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The search for dialogue as a hindrance to understanding: practices as inter-paradigmatic research program

ERIK RINGMAR

Department of Political Science, Lund University, Sweden

E-mail: erik@ringmar.net

In a recent article Emanuel Adler and Vincent Pouliot argued that attention to 'practices' could help IR scholars overcome ontological gaps and provide a new basis, on which the discipline could be established. Four such dichotomies are particularly salient: between the material and the meaningful, the rational and the practical, between agencies and structures, and between the forces of stability and of change. By failing to provide a theoretical basis for a synthesis, however, this project will fail. What a 'practice' is, and how ontological gaps should be understood, cannot be determined outside of the context of a theory. The article reviews theoretical attempts to deal with the dichotomies Adler and Pouliot identified and investigates the role of practices in the study of international relations.

Keywords: practices; practice theory; tacit knowledge; Pierre Bourdieu; ontology; paradigm

During the past couple of decades scholars in fields as diverse as sociology, anthropology, management studies, and finance have turned their attention to a study of practices. For far too long, many have felt, the scholarly focus has been set on rational actions or on structural factors and somehow the everyday activities in which people engage have been overlooked. It is this relative neglect which a turn to practices is intended to remedy (Bohman 1997; Cetina *et al.* 2001; Reckwitz 2002; Rouse 2006; cf. Turner 1994). And now scholars of international relations are turning in the same direction. Iver Neumann may have initiated the move back in 2002 in his call to colleagues to follow the lead of French psychoanalyst and philosopher Michel de Certeau – author of *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 1980 – and pay more attention to the practices that constitute the everyday life of international politics (Certeau 1984; Neumann 2002). Ten years later the move has become something of a movement, most recently and enthusiastically promoted by Emanuel Adler and Vincent Pouliot. '[W]e invite students of

International Relations', as the two declared in a programmatic statement, 'to approach world politics through the lens of its manifold practices' (Adler and Pouliot 2011a, 2011b, 1).

Accompanying Adler and Pouliot's manifesto is an edited volume, *International Practices*, intended to demonstrate the relevance of practices for our analyses of international politics.[1] Between the covers of the volume are contributions from a first-rate team of scholars: theoretical discussions of the practice concept by Friedrich Kratochwil, Raymond Duvall, Arjun Chowdhury, and Janice Bially Mattern, but also empirical chapters in which Janice Gross Stein discusses the community of practice constituted by NGOs working in the field of humanitarian aid, Ole Jacob Sending and Iver Neumann study the practices of officials at the World Bank, Rita Abrahamsen, and Michael Williams analyze the practices of private security companies, and Erik Voeten the practices of delegates at the UNs' General Assembly (Abrahamsen and Williams 2011; Bially Mattern 2011; Brunnée and Toope 2011; Duvall and Chowdhury 2011; Kratochwil 2011; Sending and Neumann 2011; Stein 2011; Voeten 2011). Meanwhile Patrick Morgan provides a practice-based account of the policy of deterrence and Norrin M. Ripsman of balances of power, whereas Richard Little discusses the British government's response to the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s and Lene Hansen the Muhammad cartoon crisis in Denmark in 2005/06 (Hansen 2011; Little 2011; Morgan 2011; Ripsman 2011).

Uniformly insightful and occasionally brilliant though these chapters are, there is nothing truly new about this research. After all, practices of one kind or another are what scholars of international relations always have studied. Classical Realists, for example, paid detailed attention to the practices of deterrence and diplomacy, and Hans Morgenthau, for one, made a strong case for the importance of practical wisdom over scientific knowledge. Likewise, Neo-Realists have studied the practices of balances of power and nuclear weapons; Functionalists and Neofunctionalists the practices that generate, or disrupt, international cooperation; Liberals the practices of international institutions; Constructivists the practices that shape notions of identities and interests; and Post-structuralists, among other things, the practices of sovereignty and military interventions.

This long and distinguished tradition is happily acknowledged by Adler and Pouliot although they go on to argue that previous generations of scholars never studied practices 'mindfully' enough (Adler and Pouliot 2011a, 4). By this they presumably mean that earlier generations of scholars

[1] Adler and Pouliot's list of practice theorists includes no fewer than 28 names (Adler and Pouliot 2011b, 2).

never pursued their research in a selfconscious enough manner. Focusing only on the objects of their study, they never sufficiently investigated the presuppositions on which their research rested. As a result the proliferation of studies produced a proliferation of definitions and theories and resulted in an academic field, which was hopelessly fragmented and distinctly non-cumulative (cf. Katzenstein and Sils 2008, 2; Haas and Haas 2002, 573–75; Adler and Pouliot 2011b, 3–4). In particular, there are four entrenched dichotomies – what Adler and Pouliot refer to as 'ontological gaps' – on the sides of which scholarship tends to cluster: the gaps between the meaningful and the material, the rational and the practical, agencies and structures, but also between the forces of stability and of change. These gaps produce 'schools', '-isms' and 'paradigms', and scientific progress is blocked since students of international relations speak past each other, fail to add to each others contributions, and get bogged down in pointless fights.

It is Adler and Pouliot's contention that a study of practices can play a unique role in healing such rifts. One reason is the sheer ubiquitiousness of practices. Since so many different kinds of scholars study the same thing, a common definition would allow them to communicate more effectively with each other. And yet, if all that is required is a topic which is shared by a large number of scholars there are plenty of other candidates – 'power', 'sovereignty', 'identity', 'rationality', or 'globalization', to name but a few. Yet practices were chosen, Adler and Pouliot explain, since they possess a unique ontological status. Practices occupy an intermediary position in the models we build of world politics, and in particular they allow us to bridge the four ontological gaps, which they have identified. With a metaphor drawn from quantum physics, they compare practices to a 'gluon', an 'ontological entity that cuts across paradigms under different names but with a related substance'.[2] Practices 'may be considered the ontological core concept that amalgamates the constitutive parts of international life'. Practices constitute a universal language, as it were, in which scholars of very different persuasions can communicate or, if nothing else, express their disagreements. This, Adler and Pouliot explain, is our best hope for progress in the academic study of international relations. We need to 'develop and systematize an inter-paradigmatic research program', which takes practices 'as its main entry point in the study of world politics' (Adler and Pouliot 2011b, 1–2).

This argument rests on three assumptions which this article will investigate. The first concerns matters of definitions. Adler and Pouliot assume that it is

[2] Adler and Pouliot (2011a, 10). A 'gluon', according to the physics textbook, is an elementary particle which 'acts as the exchange particle for the strong forces between quarks' (Gribbin 2002).

possible to define 'practices' in such a way that the definition can gain assent from scholars of very different theoretical persuasions and yet retain enough power to help us explain and understand international processes and events. Second, they assume that practices have a unique role to play in overcoming the ontological gaps they have identified. Third – and this is their meta-assumption – they assume that it is through theoretical bridge-building of this kind that science makes progress. Separate paradigms keep us apart, which is bad for scientific progress, while inter-paradigmatic research programs bring us together, which is good for scientific progress. This article will question these three assumptions and argue the opposite: there is no definition of practices that can command broad assent and yet retain sufficient explanatory power; there is no unique role to play for practices in bridging ontological gaps; it is not certain that the inter-paradigmatic is better than the paradigmatic; or rather, that assumption rests on a metaphysical foundation which is no more secure than its opposite.

What are practices?

The necessary starting-point for any inter-paradigmatic research program is a definition of the core concept. 'Practices', Adler and Pouliot begin, 'are competent performances' (Adler and Pouliot 2011b, 4–5). That is, they are 'socially meaningful patterns of action which, in being performed more or less competently, simultaneously embody, and act out, and possibly reify, background knowledge and discourse in and on the material world'. To say that practices are performed, they go on to explain, means that they constitute a form of action, a way in which something is done. As such they differ both from beliefs, which they express, and from discourse, which they instantiate. Second, practices are often patterned, meaning that they reflect certain regularities over time and space and are repeated in a similar fashion with similar meaning. Third, the fact that practices are performed means that they have audiences who judge them to be appropriate or inappropriate given the circumstances at hand. People who share the same practices can be referred to as a 'community of practice'. Finally, practices presuppose background knowledge, a hands-on 'knowing-how', rather than an explicit and bookish 'knowing-that' (Neumann 2002, 627; Adler and Pouliot 2011b, 6–7). International practices are simply the kinds of doings in which states, or individuals and groups acting across state borders, engage. As such practices constitute the very stuff of world affairs.

Alder and Pouliot's definition is very broad indeed, and includes behavior which is not only rational and habitual but also self-reflexive and tacit, performed, and inarticulate. Thus their definition combines the two main ways in which practices have been discussed by social scientists and by

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philosophers. Most social scientists talk of practices as a standardized, patterned, form of behavior in which people engage in particular situations, times, or locations (Schatzki 2008, 88–110; cf. Campbell 1996, 38–51). A practice is 'the right way of getting something done' or 'the appropriate way to behave under a given set of circumstances'. Practices, thus understood, are a category of social observation and the point from which we observe them is external to the people who engage in them. Yet philosophers – at least philosophers working in a tradition established by Martin Heidegger and Ludwig Wittgenstein – think of practices as doings in which human beings engage without much explicit awareness (Heidegger 1962, para. 67–88; Wittgenstein 2001, para. 23–39; cf. Dreyfus 1990, esp. 184–214; Rouse 2006, 499–540). '[P]ractical knowledge can neither be taught nor learned', as Michael Oakeshott explains, 'but only imparted and acquired' (Oakeshott 1991b, 15). Practical knowledge 'can be acquired only through continuous contact with one who is perpetually practicing it'. Obviously practices thus understood have quite a different status than the patterned behavior, which social scientists study (Oakeshott 1991a, 1–107; cf. Schatzki 2008, 120–21). Most obviously, a social scientist's practice is easily observable whereas a philosopher's practice is submerged in a certain 'way of life'.

Or consider the very different meanings of a 'performance'.[3] Practices, Adler and Pouliot insist, are 'competent performances', meaning that they take place in front of other members of society who pass judgment on what they see. Yet all forms of social behavior is performed in this sense and the performative aspect of practices can for that reason in no way define them. Compare a more restrictive definition which includes only actions that are explicitly staged in order to achieve certain effects (Ringmar 2013, 28). The paradigmatic example here is provided by a theater where life offstage is *re*-presented – that is, 'presented again'. The point of the representation is to show something to an audience, to teach a lesson and to convey emotions. As the works of Victor Turner, Clifford Geertz, Jeffrey Alexander, and others make clear, representational performances of this kind are common in social and political life too, including in international politics. The terrorist attacks staged on September 11, 2001, provide a spectacular example (Alexander 2006b, 91–114). Yet for the concept of practices to have an independent meaning, it cannot refer to performances of this kind. Practices are 'presentational', not re-presentational; they are not to be seen or noticed in their own right and they have an audience not by design but only by

[3] This 'performance turn' in the social sciences has been championed by anthropologists like V. Turner (2001); and Geertz (1985, 121–46); as well as by sociologists like Alexander (2006a).

coincidence. The verdicts which such coincidental audiences might pass on what they see concerns whether a practice is 'correctly' carried out, but there is no correct way to play Hamlet the way there is a correct way to drive a bus. Practices are not performances. The terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, DC were performed but they were not practices.[4]

These diverging definitions are on ample display in *International Practices*, the volume which Adler and Pouliot have edited. To Richard Little, a practice is the same thing as an institution, but as Friedrich Kratochwil makes clear, practices and institutions are quite different since institutions require a shared understanding which practices do not presuppose.[5] Erik Voeten wants to 'foreground international practices within a strategic choice framework', while Lene Hansen argues that 'practices cannot be thought outside of discourse', and Raymond Duvall and Arjun Chowdhury see a practice as 'resonating with existing understandings (background knowledge), against which it becomes socially meaningful' (Duvall and Chowdhury 2011, 338; Hansen 2011, 292, 297; Voeten 2011, 257). Clearly these authors are talking about quite different things, and the reason they do is that they are engaged in quite different scholarly enterprises. Nothing is gained by lumping these various activities together under the same label. The fact that they all fit under the definition of a practice, which Adler and Pouliot have proposed, tells us only that this definition is far too broad. By meaning everything, practices come to mean nothing.[6] Practices, as a result, is not a powerful concept but an exceedingly weak one. Conceptual overstretch, much like imperial overstretch, leaves you exposed and vulnerable.

What has gone wrong here is easily identified. Adler and Pouliot make the mistake of treating practices as though they were 'raw data' – data which is given before any theorization – yet there can be no such thing as a practice apart from the theories and research questions which identify it (Andersen and Neumann 2012, 467–68). Given that theories and research questions differ, scholars are bound to discuss practices in different, perhaps contradictory, ways. Too broad a definition will come to include these differences and is therefore confusing, and as such it is a poor basis

[4] Practice theorists often confuse the two (see, e.g., Neumann 2002, 635–36; Adler 2010, 203–06). Likewise, performance theorists often, mistakenly, see practices as examples of performances. One example is Ringmar (2012, 2–3).

[5] '[T]here is now', says Little, 'general agreement that the idea of institutions and practices can be considered to be broadly synonymous', and when Hedley Bull wrote about the institutions of international society what he meant was really a 'complex set of practices' (Kratochwil 2011, 42; Little 2011, 176–77).

[6] Too broad a definition, say Andersen and Neumann, 'will easily turn the concept of practices into something meaninglessly wide' (Andersen and Neumann 2012, 458).

for inter-paradigmatic communication. Adler and Pouliot's suggestion that dialogue and progress can come from a refusal to make theoretical choices is untenable. This, by the way, is also why we should be skeptical regarding the claim that practices have a unique ontological status. The problem here is one of logic. Theories are ontology-building, ontology-defining, and claims regarding the uniqueness or otherwise of ontological statuses must be theoretically based. Refusing to engage in any explicit theorizing of their own, Adler and Pouliot cannot support the claim which their research program presupposes.

Janice Bially Mattern is the only contributor to the edited volume who explicitly acknowledges these problems. She is suspicious of the overly catholic definition, which Adler and Pouliot propose, and she rejects the idea that practices can overcome ontological gaps (Bially Mattern 2011, 71). Indeed she explicitly does what Adler and Pouliot refuse to do – she offers a theory of international practices which makes clear distinctions and argues its case from a particular point of view. 'I take practice as offering IR not a *broader* ontology', she writes, 'but one that is *at least* as restrictive – albeit more complex – than the various ontologies that currently pepper the field' (Bially Mattern 2011, 64). Relying on the work of the American philosopher Theodore Schatzki she defends a 'practice-ism' built on the back of 'a post-Cartesian, post-individualist ontology of human being' (Bially Mattern 2011, 64–65). Although the merits, or otherwise, of the Schatzkian framework can be debated, there is no doubt that Bially Mattern's moves – restricting her definition; making explicit theoretical choices – provide the only viable way forward for the study of practices in international relations.

Practices and ontological gaps

Moving on to the core of the proposal, our next task is to investigate the assumption that practices, however defined, play a role in relation to the four ontological gaps which Adler and Pouliot identified – that between meaning and materiality, rationality and practicality, agency and structure, and between stability and change (Adler and Pouliot 2011b, 4). Unable to bridge these gaps, scholarship takes places on one or the other side of the chasms, yet we know that both sides must be included in a complete account of the social world. The result is frustrating. What we see is a duck-rabbit: the object is the one but it is also the other – it is mental but also material, a feature of structures but also of agency, and so on. We can often flip between these two visions, and we can do it at will, but we cannot see them as both things at once. Yet Adler and Pouliot insist that we can do better than this, and that the concept of practices presents them with the

solution. Attention to practices make us 'ontologically compelled to reach beyond traditional levels and units of analysis' and allows us to 'move beyond … entrenched dichotomies in social theorizing' (Adler and Pouliot 2011b, 4). As such, the study of practices has 'immense potential'.

Undertaking this task, we are immediately confronted with a problem. Adler and Pouliot present us with a long range of metaphors, which differ in their ontological implications and point to quite different tasks for practices to perform. Practices, they say, constitute a 'bridge' that 'joins' disparate entities; they 'lie at the intersection' of, or are 'suspended between', various dualisms; they are 'gluons', 'fertile focal points', they 'amalgamate' and 'weave' things together, 'overcome' and 'surmount' conventional divides and not only 'transcend' and 'move beyond' different approaches but help us 'synthesize' them too. Yet these suggestions imply quite different logical relationships (Bially Mattern 2011, 71). A 'bridge' makes communication possible but it does not move the two sides of a river closer to each other. When things are 'woven together', by contrast, they are not merely linked but united and integrated, even if it still may be possible to identify the separate strands that make up the common fabric. When things are amalgamated, on the other hand, such distinctions can no longer be made. 'Transcendence', by contrast, indicates not only that the separate entities will be related and integrated but that there were contradictions between them which now have been abolished. The metaphors of 'surmounting' and 'overcoming' point to a similar outcome but hint more explicitly at a Hegelian logic. Instead of relying on these imprecise and contradictory directions we will, in what follows, look for help from other social theorists who have discussed practices in relation to the ontological gaps which Adler and Pouliot identify. The aim is to understand the nature of these gaps, what it would take to bridge/amalgamate/overcome, them, and what role, if any, practices have played in these attempts.

Meaning and materiality

Practices, on Alder and Pouliot's account, provide a way to join meaning and materiality. Practices are meaningful and it is the meanings we attach to them that distinguish practices from mere behavior. Something becomes meaningful, moreover, to the extent that it is represented in a symbolic system such as a language (Adler and Pouliot 2011b, 15–16). Indeed the use of language is itself a practice since words not only mean things but also do things in the world. At the same time, practices have an irrefutably material quality. They take place in material settings, have material outcomes, and these outcomes often force us to reconsider our interpretations of the world. The concept of practice is valuable, Adler and Pouliot conclude, because it 'takes us "outside of the text"' (Adler and Pouliot 2011b, 2–3).

Yet to combine the meaningful and the material is more difficult than it seems. Consider Bourdieu's theory of practice from this perspective (Bourdieu 1977; cf. Sewell 1992, 13–21; Schatzki 1997, 285–90). Practices, says Bourdieu, are formed by what he calls the *habitus* of a society. The *habitus* is a set of dispositions denoting the acceptable, the possible, the normal and the expected; the *habitus* show us the way things are and the way they have to be. As such, he insists, it necessarily reflects the class divisions of society, engendered by the capitalist mode of production, but it simultaneously also makes sense of, and perpetuates, those divisions. The actions in which individuals and groups engage take place in what Bourdieu calls a 'field' – a certain domain of social activity – where they struggle for advantage using various forms of capital – wealth but also cultural and social capital. Reflecting the *habitus*, these struggles too instantiate and reproduce the class divisions of society. Practice becomes habit, habits are rationalized, and both practice and *habitus* give way to strategic actions which orient themselves toward structures of domination expressed in terms of social class (Alexander 1995, 160). Bourdieu's theory is consequently grounded in the socio-economic positions of the actors he identifies; he is a materialist, 'in the last instance', if not before.

Vincent Pouliot, in his own research, is one of the international relations scholars who invokes this framework (Pouliot 2008, 257–88; Pouliot 2010; Adler and Pouliot 2011b, 19–28). Studying the practices through which relations between NATO and Russia were constituted in the aftermath of the Cold War, he concludes that NATO in the early 1990s was able to redefine the concept of security and that the traditional Russian 'great power *habitus*', dominant since the days of Peter the Great, temporarily receded as a result. Yet this opportunity to establish relations on a more friendly footing was quickly squandered through NATO enlargements, in 1999 and 2004, which reactivated Russia's traditional fears. Abrahamsen and Williams's investigation of private security contractors in their contribution to *International Practices*, relies on a similar, Bourdieusian, set-up. 'Viewing security as a field of practice, constituted by a relationship between the public and the private that reflects shifting forms and distributions of capital', they see the growth of private security 'as both a result and a reflection of its increasing acquisition of forms of capital and as a part of a reconfiguration of the security field' (Adler-Nissen 2008; Abrahamsen and Williams 2011, 311; cf. Bourdieu, see Berling 2012).

Important though these empirical conclusions may be, they do not follow from a Bourdieusian analysis. Scholars of international relations pick the cherries from Bourdieu's theoretical pudding, and one feature they characteristically shy away from is his rump-Marxism. Abrahamsen and Williams were, they claim, 'forced … to bracket the concept of *habitus*',

which, they acknowledge, 'Bourdieu sees as central'.[7] Instead we are left with an 'action framework' which specifies the strategic interaction that takes place between actors operating in a certain field.[8] In this way Bourdieu's contribution differs little from what a traditional rational choice theorist might supply (Alexander 1995, 150–52). On both accounts, politics is a game played by different actors, using the resources they can muster, in order to maximize their benefits. Bourdieu's materialism is lost in the heat of this strategic battle and as a result the relationship between the material and the meaningful is never properly addressed. Scholars of international relations are, of course, free to move away from Bourdieu, yet there can be no such a thing as a Bourdieusian theory of practices, which ignores his discussion of social classes. Bourdieu minus materialism is just game theory.

The alternative is to approach the dichotomy between meaning and materiality from the opposite direction. This is what Charles Taylor does in his celebrated account of the practices in which human, 'self-interpreting animals', engage (Geertz 1973, 5; Taylor 1985, 26). Practices, says Taylor, 'cannot be identified in abstraction from the language we use to describe them, or invoke them, or carry them out' (Taylor 1985, 33). There is no social reality outside of language since 'language is constitutive of the reality, is essential to its being the kind of reality it is' (Taylor 1985, 34). Many scholars of international relations agree (Adler 1997, 321–24). '[P]ractice', says Neumann, cannot be thought of "outside of" discourse' (Neumann 2002, 628; Hansen 2011, 292–93). '[A]ccounts of lived practices', Adler and Pouliot concur, 'are textually constituted', and it is thus 'relevant to conceive of discourse as practice and to understand practice as discourse' (Adler and Pouliot 2011a, 14; 2011b, 16). The claim defended here is that meaning is constituted through a representational symbolic system and that meaning requires interpretation. What is interpreted is a text, or a text-analogue, which includes society itself, including relations between states (Taylor 1985, 15; Schatzki 2008, 126–27). Yet there are well-known perils associated with seeing society as a text (Sewell 1992, 6–8). If language, following Ferdinand Saussure, is regarded as a coherent and self-contained system, the meaning of a practice must be interpreted by means

[7] Abrahamsen and Williams (2011, 327). Abrahamsen and Williams 'draw on' Bourdieu, and it is 'especially his concepts of capital and field' that attract their attention (Abrahamsen and Williams 2011, 312).

[8] Berling similarly jettisons the habitus and Adler-Nissen concludes that only 'an adaptation of Bourdieu's concepts' offers a promising tool for research. Berling briefly notes the problem this entails but concludes that 'It goes beyond the scope of this article to discuss this issue in detail' (Adler-Nissen 2008, 680; Berling 2012, 20).

of other interpretations and by means of their relation to the system of practices as a whole. As a result, the connection to the world outside of the system becomes uncertain and interpretative accounts are for that reason often accused of being 'idealist' (Sewell 1992, 12). They are also often accused of having a conservative bias since meanings, when reinforcing each other in a coherent system, are difficult to question or to change.

Interpretivists are of course aware of these difficulties. Yet as Charles Taylor points out, it is not uncommon for people to draw entirely different conclusions from the practices they share (Taylor 1985, 36–37). Indeed, some of the greatest conflicts of world history, including the Reformation and the American Civil War, were brought about by people who shared a practice but interpreted it entirely differently (Swidler 2001, 94; Sending and Neumann 2011, 237). In addition, there are many practices that are local, connected to a particular time, place or group of people. As a result it is not possible to represent all practices of a society in anything that resembles a coherent, Saussurean, structure. Using the language-metaphor we could perhaps say that many practices correspond to 'local languages' which are not widely spoken or comprehended. However, even in a local language, meaning, on the interpretivists' account, depends on interpretation. The fact that practices always take place in material settings and have material consequences makes no difference in this regard, since it is only expressed in a language, and interpreted as such, that settings and consequences come to be acknowledged. Meaning is primary, and matter is acknowledged only once, and in the form in which, it is interpreted. As long as meaning always comes first, there is no way for interpretivist scholars to 'break out of the text'. To insist, as Lene Hansen does in her contribution to *International Practices*, that 'there is a material character to every discursive structure', makes no difference in this regard since the 'material character' which discursive structures acknowledge only are those which have been discursively interpreted in the first place (Hansen 2011, 293).

As long as a sharp distinction is drawn between our bodies and our minds, the dichotomy between the material and the meaningful cannot be transcended. Forced to choose sides, Bourdieu chose materiality and Taylor chose meaning, and scholars studying international practices have made up their minds in a similar fashion. For those, like Adler and Pouliot, who hoped that practices would provide a way of moving beyond this dichotomy, this is a disappointing conclusion. The only way out of the aporia would be to insist that meaning resides neither in our individual minds nor in some shared *conscience collective*, but instead directly in our experiences of the material world (Johnson 2008; Sheets-Johnstone 2009; Ingold 2011). The world is made meaningful through our bodily interaction with it, we would have to argue, and it is just as meaningful to animals who are not

self-interpreting – newborn humans, dogs, or gastropods. Equally, we would insist that there is nothing 'hard' or 'objective' about that which we call 'the material'. Instead the material world is nothing but the environment in which animals such as ourselves make a life for ourselves. Other animals make other kinds of lives for themselves and their material reality will differ accordingly. Although a transcendence of the dichotomy thus is possible, it forces us to take up a radical philosophical position which is unlikely to be widely embraced and, moreover, practices play no obvious or straightforward role in arriving at this solution.

Rationality and practicality

Practices, as Adler and Pouliot describe them, are simultaneously both rational and practical. The successful performance of a practice requires reflexivity, judgment, and 'self-examining deliberative processes', they argue, yet taking practices seriously 'draws special attention to all those meanings that are woven into practice and that, as such, often remain tacit and inarticulate' (Adler and Pouliot 2011b, 16; Lu and Labrosse 2011, 44–53). Yet, as we briefly discussed above, social scientists and philosophers are wont to think of this dichotomy in quite different terms.

Social scientists who invoke the notion of rationality try to explain actions by reference to the intentions that guided the persons carrying them out. They take an insider's view of the action, as it were, and although we cannot actually enter into the minds of other people, the assumption regarding rationality provides a substitute of sorts. They simply assume that rational people try to maximize their utility. Social scientists who study practices, by contrast, take an outsider's view. They see people doing certain things in certain places but they cannot say why since every practice can be associated with any number of separate intentions (Weber 1978, 8–10; Campbell 1996, 67–79). The practices in which the objects of our study engage can be compared with tools (Swidler 1986, 277–78). Like a tool a practice can be used for many different purposes, but when we observe a certain tool-use we can never tell for certain why a person engages in it.[9] If we want to explain what the person does, an intention must be added to the practice but this addition must be made as the result of some separate inquiry, which takes a far wider account of a person's life.

This difference in perspectives is well-known to students of international politics (Hollis and Smith 1990, 196–216). To some, assumptions regarding rationality provide a sufficiently convincing solution. 'I cannot forecast

[9] 'This,' say Andersen and Neumann, 'offers the analyst the great advantage of ridding her of the need to make problematic claims about the state of mind amongst the people who perform the practice' (Andersen and Neumann 2012, 458).

to you the action of Russia', as Winston Churchill famously put it in a BBC broadcast on October 1, 1939. 'It is a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma' (Churchill 1939). Yet Churchill nevertheless assumed that the Soviet leaders acted 'in their national interest'. Making a similar assumption, scholars have proceeded to explain a long range of foreign policy decisions in rational, utility-maximizing, terms. Observing a certain practice, however, does not allow us to draw similar conclusions. Consider, for example, the wampum diplomacy which Andersen and Neumann (2012, 473–81) discuss. The wampum – ceremonial belts made of shells – were used by the natives in north-eastern parts of North America on various ceremonial occasions, and while these practices themselves can be described, they give us no clue whatsoever to the intentions of the persons performing them. Before such an explanation becomes possible, we need to know more about native American society and we need to know more about the people who engage in the practice. Several of the contributors to *International Practices* flip between the inside and the outside perspectives. Patrick Morgan, for one, starts by defining practices as 'patterns of behavior', but when he proceeds to tell the story of the 'practices of deterrence' during the Cold War, he relies heavily on a reconstruction of the intentions and aims of the actors involved (Morgan 2011, 139, 147–63).

The gap between rationality and practicality, we said, is thought of quite differently by philosophers, at least by philosophers of a post-Heideggerian or a post-Wittgensteinian ilk. On their account a practice is an unreflective and unselfconcious behavior, which is inherent in a certain form of life (cf. Turner 1994, 130; Rouse 2006; Turner 2007, 110–25; Andersen and Neumann 2012, 471–72). 'Every decision', as Heidegger put it, 'bases itself on something not mastered, something concealed, confusing; else it would never be a decision' (Heidegger 1993, 177; cf. Dreyfus 1990, 4). What is most important and meaningful in our lives is not, and should not be, accessible to critical reflection. Rationality provides, from this point of view, but a crude redescription of this far richer, largely tacit, understanding. Rationality, that is, is equated with a process of rationalization through which social life is redescribed in explicit and inevitably simplistic terms (Polanyi 1974, 203–45; Oakeshott 1991b, 5–17). Yet '[a]ny large social process or event will inevitably be far more complex than the schemata we can devise, prospectively or retrospectively, to map it' (Scott 1998, 309). If we take this rationalization seriously, we are admonished, we will fundamentally misunderstand the world, and if we take it as the basis for our political projects we risk doing irreparable damage to the fabric of social life. This, political philosophers have pointed out, is the origin of modern disasters such as the French Revolution or Stalin's collectivization campaigns (Burke 1790; Scott 1998, 193–222).

It is not clear which of these roles Adler and Pouliot have intended practices to play. The gap which social scientists have identified – between an insider's and an outsider's perspective – is notoriously unbridgeable, and if we understand practices as a form of standardized, patterned, behavior, we are simply siding with the outsiders (Hollis and Smith 1990, 196–216). If, on the other hand, we define practices the way some philosophers do, we end up studying forms of life from which perspective rationality appears as little but a perversion. The most plausible interpretation is instead that Adler and Pouliot are looking for a faculty akin to what Aristotle referred to as *phronesis*, 'wisdom' or 'prudence' (Aristotle 1999, para. 1140a30–1145a5). *Phronesis* is a practical form of rationality which concerns the judgment a person employs in a particular time and place. Such practical prudence is also the main feature of the statecraft of the statesmen idealized by Classical Realists like Reinhold Niebuhr, Hans Morgenthau, and Henry Kissinger (Coll 1991, 36–40; Hariman and Beer 1998, 299–311).

Compare theories of rational choice. Rational choice theorists insist that we consider the outcomes of all our options before we embark on an action. That is, the various options are first represented in our minds and ranked in degree of expected utility. Yet, as any study of statecraft will tell us, this is not what happens, at least not most of the time. Instead statesmen and women typically feel their way through – embark on some course of action and deal with the opportunities and the challenges as they arise. Understanding is an ability; reasoning is a process of discovery; and the rationality we invoke is relative to the particular time and place where it is needed. It is not correct, moreover, to see this as a faculty of the mind since the skills involved are lodged just as much in our legs, arms, and fingertips – compare the practical knowledge possessed by firefighters, rescue squads, mine-disaster teams, and doctors in emergency rooms (Scott 1998, 313–14). Churchill was consequently surely wrong to assume that a national interest is something a certain state 'has'. Instead we should think of a national interest as a hunch, a hypothesis, and its execution as a way to investigate the world. The most successful statesman is not the most rational person but the person who most successfully can make things up as he or she goes along (Coll 1991, 36–40; Hariman and Beer 1998, 299–311).

Thus described, practical reason does indeed combine considerations regarding rationality and practicality, yet it still fails to provide support for the inter-paradigmatic research program that Adler and Pouliot seek to launch. The reason is that although practical reason is a principle according to which judgments are made and decisions reached, it is not itself an ontological category (cf. Aristotle 1999, para. 1140a30). Practical reason forms a part of the cognitive and sensory-kinetic faculties of human beings; it is as such not a part of an ontology of the world but instead a way in

which various parts of an ontology are related to each other. Practical reason may guide a practice, and it may for that reason be included in an explanation of world events which focuses on practices, but it is not itself a practice.

Agency and structure

A third dichotomy identified by Adler and Pouliot is that between agents and structures, and this gap too, they claim, can be overcome by practice-based means. '"Suspended" between structures and agency, practices are simultaneously enacted (agency) and inserted within a social context of political order (structure)' (Adler and Pouliot 2011b, 16). Taking practices as our focus we can arrive at 'a superior formulation of the agent-structure conundrum, where agency and structure jointly constitute and enable practices'. Among scholars of international relations, the agency/structure problem is of course a hardy perennial and so too, in this context, is the discussion of practices. Social structures, in Anthony Giddens' well-known formulation, have a 'dual' quality which simultaneously make them the 'medium and the outcome of the reproduction of practices' (Giddens 1979, 5; 1986, 140; cf. Sewell 1992, 4–13; Schatzki 1997, 290–93). Practices were always what the theory of structuration was about, and the first generation of international relations scholars to write on the agency/structure problem were thus nothing if not the first practice theorists. 'There is no "logic" of anarchy', as Alexander Wendt put it, 'apart from the practices that create and instantiate one structure of identities and interests rather than another; structure has no existence or causal powers apart from process' (Carlsnaes 1992, 260; Wendt 1992, 394–95).

The question is only what exact role practices are supposed to play in this process. On Giddens' original formulation practices are constituted by structures, and the practices in which human beings engage serve to generate those structures. A structure, he explains, is made up of rules regarding behavior and the resources on which actors rely. To invoke an obvious illustration from world politics: there are states (agents) that exist in an anarchical international system which has certain rules regarding self-help (a structure). The choices which states make result in the creation and perpetuation of practices (balances of power, armaments, diplomacy, and so on) which can be described in terms of the rules generated by the structure. The practices, in turn, serve to perpetuate both the states and the rules regarding self-help.

Here practices are indeed presented as a third term that is inserted in the gap opened up by the dichotomy between agents and structures. Practices are constituted by agents and structures, and serve to constitute both in turn. And yet this in-between status is not usually respected. When adjusting the

structurationist framework to the explanation of real world events, the practice category has instead generally come to be subsumed under the notion of 'agency'.[10] Practices are an instantiation of agency, we are told, and the resulting 'agency/structure problem' has consequently been presented, egg-and-chicken style, as a matter of which of the two entities that should be given ontological priority.[11] A common suggestion here has been to bracket the one while studying the other: to let an analysis of agency provide the basis for an analysis of structures, and an analysis of structures the basis for an analysis of agency, and so on (Giddens 1979, 80–81; Wendt 1987, 365). '[T]he rationale underlying this analytic approach', as Walter Carlsnaes explains, 'is that structural factors – such as institutions and rules – logically both predate and postdate any action affecting them; and that an action – such as a policy – logically both predates and postdates the structural factors conditioning it' (Carlsnaes 1992, 259–60). Yet as a result of this reformulation, practices have come to drop out and agents and structures have been allowed to condition each other without the help of practices understood as a third, mediating, term. As a result, agents and structures have been turned into the unquestioned, and unquestionable, preconditions on which the analysis rests (Doty 1997, 366, 379–82).

By encouraging us to once again pay attention to practices, Adler and Pouliot help remind us how the analysis originally was meant to proceed. Practices should have been made ontologically primitive and the relevant research question should have concerned which kinds of ontological entities practices produce. Agents and structures, we should have hypothesized, will emerge as a result of the unfolding of practices (Doty 1997, esp. 374–83; Weber 1998, 90–95; cf. Bialasiewicz *et al.* 2007, 406–09; Bially Mattern 2011, 72–75; Andersen and Neumann 2012, 457). 'The notion of practice', as Roxanne Lynn Doty explains, 'encourages a reformulation of the questions of both agency and structure as questions of how discursive or signifying practices work' (Doty 1997, 385). Yet this is obviously a radical and highly controversial move. What it implies is nothing short of a rejection of the traditional Cartesian distinction between the human *cogito* and the external world. On this account, there is no longer an agent who faces a structure, but instead practices that are responsible for the production of both. If this is how Adler and Pouliot suggest practices should be studied, they are in complete agreement with post-structuralist scholars of international

[10] 'Ironically', as Doty notes, 'while practice is asserted to be key, it is not really taken seriously enough by IR theorists of the agent-structure problematique' (Doty 1997, 376).

[11] Compare Archer's warnings against 'upward' and 'downward' conflation (Archer 1996, 25–71). The choice, says Carlsnaes, following Archer, is whether agents or structures should be regarded as 'ontologically primitive' (Carlsnaes 1992, 248).

relations who repeatedly have made the same claim. Cynthia Weber's work on interventions provides an example. 'I suggest', says Weber, 'that sovereign nation-states are not pre-given subjects but in process and that all subjects in process (be they individual or collective) are the ontological effects of practices which are performatively enacted' (Weber 1998, 78; cf. Schatzki 2008, 46–47, 85–86). For example: by analyzing where and how the discursive boundary is drawn between interventions that are regarded as acceptable and as unacceptable, we learn where and how sovereignty is produced and reproduced (Weber 1998, 93; cf. Bialasiewicz *et al.* 2007, 406–09).

We may have doubts regarding the post-structuralist solution to the agency/structure problem, and if so, there are alternative ways of conceptualizing the dichotomy which, they too, take practices as ontologically primitive. Wittgensteinian or Heideggerian social theorists have, for example, reached strikingly similar conclusions.[12] Yet it is highly unlikely that international relations scholars of more traditional theoretical persuasions will be convinced by these attempts. They find it difficult not to ascribe agency to states and structural properties to international systems, and they clearly believe that the theories they rely on are models of the world represented in their minds. From a post-structuralist, Wittgensteinian or Heideggerian, perspective these are unfounded prejudices, but as far as Adler and Pouliot's proposal is concerned this is irrelevant. Even if a study of practices does provide a way to overcome the dichotomy between agents and structures, it does not provide a shared basis for an inter-paradigmatic research program.

Stability and change

The final ontological gap is that between stability and change. Consider stability first. Practices are, say Adler and Pouliot, 'the vehicles of reproduction' and 'the source of ontological stability in social life' (Adler and Pouliot 2011b, 18). Practices make up the everyday routines that give social relations, including relations between states, a high degree of predictability. Practices on this account are similar to habits. Yet practices are also a source of social change. A practice, Adler and Pouliot conclude, 'typically does something in the world, and thus can change the physical world as well as the ideas that individually and collectively people hold about it' (Adler and Pouliot 2011a, 14).

[12] Compare Ingold: 'The characteristics of organisms … are not so much expressed as generated in the course of their development, arising as emergent properties of the fields of relationships set up through their presence and activity within a particular environment' (Ingold 2011, 4; see also Schatzki 2008, 159–67).

As it stands this is an outright contradiction. Practices cannot simultaneously be the origin of one thing – stability – and its opposite – change. One way to escape this contradiction is to insist that several practices, when taken together as a set, can have an impact on each other in such a way that change is produced. One practice nudges another along, as it were, resulting in the kind of step-by-step processes through which a language gradually evolves over time or a balance of power between states comes to be established (Doty 1997, 377–79). Yet there is nothing obviously transformative about sets of practices – sets of practices, after all, could just as well nudge each other in the direction of increased stability – and for that reason it becomes crucial to stipulate exactly how one practice relates to another (Ringmar 2009, 20–24). As always Adler and Pouliot shy away from any theorizing of their own, yet they do provide a short list of suggestions: practices, they tell us, can run parallel to each other, be in symbiosis, combine to produce hybrid forms, or be in a relationship of subordination to each other.[13]

If our aim is to explain social change, however, such a list of logical possibilities is clearly not sufficient and, as Adler and Pouliot admit, the question still remains 'what other determinants to add on to practices themselves in explaining transformations' (Adler and Pouliot 2011a, 21). In the end they resort to the idea that changes are the result of political struggles in which 'a plethora of other factors may be summoned in combination with practice – intersubjective structures, material forces, etc.' (Adler and Pouliot 2011a, 19). This is an admission of failure, and the same failure dogs every attempt which the contributors to *International Practices* make to explain individual events. Lene Hansen discusses the impact of Danish journalistic practices on the Mohammad cartoon crisis, and she makes a good job of it, but she cannot explain the crisis itself since it was an event, not a practice (Hansen 2011, 296–305). When she resorts to neologisms such as 'events-practices' in order to deal with this problem nothing is revealed except how confined she is by the theoretical framework she has been given. In much the same way, Erik Voeten discusses how the practices of the UN's General Assembly allowed certain delegates to push through a decolonization agenda in the late 1950s (Voeten 2011, 259–65, 266–72). Yet these practices are not the causes of events such as the *Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples*, 1960, only their enabling conditions.

The question is not only how to explain change, however, but also stability. Consider the problem of how to account for the reproduction of

[13] Adler and Pouliot (2011a, 20). To this Hansen adds 'intersection', a fifth relationship, defined as 'the specific and general practices mobilized in the course of a foreign policy "event"' (Hansen 2011, 296).

practices over time (Turner 1994, 46). If practices to a large extent are tacit, it is difficult to understand how they can be transmitted between generations, and if they are not lodged inside the minds of individuals, it is difficult to understand where they are. The most common answer is that practices are reproduced together with the cultural code through which society as a whole reproduces itself. People construct the world, as Clifford Geertz put it, by organizing sensory perceptions in terms of received, and culturally specific, conceptual schemata (Geertz 1973, 44). Practice theorists among international relations scholars typically agree (Neumann 2002, 628; Hansen 2011, 292–93; Kratochwil 2011, 50–51, 53–54). There are rules for how practices are to be transmitted that correspond to the rules through which a language is transmitted. There is nothing mysterious about this fact. Many rules of language use too are tacit and a language is certainly a shared social entity. Practices are public, not psychological, and not lodged in any one individual's mind. Like all other parts of the cultural code, practices are to be discovered in 'the house yard, the marketplace, and the town square' – where they are 'used to impose meaning upon experience' (Geertz 1973, 44–45).

Compare evolutionary biology. The code of a culture corresponds to the DNA through which a species maintains its stability from one generation to the next. Most of the time the code is faithfully copied; that is, the practice is 'correctly' performed. Yet, just as in cases of mutations in the DNA, there are occasionally errors in the process, and this is when changes occur. Such errors are emphasized by Raymond Duvall and Arjun Chowdhury in the final chapter of *International Practices*. The problem, they conclude, is that Adler and Pouliot's proposal for an inter-paradigmatic research program focuses too much on performances that succeed. This emphasis 'serves to reify the existing order, because competence is always in relation to existing norms and mores' (Duvall and Chowdhury 2011, 349). Instead we should study where practices go wrong; when they are incompetently executed or appear exceptional in some way. '[I]f we do not take incompetent practices seriously, we will be unable to recognize those actors in international politics who are resisting or transgressing the existing rules' (Duvall and Chowdhury 2011, 343). It is through such failures and transgressions that change happens.

It is this understanding of culture as a code that leads to the dichotomy between stability and change and that makes societies seem static or progressive. Either the copying of the code goes well and stability is produced, or it goes badly, and the result is change. This is how we derive questions such as 'why, in the nineteenth century, did China remain static while the rest of the world developed?' or 'how, in the twenty-first century, will the rise of China impact on world order?'. Yet stability and change are not

themselves ontological categories and they constitute no ontological gap that practices can bridge/amalgamate/overcome, etc. Instead stability and change are processes to which ontological categories may be exposed. What we register as stability and change are only moments in the same process of continuous growth. *Panta rhei*, everything flows, and the river we step into is always the same yet it is always also different. China was never 'stagnant', it is not 'rising', except in relation to the samples we take of a country in the midst of continuous transformations. Growth, moreover, does not take place according to a preconceived code but instead in relation to an environment in which opportunities and risks continuously unfold as we gradually come to explore it. With the anthropologist Tim Ingold, we could call such an environment a 'taskspace' (Ingold 2011, 194–200). Practices play a role here too, but they are not to be understood as shared mental entities, not as parts of a cultural code, but instead as the solutions which we, guided by our peers and teachers, discover or invent as we confront each subsequent task.[14] That which we call 'culture' is the trace which our journeys make through this taskspace, and the traces left by everyone else.

The paradigmatic and the inter-paradigmatic

Behind the inter-paradigmatic research agenda that Adler and Pouliot propose there is a grand metatheoretical wager – the assumption that science makes progress through the bridging of gaps, the abolition of contradictions and the overcoming of inter-paradigmatic feuds. Scientific progress, that is, takes place as small perspectives are replaced by broader ones, as partial theories are replaced by more encompassing ones, and as Occam's razor cuts the world up in an ever more elegant fashion (Kitcher 1995). Before this can happen, however, we need a common vocabulary in which our scientific endeavors can be pursued, and it is such a vocabulary that Adler and Pouliot's inter-paradigmatic research agenda is designed to promote. But as they emphasize, a common vocabulary is not the same thing as a common theoretical framework. There can be no unified theory of international practices, and their intention is emphatically *not* to replace all previous contributions with some new and more comprehensive account. Their call is instead for an *in pluribus unum* solution – a sort of intellectual potluck – which would facilitate communication, clarify where disagreements lie, and make it possible for one contribution to build on another. What they propose is 'a modular framework that scholars from different

[14] Ingold (2011, 383–91). This is what Gibson referred to as 'guided learning' (Gibson 1986). See also Turner's explicit acceptance of such guided learning as a basis for transmission of practices (Turner 2007; cf. Rouse 2006, 528–33).

traditions can access from their own particular ontological and epistemological perspectives' (Adler and Pouliot 2011a, 18).

The dream of a unified language is at least as old as the account of the Tower of Babel. Struggle and strife can be avoided, many a social reformer has concluded, if we only learn to communicate better. When scholarship in the Renaissance increasingly came to be conducted in mutually incomprehensible vernaculars, many scholars advocated a return to a universal language – perhaps of mathematics, the original Hebrew in which God had spoken to man, or possibly a version of the pictographs of the Chinese (Eco 1997; Ringmar 2009, 101–08). A unified language was also the dream of social reformers in the decades between the two world wars. Otto Neurath, who together with Rudolf Carnap was a leading member of the Vienna Circle, devised a pictoral language, Isotype, in which complex information could be conveyed through self-explanatory charts (Neurath 1936; Reisch 1994, 153–54). Another of Neurath's projects was an encyclopedia, *The International Encyclopedia of Unified Science*, with entries on all the sciences – the study of nature, but also the study of society and the humanities (Neurath and Carnap 1944; Reisch 1994, 157–61). The aim was not to impose a single theory on all scholars, Neurath explained, instead a unified science would emerge from the bottom up once all disciplines learned to speak the same scientific language. Not coincidentally, Neurath was a firm believer in the unity of mankind, in international organizations and in social planning. It is this tradition to which Adler and Pouliot belong.[15] They too are reformers who see disagreements as rooted in misunderstandings; they too combine a faith in international organizations with a belief in the bridge-building potentials of a universal idiom. And their edited volume, *International Practices*, is a first attempt at an encyclopedia of international relations – an attempt to which they encourage others to add their respective contributions.

But the dream of a unified language – and by implication, the dream of a unified science and a unified world – rests on philosophical foundations which are easy enough to question. There is, after all, no reason to assume that the world is made up of entities that can be integrated or studied with the help of the same intellectual tools.[16] The idea of a world government is reductionist, and so is the scientific world-view; both are enemies of diversity, and any attempt to impose them by force is likely to be fiercely resisted. The world, according to this rival, this pluralist, ontology, is not made up of

[15] Adler and Pouliot have previously given ample evidence of their desire to integrate disparate research traditions (see, e.g., Adler 1997; Pouliot 2007).

[16] On the uni-verse as a pluri-verse (see James 1996). On the limits of scientific discourse (see Oakeshott 1991c). On the plurality of values (see Berlin 1971).

the same kinds of things, artificially separated, but of many kinds of things which often are impossible to combine. Languages resist reduction to the extent that they are rooted in different ways of life, and scientific vocabularies resist reduction to the extent that they are derived from what Thomas Kuhn referred to as separate 'paradigms' (Kuhn 1996, 43–51; 1977). Normal science, Kuhn explained, takes place within a paradigm, and it can be defined as a certain way of manipulating and dealing with the world; that is, normal science is an example of a practice (Rouse 1981, 271; Kuhn 1996, 35–42). But once the paradigm is subjected to sufficient tensions and strains, the paradigm breaks down and the normal practices have to be replaced or reinterpreted. Incommensurability, from this point of view, refers to the mutual incompatibility of two sets of practices.

There are indeed ways, we concluded above, of avoiding the four ontological gaps which Adler and Pouliot identified. This can be done quite easily provided we bracket the discussion of practices and make alternative ontological assumptions which are sufficiently radical. Above all it is a matter of avoiding Cartesian dichotomies – of locating meaning not in the mind but in embodied experiences; of locating the self not outside of the world but in it; of seeing reason not as a mental process but as a process of discovery, and so on (Dewey 1929, 208–47; Johnson 2008, 19–32). Yet alternative assumptions such as these are surely too radical to meet with assent from more than a fringe of international relations scholars. For Adler and Pouliot this poses a problem. There is a trade-off between the success of any gap-bridging endeavor and the extent to which such an endeavor will meet with approval. The more successful they are at bridging the gaps, the more their solutions will raise eyebrows, and blood pressures, within the profession.

From the point of view of a pluralist ontology, however, such solutions provide little comfort. To bridge ontological gaps with the help of alternative, more radical, assumptions is not necessarily conducive to scientific progress. The Cartesian assumptions can certainly be replaced by anti-Cartesian, but this is only to replace one form of reductionism by another. To the extent that old gaps are closed, new ones will open up. It is like trying to cover yourself with a blanket that is too small – you pull it tighter in one place and it exposes your body somewhere else. Blankets come in different sizes to be sure, but the world is too large for even the largest blanket to cover the whole thing.[17] This point speaks directly to the hopes which Adler

[17] Compare James: 'Everything you can think of, however vast or inclusive, has on the pluralistic view a genuinely "external" environment of some sort or amount. Things are "with" one another in many ways, but nothing includes everything, or dominates over everything' (James 1996, 321).

and Pouliot have attached to the idea of the 'inter-paradigmatic'. It is a supreme irony that Kuhn first introduced the notion of a paradigm in a book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, which was published in a series, *The Library of Unified Science*, of which Otto Neurath was the founding editor.[18] In their proposal for an 'inter-paradigmatic research program' Adler and Pouliot side with Neurath and seek to replace the separate sets of scientific practices in which scholars of international relations engage with one all-purpose set. In this way they hope to undo the damage they believe paradigms have done to the study of world politics. But if the pluralists are correct, these proposals are futile. There can be no inter-paradigmatic practices, no grand syntheses and no new start for the academic study of international relations.

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[18] 'The Structure of Scientific Revolutions', as the copyright page of the book explains, 'was originally published in 1962 as part of *Foundations of the Unity of Science*, which constituted volumes 1 and 2 of the *International Encyclopaedia of Unified Science*' (Kuhn 1996, copyright page).

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