

Fatal attraction? German foreign policy and IR/foreign policy theory

Gunther Hellmann

Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main, Fachbereich Gesellschaftswissenschaften (FB 3), Institut für Politikwissenschaft, Robert-Mayer-Straße 5, Fach 102, Frankfurt D-60054, Germany.

E-mail: g.hellmann@soz.uni-frankfurt.de

After unification in 1990, German foreign policy has received unprecedented attention from the most prominent journals of International Relations (IR) theory. This paper argues that this was due largely to the function which the German 'case' served in the discourse of IR/foreign policy theory. Realists as well as liberals and constructivists were heavily enticed by it since it seemed an excellent case for all of them to prove the worth of their theories. In doing so, however, the subsumtionist logic applied did not only foster identical exclusionist theoretical claims. It also cultivated a systematicity view of thought and action which was wholly unreceptive for potentially novel foreign policy practices to appear. The paper documents and critiques these trends as a typical phenomenon of a paradigmatic discipline. It then outlines an alternative pragmatist approach to foreign policy analysis which emphasizes the contingency and situated creativity of social action. It is argued, in particular, that this approach provides for a more adequate description of the changes which German foreign policy has undergone. Moreover, by drawing on the insights of allegedly incommensurable paradigms and by systematically integrating the inherent contingency of social action, it also shows how a logic of reconstruction can open up avenues for cross-paradigmatic dialogue. *Journal of International Relations and Development* (2009) **12**, 257–292. doi:10.1057/jird.2009.11

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Situations in which the expertise of the social scientist is solicited frequently have the following structure: some new event or bundle of events (...) has happened or is happening before our eyes, and we would like to know what its consequences are (...). Faced with the seemingly reasonable demand for enlightenment on the part of the layman and the policy-maker, and propelled also by his own curiosity, the social scientist now opens his paradigm-box to see how best to handle the job at hand. To his dismay, he then finds, *provided he looks carefully*, that he is faced with an embarrassment of riches: various available paradigms will produce radically



different answers. (...) (o)rordinarily social scientists are happy enough when they have gotten hold of *one* paradigm or line of causation. As a result, their guesses are often farther off the mark than those of the experienced politician whose intuition is more likely to take a variety of forces into account. (Hirschman 1970: 340–41, emphasis in original)

Introduction

German unification has changed the landscape of European politics. It has also left its mark on the analysis of German foreign policy and IR/foreign policy theory.¹ Since 1990, no other country (the US aside) has received as much attention from mainstream IR theory as far as its foreign policy is concerned than Germany. To some extent this rising interest in German foreign policy is certainly due to the fact that German unification was perceived as a momentous political event in its own right with possibly far-reaching implications for major (geo-) political adjustments within Europe and possibly even on a global scale. However, I will argue that the more significant cause of this rising interest has to do to with the function which the German ‘case’ served in the discourse of IR/foreign policy theory. Realists as well as liberals/constructivists were heavily enticed by the German case after unification. For realists, unification created strong incentives for Germany to assert its new found power. Some scholars even predicted a German hegemony over Europe. For others (mostly liberals and constructivists), unification served as an obvious test case for the competing explanatory power of all the other paradigmatic traditions in IR. Many of these scholars calculated that, to the extent that realism could be weakened, the standing of their own paradigms would rise accordingly.

In this paper I will review these encounters between the study of German foreign policy and IR/foreign policy theory. I will argue that the encounter has not turned out ‘deadly’ for either (as in the movie alluded to in the title of this paper). Nevertheless, it has been a calamitous one actually failing to deliver what we were promised. In the next section I will set the stage by briefly discussing how German foreign policy and IR/foreign policy theory related to each other before unification. I will then map the field in somewhat more detail as it presents itself for the time after 1990. In particular I will show (and try to explain) how German foreign policy has been propelled into the limelight of leading IR journals and what effects this yielded. The subsequent section identifies and critiques what I call the ‘systematicity view of theory and action’ which underlies much of the ‘theory’-inspired work on German foreign policy discussed in the previous section. It also sketches an alternative pragmatist approach to foreign policy analysis (FPA) which emphasizes the contingency



and situated creativity of social action. In the next section I illustrate how such an approach differs from traditional subsumptionist approaches when applied in the context of German foreign policy. I try to show in particular how traditional approaches fail to systematically account for novel ways of acting. Germany's foreign policy is neither adequately captured with a realist 'back to traditional great power politics'-argument nor is it easy to square with an idealization in 'civilian power' terms. Rather a more appropriate way of redescribing German foreign policy would focus on a new generation of foreign policy elites repositioning a more 'self-assertive' Germany in an ever tightening web of European integration as well as a global transformation which is shaped by both globalization and re-polarization.

German foreign policy and IR theory

For a long time the study of (German) foreign policy in Germany was the domain of diplomatic historians more or less explicitly applying realist frameworks to their subject matter.² It was only in the late 1960s/early 1970s that scholars such as Ernst-Otto Czempiel, Helga Haftendorn, Karl Kaiser and Werner Link began to systematically connect insights from IR theory and FPA to their analysis of (German) foreign policy.³ In their writings, these scholars (who were themselves mainly trained as historians) drew almost exclusively on the work of IR scholarship in the US — and here largely on authors (such as James Rosenau 1966; Graham Allison 1971; or Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye 1977) who were associated with traditions or approaches distinct from or openly critical of realism.⁴ The main characteristic of this research was that the approaches, models and theories which were mostly developed against the background of US foreign policy were applied to the German case. Only in the later part of the 1980s/early 1990s has theory building (in addition to theory application) become associated with German writings on foreign policy (Müller and Risse-Kappen 1990; Risse *et al.* 1999). Beyond Germany itself, however, German foreign policy did not mobilize much theoretical interest — and to the extent it did (such as in the work of Germany-born Wolfram Hanrieder (1989) teaching in the US) it mirrored the approach common to most German scholars which situated historical analysis within an explicitly theoretical framework.

German unification and the end of the Cold War changed the European political landscape as well as the way in which IR/FPA scholarship approached German foreign policy. Rather than continuing to serve as a subject matter for the local application of imported middle-range theories, German foreign policy moved centre stage in the global competition between realism on the one hand and liberalism and constructivism on the other. Non-German political



observers mostly envisioned the rise of a German Gulliver bound to becoming 'more assertive'.⁵ The idea that Germany's historical experience and the intelligence of its leadership might link up in novel ways to the novel situation in which the country found itself in 1990 seemed to be outside the realm of the possible. While granting that Europe's political landscape had been radically transformed, realists such as John Mearsheimer and Kenneth Waltz nevertheless expected timeless 'systemic' pressures to operate as they always had: 'For a country to choose not to become a great power is a structural anomaly. For that reason, the choice is a difficult one to sustain' (Waltz 1993: 66).⁶ In this view Germany was bound to rise again as a great power, eventually reclaiming a hegemonic position in Europe. Initially John Mearsheimer even recommended that Germany ought to acquire a national nuclear capability in order to dampen new threats which he considered to be an inevitable by-product of the return of multipolarity to Europe (Mearsheimer 1990). Moreover, as recently as in 2001, he still predicted that 'the most likely scenario in Europe is an American exit coupled with the emergence of Germany as the dominant state' (Mearsheimer 2001: 400). In this case he expected Germany to increase its armed forces in order to establish 'hegemony over Central Europe' in the face of a possible Russian threat (Mearsheimer 2001: 395).

Predictions such as these were a gift from heaven for the critics of realism. For liberals and constructivists it appeared to be overdetermined that Germany would stick to the basic foreign policy orientation of the old Federal Republic emphasizing a 'culture of restraint', integration and multilateralism. Four broad arguments were put forward based on different versions of the idealist/liberal-cum-constructivist tradition on why realism would eventually be proven wrong. First, given Germany's extremely high degree of enmeshment with the international economic system in general and its western European neighbours in particular, pursuing a strategy of autonomy (or even power) maximization as predicted by realists was perceived to be self-defeating for a 'trading state' such as Germany (Katzenstein 1991: 75; Kohler-Koch 1991: 606–07; Rittberger 1992: 224). In contrast to the realist image of a rising Gulliver, liberals referred to Ulysses and the image of a country which was well aware of the sirens of power and the need to add to the institutional bonds that tied it down. Rather than aiming for 'a traditional sphere-of-influence strategy in eastern Europe' Germany was expected (and actually observed) to 'choose a regime-oriented strategy'. In order to dampen whatever fears may have existed, 'the German Ulysses' was seen 'to tie himself to the European mast' (all quotes Keohane and Hoffmann 1993: 389).

Second and related to this point, the very process of formulating Germany's 'national interests' had nothing in common with the realist abstraction of a hostile and anarchic environment where each country had to look after its own



security. To the contrary, German unification had provided the country with an almost ideal position in terms of its security which in turn fundamentally changed its calculus of 'national interests'. As a result, state interests would not result from some autonomous national decision-making processes. Rather it would actually be shaped in large part by the very interaction with Germany's partners in these institutions. Moreover, given that all of Germany's partners could be expected to express their continuing interest in an integrated Germany, the socialization effects of such signals would strongly counteract any tendencies towards renationalization or unilateralism (Anderson and Goodman 1993).

Third, Germany's basically unaltered domestic structure of a cooperative federalism was seen to provide for an in-built tendency towards middle-of-the-road compromises which would also affect foreign policy. Even if it were possible for a particular social group (or coalition of groups) to 'capture' government institutions and employ them for their ends, it was difficult to imagine in what way this would fundamentally alter German foreign policy (Katzenstein 1991: 69; Kohler-Koch 1991: 607–08).

Finally, liberals argued that German political culture had undergone a dramatic and lasting transformation since World War II (Maull 1990/1991, 1992; Kirste and Maull 1996; Banchoff 1996, 1999a, b; Berger 1996, 1998; Katzenstein 1997; Duffield 1998, 1999). This did not only show in its anti-militarist political culture but more generally in the argumentative approach to international negotiation (cf. Risse 2000). Against this background, neorealist predictions seemed just ludicrous. The strongest and most direct challenge to realism along these lines was put forth by Hanns Maull in an often-cited article in *Foreign Affairs* which appeared at about the same time Mearsheimer's article was published in *International Security*. Rather than catapulting Europe 'Back to the Future', Maull saw one of the major effects of the end of the Cold War in exerting pressure on the US 'to evolve into a new type of international power, of which Germany and Japan are already in a sense prototypes: it must become a civilian power' (Maull 1990/1991: 92).⁷ In this view, international relations were 'undergoing a profound transformation that offers an opportunity to take history beyond the world of the nation-state, with its inherent security dilemmas and its tendency to adjust to change through war. (...) Germany and Japan now in some ways find themselves representing this new world of international relations. Circumstances, in a supreme example of irony, have turned them from "late modernizers" into prototypes of a promising future' (all quotes Maull 1990/1991: 93).

A quick look at the names of the scholars involved in this debate already shows that the future of German foreign policy attracted a surprising amount of attention. It is more stunning still that the debate about the future of German foreign policy after unification was propelled to the forefront of IR



theorizing from the obscure spot it had occupied (along with other middle-sized powers) before.⁸ A search in the Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) confirms this. A quick and unsystematic search retrieved 1,449 results for the search term ‘German foreign policy’ (without quotation marks). Only the US scored higher (at 2,481 results for ‘American foreign policy’ and 1,045 results for ‘US foreign policy’). For Britain, Russia, China, France and India the scores were significantly lower.⁹ A more systematic search based on an individual assessment of articles potentially dealing in a ‘theory-oriented’ fashion with the foreign policy of Germany, Britain, Russia and China reinforced this impression. For the 10-year period after 1991, the proportion of ‘theory-oriented’ articles in SSCI-covered IR journals relative to all articles dealing with ‘German foreign policy’ more than tripled in comparison to the 10-year period before unification. Moreover, it comprised more than one-third of all SSCI-recorded articles published on German foreign policy during that period. For Russia and China the proportion of ‘theory-oriented’ articles amounted to 13 and 16 per cent, respectively (see Table 1).¹⁰

Thus, as far as the interest of top IR journals is concerned, Germany outstripped even the traditional opposing superpower of the US in the leading North American social science index. Theory-oriented articles on German foreign policy were not only published by traditional FPA journals but in some of the most renowned IR journals focusing on broad (‘systemic’) issues. The list of journals included *World Politics* (Crawford 1996), *International Organization* (Duffield 1999; Risse 2000; Katzenstein 2002), *International Security* (Risse 1997), and the *European Journal for International Relations* (Banchoff 1999a; Zehfuss 2001) — not to mention the German language IR-journal *Zeitschrift für Internationale Beziehungen* (Kirste and Maull 1996; Baumann, Rittberger and Wagner 1999).¹¹ No other country of a comparable size and weight in international affairs has received as much attention in the aftermaths of the Cold War in the top journals of IR. To be sure, other journals which have traditionally been open to (or even primarily focused on) the analysis of foreign policy continued to publish work on a whole set of countries. However, it was remarkable that, after 1990, major English-language journals publishing the best work of IR theory-related work opened their pages for scholarship on German foreign policy to an extent which was unprecedented for *any* country in recent memory.

Why? How do we explain the fact that the foreign policy of a mid-sized European power has been propelled into a top-spot in leading English-speaking IR journals which normally tend to focus on overarching (‘systemic’) IR issues (rather than ‘subsystemic’ foreign policy issues)? I argue that the German case provided a welcome platform for another round in the paradigmatic competition between realism, on the one hand, and a very diverse group of liberal, constructivist and post-positivist challengers on the other



Table 1 Search results retrieved for ‘German foreign policy’, ‘British foreign policy’, ‘Chinese foreign policy’, and ‘Soviet/Russian foreign policy’ for the period 1980–1990 and 1991–2001 from the Social Science Citation Index:^a

	<i>German foreign policy</i> ^b	<i>British foreign policy</i> ^c	<i>Chinese foreign policy</i> ^d	<i>Soviet/Russian foreign policy</i> ^e
1980–1990	22	3	16	50
Theory-oriented ^f	2 (9%)	0	2 (12%)	4 (8%)
Not theory-oriented	20 (91%)	3 (100%)	14 (88%)	47 (92%)
1991–2001	58	13	70	108
Theory-oriented	19 (33%)	3 (23%)	9 (13%)	17 (16%)
Not theory oriented	39 (67%)	10 (77%)	61 (87%)	91 (84%)
Total 1980–2001	73	16	86	158

^aISI Web of Knowledge, http://portal.isiknowledge.com/portal.cgi?DestApp=XS_PROD&Func=Frame.; A detailed list with the bibliographical data of all the articles retrieved is available from the author upon request.

^bThe search was conducted for the following words: ‘German foreign policy’; ‘foreign policy’ AND ‘Germany’; ‘foreign policy’ AND ‘Federal Republic’.

^cThe search was conducted for the following words: ‘British foreign policy’; ‘foreign policy’ AND ‘United Kingdom’; ‘foreign policy’ AND ‘Great Britain’.

^dThe search was conducted for the following words: ‘Chinese foreign policy’; ‘foreign policy’ AND ‘China’.

^eThe search was conducted for the following words: ‘Russian foreign policy’; ‘soviet foreign policy’; ‘foreign policy’ AND ‘Russia’; ‘foreign policy’ AND ‘Soviet Union’.

^fArticles were judged ‘theory-oriented’ if they included some form of generalization either causally or conceptually, that is, the interest in the respective country’s foreign policy should actually have been motivated by some broader (‘theoretical’) question reaching beyond the specific case. Note that judgements did not privilege any particular notion of theory.

hand.¹² More specifically, the swelling as well as the recent receding of the surge of interest within IR-theory in German foreign policy is best explained by a widely shared expectation among IR scholars critical of realism that Germany’s post-unification foreign policy course would help to (further) weaken key tenets of realism. Germany was an ideal case to make this point given two facets of Germany’s history. On the one hand, the rise of Germany as a great power in the 19th and 20th century provided a model for aggressive power politics. On the other hand, the Federal Republic’s rise after World War II served as a major illustration for a new type of state which Richard Rosecrance called the ‘trading state’ (Rosecrance 1986; Rittberger 1992; Staack 2000; see also the discussion of Germany as a ‘civilian power’ in the work of Hanns Maull and his disciples: Maull 1990/1991; Harnisch and Maull 2001). This highly contradictory history mobilized equally countervailing



expectations as to what would happen in the light of the dramatic upheavals in 1989/1990, since the end of the Cold War and unification seemed to set the stage for the rise of a new great power given Germany's status as major player in the global economy and its liberation from the strong dependence on Western (particularly US) security guarantees after the collapse of the Warsaw Pact and the withdrawal of Soviet troops.

Three things are especially noteworthy about the way in which this paradigmatic competition was conducted. First, realist expectations provided the central point of reference against which to examine German foreign policy and/or to test some theory which purported to explain it. Given the stark contrast between Germany's history as a 'Machtstaat' and a 'trading state'/'civilian power' this set-up translated into the question of whether one would expect *continuity* or *change* in German foreign policy. Briefly put, 'continuity' was synonymous with the foreign policy of the Federal Republic whereas 'change' stood for a recourse to power politics practices as suggested by realists. A quick look at a few illustrative examples shows that up until very recently this framing of the problem turned out to heavily favour continuity accounts of German foreign policy. Accordingly, realism was mostly seen to fare rather badly, whereas liberal and (especially) constructivist accounts seemed to be right on target. Volker Rittberger and his associates, for instance, examined a series of cases in order to find out whether German foreign policy had changed in line with realist expectations. Their primary objective was to check the explanatory power of a set of theories of foreign policy which they reconstructed from available realist, liberal and constructivist paradigms. In most of the cases examined, researchers found strong evidence for continuity. Moreover, as their concluding chapter (entitled 'theories meet reality') summarizes, even in cases where change was observed, this had more to do with the influence of the foreign policy tradition of the Bonn Republic than with realist expectations. Overall constructivism fared best while neorealism performed worst. Germany 'almost always adhered to the value-based expectations of appropriate behaviour shared within the international and domestic society. At the same time, however, post-unification Germany has intensified its influence-seeking policy', a strategy which Rittberger and his group associated primarily with the realist tradition (Rittberger and Wagner 2001: 323). These findings are echoed in a slightly different vocabulary in the research done by Hanns Maull and his associates. In spite of some irritating instances where Germany has not lived up to the expectations of norm-based behaviour associated with the role-model of a 'civilian power', German foreign policy is said to be best explained by it. The underlying argument is that a set of 'civilian power' beliefs 'caused German foreign policy elites to hold on to certain principles and instruments in the face of change' (Harnisch and Maull 2001: 2).¹³ Yet, similar to culturalist explanations, this set of beliefs is



conceived of as a rather stable ‘role concept’ which ‘drove (Germany’s) external behaviour after 1989’ (Harnisch and Maull 2001: 129). In other words: German abstention from the UN-mandated liberation of Kuwait in 1990/1991 is explained with this role conception of a ‘civilian power’ as is German participation in the liberation of Kosovo for which a clear-cut UN-mandate could not be furnished.

This list of works analyzing German foreign policy since 1990 against the backdrop of realist expectations could easily be extended. Scholars such as John Duffield (1998, 1999) and Thomas Berger (1996, 1998) pointed out that the established political culture of anti-militarism, developed and deepened in four decades of foreign policy from Bonn, would make a recourse to traditional power politics seem both inappropriate and unattractive even in the wake of shifts in terms of material capabilities. Others highlighted that abandoning successful foreign policy routines seemed unlikely on account of Germany’s stable Europeanized identity (Anderson and Goodman 1993; Goetz 1996; Katzenstein 1997; Risse 1999, 2004, 2007; Banchoff 1999a, b). In these and other cases the analysis prevailed that German foreign policy was seen as confounding realist expectations of a more assertive and Realpolitik-like behaviour and displaying almost all of the characteristics one would expect based on liberal/constructivist accounts.¹⁴ Thus, in the disciplinary discourse, the traditional IR-dualism of realism vs some version of ‘idealism’ or ‘liberalism’ figures as the single relevant frame to describe and explain how German foreign policy has developed since unification (and is likely to develop in the future).

One of the ironies of this trend is, secondly, that although constructivist approaches had once started off as attempts to better account for *change*, when it came to German foreign policy, constructivism had become the advocate of *continuity*. Even more importantly, social norms, political culture, national identity, or social roles were conceptualized as remarkably stable and almost resistant to any change. Consequently, aspects of German foreign policy which could be described as changing were not framed accordingly. Participation in out-of-area operations, for instance, were interpreted in these constructivist analyses as a careful *adaptation* to a changing international environment, without conceding, however, *change* at the level of fundamental goals, political culture, or identity (Risse 1999: 48–49, 52–53; Maull 2000; for contrasting perspectives, see Baumann and Hellmann 2001). In other words, constructivist research on German foreign policy emphasized lines of continuity, even where change could hardly be denied.¹⁵

Finally, and closely related to this, most of these contributions clearly subscribed to a (neo)positivist understanding of science. For realists, this need not be elaborated on in much detail. However, even most of those authors who described themselves explicitly as ‘constructivists’ belonged to this camp.¹⁶



Thomas Banchoff, for instance, spends some time at distancing himself from rationalist approaches who, according to him, could not adequately explain the continuity of German EU-policy after 1990 (Banchoff 1999a: 261–68). Yet, while he acknowledged differences in ontology and epistemology between rationalism and constructivism, he explicitly sided with an interpretation of constructivism according to which constructivists ‘make causal claims, draw out their observable implications, and evaluate them against the empirical record’ (Banchoff 1999a: 261–68). Similarly, John Duffield’s argument about the importance of political cultures in accounting for post-unification German foreign policy is premised on an understanding of scholarly research that has to establish causal relationships first and foremost. Moreover, given the application of certain methods (Duffield explicitly mentions Alexander George’s ‘congruence procedure’ as guiding his own analysis) he sees one of the advantages in focusing on political culture in that it offers ‘a parsimonious explanation of important aspects of foreign and security policy’ (Duffield 1999: 778, see also 793–95). Thus, although the paradigmatic framing of the debate *prima facie* seems to suggest a fundamental divide between realist and non-realist approaches, the differences in terms of philosophical and methodological grounding, in this case, were minimal to non-existent.

None of this is meant to denigrate the important work that has been done during the past 18 years. The mere fact that some of the most prestigious journals of the discipline were publishing this work underlines its importance. However, if one were to side with Albert Hirschman (as I would do) in arguing that the recourse to paradigms has often turned out to be more of a ‘hindrance to understanding’ than a help one would have to take a closer look as to the actual achievements and shortcomings in the encounter between IR/foreign policy theory and German foreign policy and what lessons we might draw from this experience. While the encounter between the two has not turned out ‘deadly’ for either, it did have some very unfortunate effects. Three negative effects stand out.

First, the paradigmatic fixations of realists, liberals and constructivists have often prevented an open-minded approach to the study of (German) foreign policy, that is, one allowing for either inter-paradigmatic syntheses or ‘analytical eclecticism’ (Katzenstein and Sil 2008) crossing paradigmatic borderlines.¹⁷ There is a widespread tendency among IR theorists to single out key phenomena of international politics for paradigmatic treatment, that is, for ‘demonstrating’ the (presumed) superior explanatory power of some paradigm in comparison to one or more rivals. A brief and stylized version goes something like this: The rhetorical strategy usually applied relies on deriving predictions from a set of (more or less fixed) paradigmatic ‘core assumptions’ (Legro and Moravcsik 1999) which are then ‘tested’ against the



empirical ‘evidence’. If one can establish a convincing fit between the ‘evidence’ and the predictions, the explanatory power of the paradigm has been demonstrated and victory can be declared. However, since empirical ‘evidence’ is hardly as incontestable as the rules of the game of paradigmatic rivalry seem to suggest, paradigmatic encounters are never conclusively decided along this route. Usually all the combatants leave the battlefield more or less intact although in some cases some combatants may look stronger than others. However, there are always effective strategies available for all parties concerned to limit the potential damage to paradigmatic claims to ‘superior explanatory power’. One such strategy is to argue over what amounts to a proper description of the state of affairs. Another one is to (more or less openly) readjust the predictions in the light of incontestable ‘evidence’. This is the reverse move to the one mentioned above. Rather than fitting the ‘evidence’ to the theory in order to be able to claim superior explanatory power, the theory is here readjusted to some irritating and compelling evidence, which cannot convincingly be explained by the initial version of the theory. Still another is to silently declare a truce among the combatants and move on to another terrain to reengage under potentially more favourable conditions. Along the way, the combatants may choose to realign or even raise a new flag during subsequent encounters (the merger between the ‘neo-realism’ and the ‘neo-liberalism’ of the early 1990s under the new heading of ‘rationalism’ in the latter half of the 1990s being a case in point). Yet the underlying rules of the game for paradigmatic rivalry often seem to remain untouched. This harsh form of paradigmaticism may not fit as neatly with the German case as it does, for instance, with respect to disciplinary encounters with the future of NATO since the early 1990s, yet, as the project by Rittberger *et al.* shows, there are undoubtedly similarities.¹⁸

A second and related effect of the fixation on paradigmatic competition is the insensitivity *vis-à-vis* the possibility that novel things may happen to the ways in which the foreign policy of Germany (or any other country) is conducted — that is, that the actions and interactions among states and people(s) may result in outcomes which do not fit within our paradigmatic frames of reference. If we assume that (the analysis of) foreign policy is *not* ‘analogous to completing a crossword puzzle’¹⁹ — that is, if we assume that the nature of the game is not to discover *the* right answer, but to come up with an appropriate, possibly innovative description, explanation or solution for the problem at hand — we have to accord contingency a systematic place in our theorizing about IR as well as foreign policy. This way of framing the problem — that is, according *contingency* a *systematic* place in our *theorizing* — may sound like a contradiction in terms since ‘contingency’ and ‘theory’ do not go well together in the established language games of the discipline. However, this is the price (if it is one) which we have to pay,



if we want to give foreign policy — defined as human (rather than ‘rational’) *choice* — its due.²⁰

German foreign policy, once again, is a good case in point. While theoretical interest in German foreign policy surged during the 1990s, it has markedly ebbed after approximately 2000. One way to account for this receding interest is by pointing out that more recent developments in German foreign policy are not easy to deal with within established paradigmatic frames. For instance, liberals and constructivists had to grant that some of the key developments in German foreign policy in recent years are not easily reconciled with their initial expectations. German unilateralism in the context of UN-deliberations about the Bush administration’s Iraq campaign in 2002/2003 were incompatible with civilian power expectations (Maull 2004: 17, 20–21). Germany’s breach of the ‘Stability and Growth Pact’ accompanying EMU similarly showed the limits of the action-guiding power of Germany’s presumed Europeanized identity.²¹ The same applies for Germany’s intensified push for a national permanent seat at the UN Security Council after 2004 when Schröder discarded earlier diplomatic language in favour of a common European seat (Hellmann and Roos 2007). All of these highly symbolic moves resembled traditional power politics much more than expectations derived from established liberal or constructivist theorizing.

However, this is not to say that realism fared any better. Germany has neither discarded its principal orientation towards multilateralism although it has, as Rainer Baumann has convincingly shown (Baumann 2002, 2006), subliminally redefined multilateralism in a much more instrumental fashion. Nor has it built up its armed forces in order to aim for ‘hegemony’ over Eastern Europe as John Mearsheimer has expected (Mearsheimer 2001: 400, 395) or as geopolitical thinking may suggest (Behnke 2006). To the contrary, defence spending has continuously dropped after 1990 to one of the lowest in per capita terms among NATO members. Thus, neither realists nor liberals or constructivists have done very well in coming to terms with the implications of the ‘new event or bundle of events’ (Hirschman 1970: 340) relating to German unification. Unsurprisingly many of their ‘guesses’ about the future course of German foreign policy have been quite far off the mark.

A third negative effect of paradigmaticism relates to the political consequences which alarmist and/or starry-eyed perspectives on German foreign policy (which sometimes accompany realism, liberalism and constructivism) may yield. Assuming that exclusionary realist vs liberal/constructivist claims are actually believed by a sufficiently large number of individuals taking part in shaping either German foreign policy or foreign policy *vis-à-vis* Germany, such beliefs could have counterproductive consequences. For instance, if enough Europeans believed that Germany is indeed aiming at hegemony, this belief may entice such states to pursue self-defeating balancing strategies which may



actually initiate power politics tactics on Germany's part. Polish foreign policy *vis-à-vis* Germany during the Kaczynski years as well as Chancellor Schröder's Russia policy which sidelined the Poles can be interpreted in this way. In contrast, if we assume that sufficiently large numbers of Germans believed both in the seductive self-image of Germany being a 'civilian power' distinct from 'traditional' powers such as France or Great Britain, and if they also shared the assessment that this civilian power is located in the midst of a solidly pacified and tamed European continent this may actually promote a more assertive/power politics approach to foreign policy which disregards the much more sceptical views held among Germany's partners. Elements of such an approach could be observed during the chancellorship of Gerhard Schröder. For instance, sceptical reactions among Germany's European partners were clearly visible among Italian and Eastern European decision makers as far as Germany's claim for a permanent seat at the UN Security Council and its Russia policy were concerned. However, these sceptical reactions did not stop chancellor Schröder in pursuing a narrow national interest campaign since his view was that Germany had 'an active role to play in a multipolar world' (Schröder 2003: 2480C).

Systematicity vs contingency: A pragmatist revision of FPA

The question about the prospects of German foreign policy after unification belongs to that class of questions which addresses 'the future' of a particular country's foreign policy. Especially if it relates to great powers or strategically positioned countries such as Germany after unification or China today, this is a type of question which most academics would grant to be both 'important in the real world'²² and not easily tackled with the standard disciplinary tools available due to the vagueness and inevitable underspecification ('the future') of the macro phenomenon ('foreign policy') referred to. It belongs to the sort of questions mentioned in Albert O. Hirschman's initial quote where 'some new event or bundle of events (...) has happened or is happening before our eyes, and we would like to know what its consequences are' (Hirschman 1970: 340). At that stage the crucial challenge is how to translate the significant 'real-world problem' into a *researchable* question. In Hirschman's somewhat pointed description this is the time when the social scientist 'opens his paradigm-box to see how best to handle the job at hand'. An alternative (and openly affirmative) description of the same translation problem would put it this way: 'If we begin with a real-world problem, we should ask how that problem can be studied with modern scientific methods so that it contributes (...) directly or indirectly, to a specific scholarly literature. (...) *A proposed topic that cannot be refined into a specific research project permitting valid*



descriptive or causal inference should be modified along the way or abandoned. A proposed topic that will make no contribution to some scholarly literature should similarly be changed' (King *et al.* 1994: 18, emphasis in original).

This is precisely what happened when IR turned to the German case after unification. Studying the German case was supposed to make a contribution to the debate among realism and its main challengers. Hypotheses deduced from different paradigms were expected to inform our understanding or even predict the future course of German foreign policy. Sometimes the implicit assumption even seemed to be that the test of such hypotheses would help to strengthen or weaken the respective paradigms.

This understanding of how research ought to be conducted is widespread in IR. The underlying logic of research is one of subsumption where observations are subsumed under some pre-given category or theory.²³ This is based on a theory of thought and action (sometimes referred to in IR discourse as questions of ontology and/or epistemology) which conceives of the world (or reality) in terms of a fundamental distinction between systematic and non-systematic aspects. I will call this the *systematicity view of thought and action*. Since 'good social science' in this view 'attempts to go beyond (...) particulars to more general knowledge' (King *et al.* 1994: 35), it is a prerequisite for knowledge production that human beings are assumed to be able to reliably 'partition the world into systematic and non-systematic components' via description.²⁴ 'Description' is used interchangeably here with 'the accumulation of facts' (King *et al.* 1994: 7–8). It is the (more or less unproblematic) input which provides the raw material for the more demanding tasks of science, that is, explanation and theory construction. Since a lot of the material which social scientists use for theory construction is historical, 'the accumulation of facts' often draws on the prior work done by historians. However, since the function of a historical narrative for the purposes of theory-building is clearly circumscribed ('one does not apply theory to history; rather one uses history to develop theory', said Stinchcombe 1978: 1), it has to come in a particular form. Two steps have to be distinguished. First, the analyst has to come up with a summary of the facts to be explained — usually by relying on 'good historians' who 'understand which events were crucial, and therefore construct accounts that emphasize essentials rather than digressions'.²⁵ Secondly, the material thus gathered and summarized has to be simplified by separating 'systematic' from 'non-systematic' components. What is necessarily lost along the way are those historical contingencies which are not easily subsumed under pre-established categories. As a matter of fact, *contingency* is necessarily relegated to the 'residual category' playing field if this understanding of science is to achieve its task since contingency is essentially synonymous with non-systematicity.



This is a grave mistake from the alternative *contingency view of thought and action* which I will advocate in the remainder of this paper. According to this view, contingency is not a residual category to be sidelined or even excluded from theory building. Rather it is an essential element of human thought and action as pragmatists have argued for a long time.²⁶ Moreover, this view can more easily (and convincingly) deal with the question of foreign policy *innovation* (as in the German case) which approaches that apply a logic of subsumption fail to grasp due to their inbuilt systematicity bias. At the bottom of this pragmatist theory of thought and action²⁷ lies what Hans Joas (1992b) has called *situated creativity* — a conception of action which *systematically* integrates what is sidelined in the systematicity view of thought and action. It distinguishes between what Dewey calls ‘routine’ (or ‘determinate’) situations on the one hand and ‘problematic’ (or ‘indeterminate’) situations on the other.²⁸ In the former an actor applies ‘a more or less fixed way of doing things’. She acts routinely or even mechanically (Dewey 1981[1938]: 513). This situation is ‘determinate’ in the sense that it forms ‘a unified whole’, a ‘closed “universe of experience”’. Actors can resort to an internalized repertoire of rules which is based on experiences with similar situations in the past. An indeterminate or problematic situation in contrast is ‘open’ in the sense ‘that its constituents do not hang together’ (Dewey 1991[1938]: 109). The situation is perceived as problematic because there are no given and apparent ways of dealing with it.²⁹ The unreflected belief in ‘self-evident conditions and successful habits (...) and the concomitant routines of actions break down; the normal and automatic process of action’ is interrupted (Joas, 1992b: 190). Through inquiry the actor must search for a new belief that enables her to find an appropriate new way of coping with the respective problem at hand. It is in this situation that the potential for creativity comes into play.

In contrast to a systematicity view of thought and action pragmatists locate creativity of both individual and collective actors at the centre of their understanding of social action. They see creativity as ‘an achievement within situations that call for a solution rather than as the unconstrained creation of new things without any constitutive background of unreflected routines’ (Joas 1992b: 190). This understanding of situative and genuinely creative action implies that it would be inappropriate to dissolve any singular action from its larger *context of action* and to describe it in the sense of a relation of ends and means that precedes this singular action and can at the same time be restrictively applied to it. As Dewey put it, individuals ‘live in a *series* of situations’ (Dewey 1981[1938]: 519, emphasis added), an ‘experiential continuum’ (Dewey 1981[1938]: 512), in which the continuity of experience and the interaction with the environment of objects and other individuals form an inseparable whole. The formulation of ends does not take place *before* a



particular action in a strictly temporal or causal sense. Even if the action rests on specific plans in the sense of preconceived schemes of action, the concrete course of action has to be 'constructively created in each and every situation' while remaining 'open for continuous revision' (Joas 1992b: 237). It is through 'creative intelligence' that actors 'project new and more complex ends' (Dewey 1981[1917]: 94). This in turn means that it is more appropriate to conceive of the formulation of ends and the choice of respective means as a complex interplay in a given problematic situation, rather than assuming that an actor's goals are fixed, while the choice of the means of action will only be oriented towards these ends.³⁰ One implication of this view is that even if we were to work with the (unrealistic) assumption that the menu of problems to be dealt with in German foreign policy had not changed, the ends of German foreign policy were unlikely to remain unaltered if new means had become available (and vice versa) — which is clearly the case with regard to the radically changed context of German foreign policy after unification. Thus, from a pragmatist point of view, the structure of any problem to be solved is complex in the sense that conglomerates of creative actors and bundles of motivations and beliefs come into play over a temporal continuum. In terms of the temporal context of our problem-solving action ('coping') *experience* (i.e. past thoughts and actions of ourselves as well as others) is as important as *expectation* (i.e. intentions as to *desired* future states of the world as well as predictions as to *likely* future states (cf. Emirbayer and Mische 1998).³¹ Quite often, it will become apparent that a solution of a concrete problem is the more intelligent, the more an actor (in the light of changing conditions) succeeds in formulating 'new and more complex ends' (Dewey 1981[1917]: 94).

Creative action thus involves an understanding of the so-called 'structure-agency problem' that differs fundamentally from a systematicity view of thought and action. To say that contingency is a fundamental feature of the social world basically means that in explaining social phenomena we always face the *inherent* paradox that *possibilities* at once decrease *and* increase (Hawthorn 1991). The former is obvious since we expect a good explanation to identify those causes which made a *particular* outcome possible (rather than some alternative). However, the better our explanation the more it will have to draw on counterfactual reasoning, that is, a discussion of plausible *alternative* developments: if we were to slightly change some of the initial conditions, an alternative path would have been more plausible instead. In other words, the force of an explanation turns on the counterfactual which it implies. In this sense, the horizon of possibilities is also systematically *increasing* in any good explanation.³²

These possibilities, however, are not *knowable* in the positivist sense of precisely locating counterfactuals by drawing a distinction between 'systematic' and 'non-systematic' components of reality as King, Keohane and Verba



argue. In their view ‘the issues addressed under the label “multiple causation” do not confound our definition of causality (...). The fact that dependent variables, and perhaps all interesting social science dependent variables, are influenced by many causal factors does not make our definition of causality problematic. The key to understanding these very common situations is to define the counterfactual conditions making up each causal effect very precisely’ (King *et al.* 1994: 89). Yet this is exactly the problem since we do not dispose of a reliable method to precisely define the horizon of possibilities making up the world which has to be partitioned into systematic and non-systematic factors.³³ Even classical positivist research has produced ample evidence that counterfactual analysis cannot meet the standard of precision presumably required for valid causal analysis. Olson *et al.* (1996), for instance, have pointed to a series of psychological experiments which have shown that counterfactual thinking is guided and constrained by both motivational and cognitive biases and that ‘these biasing factors can introduce systematic distortions into counterfactual considerations’ (Olson *et al.* 1996: 296).³⁴ Moreover, as Robert Jervis (1996) has argued, counterfactual analysis often tends to be based on the erroneous assumption that the change of one causal factor will lead to precisely definable effects thereby ignoring the fact that in complex systems even minor changes can lead to far reaching unknowable effects.

Thus ‘precision’ in distinguishing between systematic and non-systematic components of reality for the purposes of counterfactual analysis is a heroic assumption which does not fit with contingent real-life coping. As long as this coping involves problematic rather than routine situations (which applies to the overwhelming majority of issues which scholars are interested in studying) this will always call for creative intelligence. Therefore, counterfactuals are always *post hoc* arguments about causal possibilities having been actualized (or not actualized) in a *particular* situation.

This is not to say that pragmatism would deny the usefulness (and even necessity) of a search for similarities and patterns. As a matter of fact, the Deweyan concept of experience is actually built on a notion of patterns. However, the concept of genuine creativity of human action suggests that we ought to think of patterns in a different way than usually done by subsumtionists. Fundamental routines aside, most of the situations which are of interest to us as IR scholars are not conducive to the standard procedures of formulating *if-then* propositions and *ceteris paribus* conditioning characteristic of a logic of subsumtion. Situations may be *similar* (and in this sense they may be said to be *patterned*) but very few of the situations which attract our scholarly interest are *identical*. Yet the identity assumption is essential for any *if-then* generalization. This critique does not imply that one has to hold ‘the view that every event is completely unique’.³⁵ Besides the fact that it is unclear



what it would mean to describe an event as ‘completely unique’ few (if any) scholars in IR actually hold such a view. Rather, the point is that we have to loosen the strictures accompanying the systematicity view of thought and action in order to increase the fit between our theoretical work in the field of foreign policy and our objects of study.

If we were to accept such a position we would not necessarily practice our trade completely differently. One of the two criteria spelled out by King, Keohane and Verba — that is, that our research should address questions which are ‘consequential’ for how we live (King *et al.* 1994: 15) — has been at the core of pragmatist thinking long before positivism took hold in IR. So there is obviously some overlap here. Yet in order to achieve such insights, pragmatists believe that we cannot hope for (and do not need) ‘verified scientific explanations’ (King *et al.* 1994: 15). Since experience has ‘ways of *boiling over*’ (James, 1995[1907]: 86, emphasis in original), and since, therefore, it must not be pressed into the straightjacket of generalized ‘theoretical’ statements, the pragmatist emphasis on contingency and creativity implies a replacement of the positivist *ceteris-paribus* conditioning in the search for generalizations with a more loosely circumscribed *ceteris-similibus* reasoning which leaves room for both generalization and creativity. As Dewey put it, ‘cases are like, not identical’. Therefore, the methods we use in tackling specific problems ‘have to be adapted to the exigencies of particular cases’, however ‘authorized’ these methods may be in the canon of a particular discipline (Dewey 2007[1907]: 142).

This is what the *logic of reconstruction* (in contrast to the logic of subsumption) aims at. Rather than subsuming observations under pre-fixed categories or theories, a reconstructive perspective aims at disclosing structures of meaning. It is based on the expectation that such structures of meaning entail some novel aspect(s) almost by necessity — at least if the object of interest is non-routine human action. Moreover, from a methodological perspective ‘meaning is not treated as internal to a preconstituted, opaque subject, but rather internal to a process of communication — and thus observable in the medium of language. According to such a view, the constitution of something as a fact, or as an object depends on a contentious process of signification, a struggle for the recognition of its facticity. The extent to which something is constituted as an object of knowledge thus hinges on an intersubjective process of ascribing meaning rather than on any innate quality of the problem itself’ (Herborth 2008: 18). Such a reconstructive perspective may involve disclosing *case-specific* causal and/or constitutive connections as propagated by a broad range of interpretivist and hermeneutic approaches and methodologies.³⁶ Or it may involve the creation of new concepts, metaphors or readings — what Richard Rorty has called ‘recontextualization’ in the form of ‘imagination’: ‘Paradigms of imagination are the new,



metaphorical use of old words (e.g., *gravitas*), the invention of neologisms (e.g., ‘gene’), and the colligation of hitherto unrelated texts (...). Successful colligation of this sort is an example of rapid and unconscious reweaving: one lays one set of beliefs on top of another and finds that, magically, they have interpenetrated and become warp and woof of a new, vividly polychrome, fabric’ (Rorty 1991, 94–95; emphasis in the original). For instance, redescribing Germany’s post-unification foreign policy in terms of a creative repositioning under changing internal and external conditions which draws on both ‘realist’; and ‘non-realist’ thought would be a case in point here.

The expected question from proponents of a systematicity view of thought and action would be how do we know whether such redescriptions are ‘valid’. The pragmatist response would be to discard the question as a false one because it presupposes what pragmatists consider to be a fundamental flaw of this view, that is, that we humans possess the faculties to identify the criteria which demarcate a ‘true’ account from a merely ‘plausible’ account.³⁷ Pragmatists argue that there is no such criterion and that ‘plausibility’ is both all we can get *and* all we need. As Wittgenstein put it: ‘Knowledge is in the end based on acknowledgement’ (Wittgenstein 1975, §378). Thus, if, with time, sufficiently large numbers of scholars and observers come to find a particular description of German foreign policy fitting or at least worth arguing about this is a better measure of its usefulness as is the inherently controversial notion of ‘explanatory’ power.³⁸ In this sense Maull’s redescription of Germany as a ‘prototypical civilian power’ has been as useful a contribution in the debate about post-unification German foreign policy as has been the attempt by realists and non-realists to mine available theories of IR in order to shed light on the future course of German foreign policy. The key criticism from a pragmatist point of view is that in putting too much weight on pre-fixed theoretical concepts has not been sufficiently sensitive to case-specific and situational structures of meaning and the accompanying possibility and even *likelihood* of novel and creative repositionings of German foreign policy.

A pragmatist perspective on German foreign policy

This focus on contingency and situated creativity implies that the analysis of (German) foreign policy ought to focus on both context and action. Moreover, since both the incommensurability thesis as well as the dualism between explanation and understanding are rejected (Rorty 1982b, 1987) there are neither strictures on drawing on different sources of theoretical knowledge (or different ‘paradigms’) nor are there any insurmountable methodological obstacles in combining an internal (reconstructive) and an external



(explanatory) perspective on action. Quite the contrary: Given that the pragmatist theory of thought and action (with its emphasis on both experience and creative intelligence) applies to the practice of scholarship as it does to action more generally, it is incumbent upon any scholar to draw as creatively as possible on as many sources as possible in line with generally accepted disciplinary research practices when analyzing a particular topic.

In the case of German foreign policy after unification this means that attention ought to be paid to the situation in which Germany found itself after 1990 as well as the internal perspective which decision-makers brought to German foreign policy. The latter points primarily to agency-centred methodological tools (such as traditional explanatory decision-making approaches but also reconstructive approaches analyzing discourses), the former calls on paying attention to reconstructing structures of meaning at the international and the domestic level. The point in considering such a combination would not be that such a form of 'analytical eclecticism' (Katzenstein and Sil 2008) is mandated by the nature of the problem at hand, thus establishing a new form of *pragmatist orthodoxy*. No such argument could be justified based on pragmatism since a contingency view of thought and action necessarily includes the belief that different methodological paths are available to make sense of (Germany's post-unification) foreign policy. Rather the argument in favour of this combination of different methods would be that the mobilization of various disciplinary tools would increase the likelihood of providing at least *one* adequate description of the situation.

However, if one chooses such a combinational approach it becomes clear fairly quickly that a highly complex and contradictory picture emerges. For instance, it has been largely undisputed among analysts from the very beginning that Germany's domestic and international environment had drastically changed in 1990. First, as a result of unification and the removal of remaining legal strictures it had become both bigger and freer, now clearly standing out as the largest member of the European Union. Second, with the end of the Warsaw Pact and the perspective of its Eastern neighbours joining the EU in the long term, Germany had also gained what it never had before: a safe environment made up exclusively of allies. From a neorealist perspective, therefore, Germany was clearly more powerful. However, Germany's international environment also displayed powerful countervailing pressures which rendered a neorealist scenario for a German re-emergence to traditional great power status much less obvious. No other great power before Germany had been deeply embedded in the most intricate net of international institutions, most importantly the EU and NATO, as Germany was. What is more, with Germany often leading the way, the EU in particular set out on a trajectory immediately after 1990 to tighten the bonds that bound Germany



and its partners ever more closely together, thereby ever more approaching the ideal of a Kantian ‘culture of anarchy’ (Wendt 1999: 297–308). Thus, against the background of some of the core ‘systemic’ IR theories (neorealism, neoliberal institutionalism and Wendtian constructivism) the incentive structure was highly contradictory pulling Germany in very different directions.

The same can be said about the implications of widely shared descriptions of the foreign policy implications of domestic changes. Whereas Germany had grown more powerful in traditional realist terms it also faced a huge task domestically in transforming Eastern Germany. This was bound to absorb tremendous resources which would not (or no longer) be available for international engagements (EU ‘paymaster’; defence budget increases). Moreover, Germany’s deeply ingrained political culture of antimilitarism and instinctive multilateralism — which had just been reinforced by the huge and unexpected success of unification with the consent of Germany’s neighbours — made it difficult to imagine a reversal along a traditional great power trajectory. As a result, the material-ideational constellation of an anti-militarist and Europeanized identity combined with huge domestic challenges (the prioritization of which was made all the more likely given an international environment essentially made up of allies and friends) clearly pointed to low-key international engagement. On the other hand, a new generation of leaders was bound to take over the helm eventually. For classical realist theory with its emphasis on prestige-seeking and status-orientation (Markey 2000), this pointed in the direction of a much more self-assertive outlook among the new foreign policy elites which would demand a more elevated role in recognition of its increased power. Thus, based on a broader set of plausible disciplinary knowledge about foreign policy, contextual incentive structures once again produced countervailing pressures.

Against this background of conflicting tendencies stemming from a radically altered domestic and international context, it was implausible to either expect a mere return to old-fashioned great power politics or just mere continuity along the lines of the old Federal Republic. Rather, the much more plausible expectation was one that would have emphasized a synthesizing perspective producing highly contradictory, even amorphous descriptions as far as individual variables were concerned while at the same time leaving the onlooker with an overall impression of enormous tension the eventual outcome of which was hard to predict. One of the presumptions of this paper is that *genuine* puzzlement along these lines was much more widespread in the aftermaths of 1990 than acknowledged. Such puzzlement helps to explain why so many scholars who had hitherto focused on other questions developed an interest in studying German foreign policy in the early 1990s and why some of the top journals of the discipline opened their pages to publish their work.



However, if this description is adequate it should also be immediately apparent that one of the core recommendations of a logic of subsumption applied — that is, that the research problem of the evolution of German foreign policy had to be tailored to the needs of scientific inference by specifying testable outcomes and by keeping causal variables to a minimum in line with disciplinary debates.

The discussion above has shown how paradigmatic fixations missed some of the complexities that resulted from the radically changed situation after 1990. In some respects this was the result of insufficiently reflecting the question of how the problem to be solved had to be formulated in the first place. To be sure, the puzzlement driving the exploding interest of IR theory in German foreign policy originated in two types of laudable motivations: the genuine concern that a relapse into power politics might result from Germany's improved security position and the equally genuine confidence that the structural conditions for a continuation of a 'Bonn Republic' outlook could hardly be better than in the German case. Both are laudable in normative terms since they were directing attention at highly consequential scenarios which could not be rejected out of hand: (a) that a more powerful Germany might unsettle European peace and stability and (b) that a powerful 'civilizing' German impetus might push the transformation of Europe towards a Kantian culture of anarchy. However in combination with subsumptionist-cum-paradigmatic disciplinary inclinations these motivations quickly degenerated into one-sided fixations. From a sociology of science point of view such disciplinary practices have obviously solved *some* 'problem' in propelling academic careers as a result of publishing in highly ranked peer-reviewed journals. Yet they have remained well below their potential in also contributing to a better *understanding* of the course of German foreign policy by, for instance, posing the research problem in terms of genuinely open questions about the future shape of what is usually considered to be the grand strategy of a country.

Most importantly, the prevailing logic of subsumption has blocked such forms of inquiry which were open to the contingency and novelty that is necessarily entailed when creative intelligence comes into play in complex problematic situations. This is the second point where a pragmatist analysis of German foreign policy can offer a different perspective. Rather than seeing the range of possibility being sufficiently circumscribed by expectations derived from established theories, it would systematically allow for novel ways of enacting German foreign policy to appear. Specifically, for a pragmatist it would not be surprising at all to observe new patterns of action based on a fusion of behavioural traits which are usually considered incompatible in traditional theories. For instance, a description of German foreign policy which emphasizes a much more status-conscious and self-assertive positioning



(as portrayed, among others, in Germany's stubborn bid for a permanent seat in the UN Security Council at the expense of a unified European position) can fit with a continued orientation at strengthening a common European foreign policy (Schmalz 2004; Hellmann and Roos 2007). Similarly, the observation that weapons procurement decisions taken during the last 10 years (Lauer 2007) obviously increase both Germany's capacity for autonomous action as well as its capacity for long-range deployments does not imply a retreat from the deeply engrained 'never alone' postulate since the doctrinal underpinnings of Germany's multilateral orientation within the context of the EU and NATO has thus far not fundamentally changed. In other words, what we observe here is neither adequately captured with a realist 'back to traditional great power politics'-argument nor is it easy to square with an idealization in 'civilian power' terms. Such a description would see the 'new' Germany neither on a track back to a German 'Machtstaat' predecessor nor would it merely extrapolate foreign policy practices of the 'Bonn Republic'. Rather it offers a novel interpretation as to what self-assertive ('selbstbewusste') German foreign policy may mean under conditions of a new generation in power, an ever tightening web of European integration and a global transformation which is shaped by both globalization and re-polarization.³⁹

Conclusion

In this paper I have tried to show how and why the analysis of German foreign policy has received so much attention from largely positivist-inspired scholarship in the decade after unification. In large part, this was due to deeply ingrained disciplinary practices which tend to emphasize systematicity and an accompanying logic of subsumtion at the expense of the contingency and creativity which are implicit in a logic of reconstruction. The point in offering this critique is not to replay typical dualistic oppositions in reversed order by depicting subsumtionists as being wrong-headed and by propelling pragmatism to the top-spot of a new '-isms' hit-list as the alleged wave of the future. Rather, in spelling out a particular observation concerning the treatment of German foreign policy in IR discourse, I wanted to offer a different perspective on a typical phenomenon in IR research practice which is relevant well beyond the German case (even though it reveals some of its most striking features here). Propagating a harsh dualistic opposition between subsumtionists and reconstructionists would be ill-conceived since individualizing elements granting some room for contingency and creativity are visible in the research of those who emphasize a systematicity view of thought and actions as generalizing elements are observable among those who emphasize a contingency view of thought and action.⁴⁰ Therefore this distinction ought to



be taken as an analytical one which turns out to be much less rigid in real-life research for *both* sides.

This pragmatic approach can be noted in the way German FPA has developed during the last few years. With time passing and new foreign policy practices stabilizing themselves German foreign policy has lost some of its openness in terms of some of the more dramatic possibilities of change/continuity initially envisaged. This more consolidated (or, seemingly, 'predictable') foreign policy practice emanating from Berlin steers much less interest in key IR journals. A more pragmatist way of putting this is that a new routine has settled in the study of German foreign policy. Established paradigmatic frames of reference continue to inform analysis (e.g. Maull 2006, 2008; Overhaus 2006; Crawford 2007; Weber and Kowert 2007; Weiss 2009). However, the striking difference between the analysis of German foreign policy and the foreign policy of comparable powers, identified during the 1990s, has essentially vanished.⁴¹ Even if one may continue to argue against the claim of those observers who keep pushing their own redescriptions of Germany as a 'normal' power — with all the usual connotations of distancing Germany's presence from its Nazi past or justifying contemporary power politics practices — it certainly seems harder to dispute the claim that the *study* of German foreign policy has become 'normalized'. From a pragmatist point of view this is not really puzzling. However, the assumption underlying this paper is that it is worth being addressed explicitly because some broader arguments can be developed in this context as far as typical disciplinary practices are concerned. Among others, this includes the argument that 'normality' in the study of foreign policy or (broader) systemic IR issues entails paying more (and more systematic) attention to contingency and creativity. One of the promises which goes along with such a change in disciplinary habits is that the difference in understanding a rapidly changing landscape may disappear, a prospect that Hirschman diagnosed in his initial quote in comparing the 'social scientist' and the 'experienced politician'. Mitigating this difference might make for better scholarship *and* better foreign policy.

Notes

1 This research has profited from discussions with many collaborators, especially Rainer Baumann, Benjamin Herborth, Wolfgang Wagner and Reinhard Wolf. For comments on earlier versions I am grateful to Amelia Hadfield, Stefano Guzzini and the participants in a panel at the ISA 2007 in Chicago. In addition, the comments and suggestions of JIRD's reviewers and editorial team are deeply appreciated for helping in making this a much better piece. Last but not least, thanks for research assistance goes to Patrick Reitz and Christian Weber.

2 For a more detailed treatment, see Hellmann *et al.* (2007: 39–44). See also Harnisch (2003).

3 Gottfried-Karl Kindermann, who was a student and assistant of Hans Morgenthau and held the IR chair at Munich University between 1967 and the late 1990s, is an exception in this regard. Kindermann stuck closely to the line of his mentor which he refined into the 'Munich school of



- neorealism'. However, beyond the narrow confines of Munich he had no influence on either German Political Science or IR.
- 4 The only exception here is Werner Link whose work drew on both German realist classics and Kenneth Waltz.
 - 5 The earliest reference to the image of Gulliver as unification was approaching was made by the German correspondent of *the Economist*. See Jonathan Carr, 'When the Wall Comes Down. A Survey of West Germany', *The Economist*, 28 October, 1989: 13; for similar arguments see also Charles Krauthammer, 'Return of the German Question', *Time Magazine*, 25 September, 1989: 33. An early list of seven 'cardinal sins' of Germany as a rising great power was provided by William Horsley (1992: 14).
 - 6 See also Waltz (1993: 50, 54, 62–7, and 69–70). The view that Germany would upgrade its military power was not only held by structural or offensive realists. The British historian Timothy Garton Ash also thought that Germany 'would be behaving differently from most large states in history' if it were to forgo this option (Garton Ash 1994: 68).
 - 7 According to Maull, becoming a 'civillian power' implied three things (Maull 1990/1991: 92): '(a) the acceptance of the necessity of co-operation with others in the pursuit of international objectives; (b) the concentration on non-military, primarily economic, means to secure national goals, with military power left as a residual instrument serving essentially to safeguard other means of international interaction; and (c) a willingness to develop supranational structures to address critical issues of international management'.
 - 8 'Obscure' here refers to the general placing and valuation of foreign policy-related work (even if it entails 'theory') in the hierarchy of IR journals. Among the journals at the top of the hierarchy, not a single one specializes on the analysis of foreign policy. As a matter of fact, such a journal (*Foreign Policy Analysis*) has only recently been established. However, given the way that IR (as a discipline) rewards 'systemic' vs 'sub-systemic' theorizing it is clear that FPA ranks significantly lower in terms of professional prestige than systemic/IR theory. On this point, see Waever (1998, 2003).
 - 9 For Britain, Russia, China, France and India the scores are as follows: 753 results for 'British foreign policy', 496 results for 'Russian foreign policy', 416 results for 'Chinese foreign policy', 333 results for 'French foreign policy' and 144 results for 'Indian foreign policy'. These searches were conducted on 24 February, 2007.
 - 10 Note that this is probably a conservative calculation, potentially even biased *against* Germany for several reasons. First, the 'theory-oriented' share would rise further if we were to exclude the journal *Internationale Politik* and its predecessor *Europa Archiv* (which are both policy-oriented journals equivalent to *Foreign Affairs* in the US and which account for more than 20 per cent of all the articles found). Second, if anything the SSCI is probably biased towards English-language journals which (given the often parochial nature of our disciplinary fixtures) should actually be to the advantage of both Britain and undisputed great powers such as Russia and China. (For instance, the leading German IR journal *Zeitschrift für Internationale Beziehungen* is not included in SSCI.) Britain is difficult to count. The share of 'theory-oriented' articles is close to Germany in percentage terms. However, the overall number of articles is very low. Moreover, all three articles making up the 23 per cent share of 'theory-oriented' British articles fall into the classical Comparative Foreign Policy (CFP) rubric (and for two of the three articles Germany marks the comparative contrast foil). Third, for whatever reason the SSCI did not count all of the obvious articles under the rubric of German foreign policy. Zehfuss (2001) is an obvious case in point. One could also add Risse (1997 and 2000) since both include major case studies related to Germany.
 - 11 One could add other theoretical contributions to somewhat less prominent IR journals or peer-reviewed edited volumes such as Katzenstein (1993), Hyde-Price and Jeffery (2001), Bach and Peters (2002), Behnke (2006).



- 12 This paradigmatic thrust is already hinted at in the titles of some publications, see Duffield (1999), Baumann *et al.* (1999).
- 13 The 'ideal type' of a civilian power which is said to 'cause' this behaviour includes 'states which are actively promoting the "civilising" of international relations'; such states 'try to replace the military enforcement of rules (politics based on power) with the internationalization of socially accepted rules'. This includes 'efforts to constrain the use of force in settling political conflicts', 'efforts to strengthen the rule of law' and efforts to promote 'participatory forms of decision-making' and 'non-violent forms of conflict management', see Harnisch and Maull (2001: 3–4).
- 14 For more recent views by Maull which basically confirm this perspective (including Germany's balancing behaviour during the Iraq crisis), see Maull (2004, 2006); see also Risse (2004, 2007). A few scholars such as the diplomatic historian Gregor Schöllgen (2003) or IR scholar Carlo Masala (2004) can be interpreted as both acknowledging and welcoming a return to Realpolitik practices. However, these voices clearly represent a minority point of view.
- 15 Maja Zehfuss (2001) is a noteworthy exception. Zeroing in on Alexander Wendt's work, she uses debates in Germany about the country's military involvement abroad after 1990 as an illustration to show that identities are much more complex than a Wendtian conception of identity allows for.
- 16 Maja Zehfuss (2001) once again is an obvious exception.
- 17 As always, there are exceptions. Especially in the British German Studies community there have been several works which are guided by an intuitive rejection of paradigmatic fixations (see for instance Hyde-Price and Jeffrey 2001; Dyson and Goetz 2003; Green and Paterson 2005). However, what distinguishes the present paper from those works is the direct engagement of paradigmatic fixations and an explicit attempt to spell out a different epistemological position on which to ground this form a foreign policy analysis perspective.
- 18 See Hellmann (2000a, 2003, 2006a).
- 19 For this as well as other apt criticisms of the field of foreign policy analysis, see Brown (1997: 80).
- 20 For an elaboration of the pragmatist sources of this perspective, see Hellmann (2002). I will return to this point below.
- 21 When the 'Stability and Growth Pact' was created in 1995/1996 to provide for monetary stability, the German government enforced a set of rather detailed and strict rules against heavy opposition from other EU member states. For constructivists, the creation of EMU was interpreted as evidence of Germany's Europeanized identity (Risse *et al.* 1999). Yet, only 5 years later, it was Germany itself which not only refused to comply by these rules but actually led the move to 'suspend' them when the European Commission finally initiated formal steps to allow for Germany to be officially sanctioned for not abiding by the Pact. From a legal point of view, this amounted to an open breach of the Pact as the European Court of Justice (ECJ) ruled in the summer of 2004. What is more, this case clearly showed that Germany failed an easy test of the action-guiding power of its Europeanized identity: it only had to abide by what it had put in place itself and what the majority of experts interpreted (in line with the ECJ) as a clear-cut set of rules. However, it did not do so. Rather, driven by domestic political concerns, the government chose to pursue narrowly defined national interests (cf. Hellmann 2006b: 174–5; see also Crawford 2007: Chapter 4).
- 22 'A research project should pose a question that is "important" in the real world. The topic should be consequential for political, social, or economic life, for understanding something that significantly affects many people's lives, or for understanding and predicting events that might be harmful or beneficial' (King *et al.* 1994: 15).
- 23 The distinction between a 'logic of subsumption' and a 'logic of reconstruction' has been introduced by the German sociologist Ulrich Oevermann drawing, among others, on the work of the American pragmatists and Theodor Adorno. Ulrich Franke, Benjamin Herborth and Ulrich Roos have been instrumental in pointing me to this important literature.



- 24 All quotes from King *et al.* (1994: 35, 43, 79). For the authors this distinction between 'systematic' and 'non-systematic' factors is crucial, see also *ibid.*, pp. 42–4, 55–63, 79–82, 84 and their discussion of 'omitted variable bias', pp. 168–82, 196–207. In an interesting twist they do grant in another context of the same book that it may not be an easy task after all to draw such 'systematic vs nonsystematic' distinctions in a reliable way. In discussing the reliability of a theory they explicitly state (on p. 21) that 'human beings are very good at recognizing patterns but not very good at recognizing nonpatterns. (Most of us see patterns in random ink blots!)'.
- 25 King *et al.* (1994: 53). 'Where possible, analysts should simplify their descriptions only after they attain an understanding of the richness of history and culture. Social scientist may use only a few parts of the history of some set of events in making inferences. Nevertheless, rich, unstructured knowledge of historical and cultural context of the phenomena with which they want to deal in a simplified and scientific way is usually a requisite for avoiding simplifications that are simply wrong' (King *et al.* 1994: 43).
- 26 For a set of overviews emphasizing different aspects of pragmatism as a philosophical tradition, see Rorty (1982a, 1987, 2007), Joas (1992a: 7–15, 28–37), Rescher (1995), Bernstein (1995), Putnam (1995), Menand (1997) and Shook and Margolis (2006). For a recent discussion of pragmatism as a theory of thought and action from a social science perspective, see Joas and Kilpinen (2006). For very brief (and often truncated) earlier references to different versions of pragmatism in IR, see Puchala (1990), Smith (1996: 23–5), Deibert (1997) and Adler (1997: 328–30). More recent (and more thorough) engagements of pragmatism in IR are provided in a special issue of *Millennium* (Vol. 31, No. 3, 2002) and in Sil (2004), Kornprobst (2007), Kratochwil (2007), Friedrichs and Kratochwil (2009), Katzenstein and Sil (2008). For a more detailed discussion of my own understanding of pragmatism, see Hellmann (2002, 2003, 2009b, 2009c).
- 27 For pragmatists, *thought* and *action* are two sides of the same coin. As a matter of fact, for pragmatists the classical dualism in Western philosophy between *thought* (or *theory*) on the one hand and *action* (or *practice*) on the other represents an odd and misleading distinction indeed (cf. Dewey 1929: 3–25), where he traces this enduring distinction back to Greek philosophy and the distinction between activity (as contemplation) vs action (as doing and making); on this point, see also Rorty (1996: 40).
- 28 In the (misleading) modern distinction between the 'theory of knowledge' (or epistemology) on the one hand, and the 'theory of action' on the other, one might say that the distinction between determinate and indeterminate situation represents an action-theoretical equivalent for Charles Sanders Peirce's distinction between belief and doubt (Peirce 1997[1868]). Yet as Dewey (1981[1938]: 56–7) pointed out, American pragmatism 'has given to the subject, to the individual mind, a practical rather than an epistemological function. The individual mind is important because only the individual mind is the organ of modifications in traditions and institutions, the vehicle of experimental creation'.
- 29 It is important to note that the 'new' situation is to be seen as a 'precognitive' state that will be transformed into a 'problematic' one 'in the very process of being subjected to inquiry'. Dewey writes: 'The indeterminate situation comes into existence from *existential causes*, just as does, say, the organic imbalance of hunger. There is nothing intellectual or cognitive in the existence of such situations, although they are the necessary condition of cognitive operations or inquiry. In themselves they are precognitive. The first result of evocation of inquiry is that *the situation is taken, adjudged, to be problematic*' (Dewey, 1991[1938]: 111; emphases added). It is in this sense that a problematic situation is always composed of 'objective' and 'internal' factors, as Dewey (1981[1938]: 518) stresses; on this point, see also Joas (1992b: 193–6 and 235–6).
- 30 In this pragmatist theory of action, ends are usually 'relatively indeterminate and will only be specified in the course of the decision on the means to be used. Reciprocity of ends and means thus implies an interplay between choice of means and specification of goals. The dimension of



- the means is not neutral *vis-à-vis* the dimension of the ends. By realizing that we possess certain means we detect ends we were not aware of before. Thus, means do not only specify ends, but they also broaden the scope of possible ends' (Joas 1992b: 227).
- 31 *Intentions* refer to a future that we *hope to shape* as a result of our current thoughts and actions; *predictions* refer to the *likelihood* that our intentions will indeed turn out to shape the future. Cognitively we often tend to equate both, but in the abstract (at least) we know that *outcomes* may differ from *outputs* and that there may be unintended consequences resulting from our interaction with others.
- 32 'An explanation, in short, locates something in actuality, showing its actual connections with other actual things. Its success as an answer to the question "why" will turn on the plausibility of the reasoning (...) that we invoke to make the connection. The plausibility of this reasoning will turn on the counterfactual it suggests. And if the counterfactual is itself not plausible, we should not give the explanation the credence we otherwise might. (...). Yet causal possibilities, if they remain merely possible, are not actualized. Practical possibilities are before the event at most actualized in someone's thoughts, as something that an agent or set of agents might have done or might yet do; after the event, in celebration or regret. Possibilities are not items at any world or in any head on which we can suppose that we or actual agents will cognitively converge, or about which, even if we do, they could be said to be certain, and thus to know' (Hawthorn 1991: 17).
- 33 Mustafa Emirbayer (1997) has pointed out that a complete description of all available possibilities would in fact be incompatible with a notion of creative agency holding that such a horizon of possibilities can be reconstituted at any time.
- 34 The observation that in constructing counterfactuals human beings tend to draw on their 'most favored patterns of knowing and thinking' (Turner 1996: 293) applies to experts and laymen alike. Philip Tetlock has 'tested' cognitive theories about judgmental biases and errors among international relations experts showing that these experts were no different in their judgmental biases than non-experts. They too 'neutralize dissonant data and preserve confidence in their prior assessments by resorting to a complex battery of belief-system defences that, epistemologically defensible or not, makes learning from history a slow process and defections from theoretical camps a rarity' (Tetlock 1999: 335).
- 35 'In the search for regular and identifiable patterns the field of foreign policy analysis rejects the view that every event is completely unique' (Kaarbo *et al.* 2002: 5); see also King *et al.* (1994: 10–2).
- 36 Cf. Franke (2008) and Roos (2008).
- 37 On this distinction and the accompanying plea for 'validity' and 'truth', see King *et al.* (1994: 31).
- 38 On the priority accorded to description over explanation, see also Wittgenstein (1975, §189): 'At some point one has to pass from explanation to mere description'; on this point, see also Ben-Menahem (1998) and Rorty (1982b).
- 39 For different illustrations as to how this might be substantiated empirically with regard to an analysis of feedback loops between German decision-making on the one hand and the international environment on the other as well as an analysis of the changing meaning associated with the key foreign policy vocabulary, see Hellmann (2006a, 2000b) and Hellmann *et al.* (2008); for a Rortyan 're-description' of contemporary German 'grand strategy' in terms of an 'assertive multilateralism' projected to the global stage via European foreign policy, see Hellmann (2009a).
- 40 On the former, see George and Bennett (2005); on the latter, see Katzenstein and Sil (2008).
- 41 For a list of more recent works on German foreign policy which — although most of them are hardly 'a-theoretical' — nevertheless significantly de-emphasize earlier paradigmatic fixations, see Baumann (2002, 2006), Green and Paterson (2005), Paterson and Miskimmon (2005), Waever (2005), Haftendorn (2006), Harnisch (2006), Hülse (2009).



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About the Author

Gunther Hellmann is a Professor of Political Science at Johan Wolfgang Goethe-University Frankfurt/Main, Germany and a Principal Investigator and Member of the Board of the Cluster of Excellence 'Formation of Normative



Orders' there. He has been publishing on German foreign policy, European and transatlantic security, and IR theory. Recently he has been a co-editor (with Siegmur Schmidt and Reinhard Wolf) of the *Handbook on German Foreign Policy* (in German), VS Verlagsgesellschaft 2007, and an editor of *De-Europeanization by Default: Germany's EU-Policy in Defence and Asylum*, Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2006.

AUTHOR COPY