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Is Bertrand Badie's reference to International Relations as 'pseudoscience' valid?[297]

"The best lack all conviction, while the worst Are full of passionate intensity." –W.B. Yeats.

Any analysis on the past failures or successes in International Relations post World War 1, if judged from this context, must take the perspective of 100 years hence. This way issues in any outcome can be easily understood as results of the issues in the processes that generated it. The understanding of International Relations at its so-called 'Centenary Anniversary' may therefore be perceived as a realization of the constraints that the field took upon itself. Amitava Acharya for instance, in his lecture at Centre for International Studies, Oxford University, remarked that International Relations could be 'highly limiting' and 'far less accommodative', especially for any trans-disciplinary field like 'Forced Migration Studies'. Though he attributes this shortfall to the major biases of the three 'mainstream theories' of the field; Power bias of Realism, which emphasizes structural power; Cultural bias of Liberalism, signifying ethnocentrism or western centrism; System bias of Constructivism, which somewhat privileges the systemic forces, units and outcomes at the expense of those which are regional and local, or sub-systemic. It can, however, be reasonably argued, drawing from Acharya's assertion that these biases are not mutually exclusive, that the origin of these constraints could be traced in the temporal sequence of development of this field. The purpose here is to draw its brief sketch to suggest a significant detour that may long be in order for the field of International Relations.

Officially, International Relations emerged with the establishment of the department at University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, in April 1919. The letter

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[297] Périer, Miriam. "Rethinking International Relations." *Sciences Po*, CERI, 5 Feb. 2020, www.sciencespo.fr/en/news/news/rethinking-international-relations/4579.

of endowment from the Davies siblings in 1918 to the Council specified that the

Woodrow Wilson chair inaugurated by Alfred Zimern was,

> "…in the memory of the fallen students of our university for the study of those related problems of law and politics, of ethics and economics, which are raised by the prospect of a League of Nations and for the truer understanding of civilization other than our own."

The narrative that emerged was therefore concerned with understanding of the nature and causes of war within the framework of sovereign states. One could even argue that prevention of war became the *raison d'être* of this field. It was perhaps one of the 'Origin stories' that seemed to take root in academia, serving to both contextualize and justify the field. Such concern with war, however, was not new and the Treaty of Westphalia, 1648, was and still is to an extent, a strong contender to the claim of origin by some. Perhaps, by the time the concept of International Relations gathered full steam in the 1930s-40s, the notion of 1919 as the watershed became common knowledge. This was partly due to the reinvigorated interest in international affairs in the 19th century that culminated into the First World War, which snowballed into the second and ultimately the Cold War. The issues, however, arose when such simplifications were accepted at the face value.

The objectives of the League were, rightly assumed to be fourfold. It sought 'interdiction of war' and presented itself as a provision of a political and juridical 'safety-valve' to 'buttress peace' by improving inter-state relations by various means. It is therefore not surprising that the *International Affairs* regard the 'turbulent world of1919 and attempts by world's powers to build a peaceful international order as a starting point'.

However, take note that the world has changed. We are at least 5.9 billion more people, 143 more 'sovereign states' and far more technologically advanced

than were in 1919. The global military expenditure now touches $1.7 trillion (2018) and the role of non-state actors has seen resurgence in recent years, as is the case with 'domesticlinkages'. State actors themselves have altered quite a bit. Joseph Nye, for instance, finds the USA more parsimonious today than it was 100 years ago. In short, we are increasingly moving towards an interwoven realm of international affairs. This, therefore, begs the question on the viability of the traditional constraints of International Relations. The disturbing outcome, however, is that this field has been unable to generate any 'big ideas' with a spillover effect on the allied disciplines, despite witnessing substantial growth, particularly in the past 30 years. One extreme suggestion, as a result, was to possibly discard the field of International Relations altogether and reallocate its components to relevant fields. This was indeed the courtesy of the mixed opinions held on the extent of theory building here.

This may even imply that International Relations never developed into a proper field in its own right. If theorizing is considered as the touchstone of any field, Acharya has highlighted four major functions through which International Relations 'theories' could be understood viz. description and understanding, explanation, prediction and (normative) transformation. The main charge on all ends here is the lack of originality that frustrates the independence of International Relations as an academic field. This is when we have not brought in the inseparable relation that International Relations theories share with policy and practices of the same, which again is highlighted in the pre-eminence of foreign policy in this field whose content is often determined by the professionals in charge. Thus, as Acharya states, theory informs policy, the former may also be made and remade by politics and policy. Theoretically, the issue is that the main source of International Relations, Political Science, is very insular in this regard.

It has remained in Justin Rosenberg's proverbial 'prison of Political Science' with 'borrowed ontology', thereby failing to transcend into other disciplines through ideas that can 'speak to other social sciences and humanities'. The blame is squarely put on E.H. Carr's 'Twenty Years' Crisis?' given the view that division of social sciences was not a functional division of labor (C.W. Mills) and a 'fateful…wrong turn' (Eric Wolf) reflecting the triumph of Liberalism (Immanuel Wallenstein). This view is, however, in part reminiscent of the same distaste that Nietzsche held for Plato and Aristotle for establishing Political Science as a specialized social science, and thus warrants a similar treatment. In short, International Relations assumed a negative identity, i.e. politics without a central authority, restricted by the narrower vision of political realism.

To this end, Rosenberg highlights how even works of Kenneth Waltz, post whom any theoretical development in International Relations appear as mere 'footnotes', fails to achieve trans-disciplinary significance due to its explicit political orientation and detachment from domestic politics. As a result, his work is only 'vaguely recognized in Political Science' and little elsewhere. The alternative approaches, on the other hand, are yet to give a new theory based on the unique and apparently 'scientific' properties of the 'international'. As a result, like a real prisoner, it can receive external visits but cannot repay the same.

By changing the approach, perhaps, we may find a way out. The studies so far in the field, even in the realist-idealist-constructivist debates, the take on International Relations has been more analogical. The derived models therefore, the 'billiard-ball' or 'latticework' for instance, reflect this philosophy. Probably the need today is to underline the 'first principles'. It is not that the system of analogies or methodological use of analogies and counterfactuals are not beneficial. They are particularly simple, strategic and may even be insightful.

However, its strength, and also its main weakness, is that it presumes a new opportunity or a novel problem in a specific prior setting that is deemed similar in essence to the field where it is applied. The solutions therefore get transferred from its original setting to an unfamiliar context. In International Relations particularly, this assumes the form of deduction and trial and error processes, thanks to the abundance of data in this regard. It is here we return to the issue of original constraints on the field as in this process one has to restrain this 'abundance of data' to make it manageable. This goes without saying that the obvious result here is exclusion. Consequently, we run the risk of anchoring in superficial similarities that may be hard to dislodge and vulnerable to confirmation bias.

This issue is validated, for instance, by Prof. Mark B. Salter, in his introduction to *Securitization Theory: 20 years in Security Dialogue*, where he acknowledges,

> "...the consistent failure of security theory to point us to the complex and complicated social and political processes involved in connecting an issue with the value-category of security."

And upholds that,

> "Security theory is best when it serves as a purposively simple entry point into a rich empirical field…"

Thus, one may argue that International Relations is in John Searle's 'Chinese Room'. Searle may find out from a batch of mandarin writings (a language about which he is without a clue) specific sets of questions and their answers by following a list of instructions or rules that enable him to correlate those manuscripts. His answers may be indistinguishable from that of the native speakers of mandarin but in reality, he has understood nothing about those

answers – he merely followed instructions blindly. From this perspective, the plight of International Relations seems no different.

On a different note, what has not changed in the world today is, first, the importance of 'history' as a source of legitimate authority in justifying international actions, perhaps even as Casus belli, despite being susceptible to tainted interpretations. The cases of Crimea and the SouthChina Sea could be the most contemporary examples in this case. The Second continuity is in the importance of International 'prestige', a sort of arrogance that explains the struggle of states to dislodge the sitting leaders in global positions, e.g. Germany against the UK in Europe, Iran against Saudi-Arabia in the Middle-East and China against the USA worldwide. Perhaps, the quest for the 'first principles' may commence from here.

It is a Pascal's wager[298], and reviewing the field by reconfiguring the questions rather than re-interpretation of the answers with regard to international activity is the safer bet.

Hence, in the discipline of International Relations, a quagmire of hawks, doves, wars and peace, even after 100 years of establishment, there is nothing wrong with shaking up our preconceptions of how the world works every once in a while.

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[298] Pascal's wager is an argument in philosophy presented by the seventeenth-century French philosopher, mathematician and physicist, Blaise Pascal (1623–1662). It posits that humans bet with their lives that God either exists or does not.

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