development focusing on a particular aspect of thinking, talking, or acting ...’ (Liu and Liu, 1996: 16).

What if the conclusions reached by entertaining ‘every rational explanation ...’ and by developing ‘every tenable hypothesis respecting their cause and history’ results in incommensurability, however? But then, why decide in advance that we are not capable of coordinating such conclusions? Why not just try and reconcile them? Why not do strategic assessments of their relative ‘measure and extent’? Why not attempt to arrive at a ‘combined result in varying proportions’? Why, after all, should we use a single yardstick to combine and reconcile what (because of its reliance on different conceptions of human nature) is ultimately incommensurable?

Questions like these help us to see with more than the simple eye of ‘linear order’. They stop us reducing our analytic imagination to just a ‘succession of thoughts’. They teach us to contemplate the world with compound eyes instead, allowing for ‘simultaneous vision from different standpoints’ and a discipline viewed ‘analytically and synthetically’ at the same time.

They also help us to escape the ‘blinding influences’ of ‘intellectual affection’ for one analytic language or another. There is, after all, no hypothesis about human behavior that does not rest on a basic assumption about human nature, and only one analytic language will articulate only one such assumption. What about the others? (Chamberlin, 1890: 93–4).

None of the above denies the difficulties we face in conveying the richness of incommensurability. We do not, for example, speak or write in multiplex ways. Speech and prose are linear. They tend to turn all multiplicity into unicity. As a consequence we are likely to find ourselves eschewing the ‘full panoply’ of potential hypotheses, even if we want to acknowledge them. As a consequence we are likely to find our capacity to see what is actually happening, to assess accurately the significance of what is happening, and to choose an appropriate response to what is happening, reducing once again. An acute concern for balancing the insights from different ideologies may also hamper effective and efficient political practice. Which is why, as Chamberlin observes, ‘in the gross affairs of life’ we tend to be ‘less precise’.
Imagine being asked to advise a poor country’s decision-makers what to do about a large foreign debt, for example. Does one advise default, or an asset sale, or continued trade, or eschewal of an earlier elite’s right to contract such as debt in the first place, or counter attack the international investors who supplied the initial loan? Each response is justifiable. Each policy prescription implements one of the key analytic languages used to describe and explain IPE (mercantilism, liberalism, market universalism and marxism). Most of these policy prescriptions can appeal to historical precedents as well: Peru as a case of the repeated use of the default strategy, for example; Thailand as a case of continuing to marketeer; Malaysia as an example of a state-making elite prepared to impose capital controls and counter-attack. Each policy prescription has something to offer, though each carries its own costs as well. So, what is to be done?

While a singular approach requires only one response, a multiple approach, that entertains multiple working hypotheses, will call for a mixed strategy instead. This might mean combining the attempt to get some of the debt rescheduled with continued trading initiatives, for example. It might mean more responsibility put on individual borrowers, plus attempts to control cross-border capital flows. Or it might mean exercising all four options at once, plus others, taken from the margins perhaps, where pertinent policy prescriptions also abound. The point is that the policy-making mind is capable of keeping more than one analytic language in play at the same time. The fact that ‘[e]ach hypothesis suggests its own criteria, its own means of proof, [and] its own methods of developing the truth’ is an added bonus, which is why Chamberlin (a very early postmodernist in this regard) would have us assemble a ‘group’ of hypotheses, capable of encompassing world affairs ‘on all sides’, anticipating as a consequence not only a ‘total outcome of means and of methods [that] is full and rich’ but also ‘better and truer observation, and a juster and more righteous interpretation’ (Chamberlin, 1890: 94, 95).