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Abusing History



A Critical Analysis of Mainstream
International Relations Theory Misconduct

Occasional paper **6** published by the
Center for United States Studies of the
Raoul Dandurand Chair of Strategic
and Diplomatic Studies



Chaire Raoul-Dandurand
en études stratégiques et diplomatiques
Raoul-Dandurand Chair
of Strategic and Diplomatic Studies

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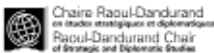
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Editing: Andréa Lévy
Design: Olivier Lasser

Dépôt légal – Bibliothèque nationale du Québec, 2004
ISBN 2-922844-41-2



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**Abusing History:
A Critical Analysis of Mainstream
International Relations Theory Misconduct¹**

By Anne Marie D'Aoust

Il n'y a de faits historiques que par positions².

For international relations theorists to insist that all nations within an anarchic system practice self-help strikes us a little like saying that fish within water must learn to swim. It is neither untrue nor untrivial – just uninteresting³.

Introduction

In Political Science, the discipline of IR has been widely regarded as an “American Science” ever since Stanley Hoffman published his renowned essay in 1977⁴. This “American Science” is mainly dominated by a single theoretical approach – that of Neorealism – which relies primarily on the concept of historical recurrence to ground its arguments. Other “new” theoretical approaches which challenge this parochialism, namely feminism, constructivism and Critical Theory, remain outside the “official

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1. Please note that this paper is still a work in progress. It was first presented at the History Students's Colloquium, History Department, York University, Toronto, on February 28, 2004. Special thanks to David Grondin for ongoing discussions and constant support.
 2. Charles Seignobos, quoted in Antoine Prost, *Douze leçons sur l'histoire*, Paris, éditions du Seuil, 1996, p. 68.
 3. John Lewis Gaddis, “History, Theory, and Common Ground”, *International Security*, vol. 22, no. 1, été 1997, p. 78.
 4. Stanley Hoffmann, “An American Social Science: International Relations”, *Daedalus: American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, vol. 106, no. 3, 1977, p. 41-60.

boundaries” of the field. These boundaries are largely set by the Neorealist agenda and its variations, which rarely diverge from an unquestioned central rationalist-empiricist theme⁵. Thus, with respect to its methodological and epistemological stance, Neorealist theory implicitly views History as a vast field of objective data and primary sources ready to reveal their truth to the social scientist. To test and/or prove the validity of Neorealist theory in the field of International Relations, one must refer to historical data and confront theory with “straight facts”. What I propose to do here is to analyze the ways in which the Neorealist approach to International Relations makes use of history, and subsequently to consider some crucial epistemological and theoretical debates in the field of History that are ignored by Neorealists like Waltz.

Many authors have criticized and challenged the scientific basis of Neorealism from a variety of theoretical standpoints, but few have examined the use of historical data which Neorealists must rely on to prove their allegations. Thus, I will forego the temptation to hold forth on the incompatibilities between the history of IR and the equivalent sub-discipline in Political Science, a theme that has been amply treated and debated⁶. Instead I will attempt to show how the particular approach to history adopted by the Neorealists has shaped the very nature of the study of IR in Political Science. In so doing, I will bring into play a number of issues relevant to historical studies that the Neorealist perspective fails to address and that render the Neorealist use of history problematic. First, I will provide an overview of the foundations of Neorealism, which represents the dominant theoretical framework in International Relations. Subsequently, I will consider some problems inherent in the Neorealist use of history. And, finally, I will offer some brief concluding remarks on the way in which Neorealism has shaped the very character of the discipline of International Relations.

One world, two disciplines

For some scholars, such as Jack Levy, the fundamental difference between History and Political Science is mainly one of method. They maintain that History is idiographic, whereas Political Science relies on a nomothetic model, which means that History seeks to understand unique series of events, while traditional approaches to IR propose to advance general explanatory laws⁷. This is the same distinction drawn by Martin Hollis and Steve Smith to characterize the two broad traditions that have shaped the subfield of IR in Political Science from its inception. While historians are

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5. Robert M.A. Crawford, “International Relations as an Academic Discipline: If It’s Good for America, Is It Good for the World?”, in *Intentional Relations – Still an American Social Science? Toward Diversity in International Thought*, Robert M.A. Crawford and Darryl S.L. Jarvis (ed.), New York, State University of New York Press, 2001, p. 3.
 6. For an excellent overview of the debate, see the collection of essays edited by Colin Eman and Miriam Fendius Elman, *Historians, Political Scientists, and the Study of International Relations*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, MIT Press, BCSIA Studies in International Security, 2001.
 7. Jack Levy, “Too Important to Leave to the Other : History and Political Science in the Study of International Relations”, *International Security*, vol. 22, no. 1, Summer 1997, p. 30-31. p. 22-33.

trained to describe and interpret individual events or a temporally bound series of events (thus adopting a view from the inside, focusing on the actors' feelings, choices and impressions), political scientists generalize about the relationships between variables to construct lawlike statements about social behavior (thus adopting a view from the outside, focusing on the causes of events, which are governed by recurrent laws of nature)⁸. Of course, this contention is open to dispute (historians will immediately point to the *Annales* school, for example, as a good example of nomothetic application of history) but it is revealing of the Neorealist perspective on the disciplinary boundaries between Politics and History in International Relations. As we will see, however, "the difference between understanding from inside and explaining from outside [...] [is] pretty thin, if beliefs and desire can appear in scientific explanations."⁹

In fact, from its earliest beginnings as a discipline, specialists in "international relations" have sought to distinguish the field from that of history. Traditionally, political scientists have agreed more or less unanimously that the discipline was founded in 1919, right after the First World War. This consensus among political scientists in regard to the founding of the discipline is noteworthy, for two reasons. First of all, it is implicitly legitimizing. This narrative centres on the notion that there is such a thing as a separate discipline of IR, which had its origins in 1919 and which therefore "must" exist as a specific field of study, apart from that of history¹⁰. Second, the consensus on the founding date of the field tends to justify, at least implicitly, a neorealist theory of International Relations and a disciplining of the discipline. As Steve Smith notes, the discipline gets defined as one founded on the problem of inter-state war. Scholars sought to address this specific issue or ran the risk of getting their work dismissed as "not IR".¹¹

Some historians of the discipline of International Relations, such as Brian Schmidt¹², have argued that the historical consensus concerning the foundation of the discipline is debatable. Schmidt even goes so far as to assert that the common perception that the discipline was founded in 1919, even if it is false, has had important direct consequences in producing a founding myth. The founding myth "portrays realism [in an understanding limited to *Realpolitik* consideration] as replacing idealism. And this myth has structured debate about IR through the present day."¹³ However, according to Steve Smith, the main impact of the story of the development of the discipline has been that IR can be portrayed as separate from political science or history or economics and this is

8. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

9. Martin Holis and Steve Smith, *Explaining and Understanding International Relations*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1990, p. 4.

10. Steve Smith, "The Discipline of International Relations : Still an American Social Science ?", *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, vo. 2, no. 3, October 2000, p. 378.

11. *Ibid.* This disciplining of the discipline has been made obvious with Robert Keohane's 1988 ISA Inaugural Address, where he specified that tenants of other theories, such as feminism or postmodernism, should prove their utility to the field by organizing their work on a traditional IR agenda which could be testable.

12. Brian Schmidt, *The Political Discourse of Anarchy: A Disciplinary History of International Relations*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1998, 309 p.

13. Brian Schmidt, cité dans Steve Smith, *loc. cit.*, p. 378.

commonly accompanied by the claim that it has a distinctive “methodology”, realism and its variants, like neorealism¹⁴. Methodology is used here as an epistemological stance designating a way of studying the “real world”, a view of what counts as “international relations” as an object of study, as well as what counts as legitimate scientific knowledge.

Neorealism: An Overview

Having outlined the broader context of where History and Political Science are seen to overlap and diverge, we can take a closer look at neorealist theory *per se*. Neorealism, which also goes under the name of Structuro-realism, originated with the 1979 publication of Kenneth Waltz's *Theory of International Politics*. My aim here is not to embark on an elaborate theoretical discussion: like Richard K. Ashley, I would rather treat the neorealist movement as a whole and challenge its general commitments than challenge an individual theoretical work. I will thus confine myself to identifying the basic neorealist theoretical assumptions set out by Colin and Miriam Elman. In this way, I can pay closer attention to the issue at hand, namely, the use of history by Neorealists. According to the Elmans:

Neo-realist models derive predictions from a set of core elements. First among these is the assumption that states interact in an anarchic environment. The theory also predicts aggregate state behavior and outcomes by relying on the following assumptions: that states are self-regarding; that consequently self-help is the system-mandated behavioral rule or principle; and that threat to survival is the main problem generated by the system. Neo-realist models assume that states are the primary actors in international politics and they weigh options and make decisions based on an assessment of the external environment and their strategic situation.¹⁵

Neorealism qualifies as a Positivist approach. By Positivism, it is meant “a belief and a commitment to a unified view of science and the adoption of methodologies from the natural sciences to explain the social world”¹⁶. As such, Neorealists share four implicit assumptions about their work: 1) The belief in the unity of science, including the social sciences; 2) The distinction between facts and values; 3) The existence of regularities in the social and natural worlds, and 4) Empirical validation or falsification as the hallmark of real inquiry in IR¹⁷. Thus Neorealism appears as an ahistorical theory, insofar as it claims to be applicable to all contexts, regardless of historical time frame. However, in an effort to demonstrate its ahistorical character, Waltz and other Neorealists seek to ground their arguments in concrete historical cases. Thus the Peloponnesian Wars and the First World War are presented as classic examples to prove Neorealist theory right. In Neorealist theory, history serves an instrumental function: you have a theoretical framework,

14. Steve Smith, *loc. cit.*, p. 378.

15. Colin Elman et Miriam Fendius Elman, « Correspondence: History vs. Neo-Realism: A Second Look ». *International Security*, vol. 20, no. 1, Summer 1995, p. 183.

16. Steve Smith, “Positivism and Beyond”, in *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond*, Steve Smith, Ken Booth and Marysia Zalewski (eds.), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 11.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

and to demonstrate its validity you must test it empirically, against the facts. So you turn to history, which provides all the facts necessary to verify the theoretical model. Indeed, from the point of view of the social scientist, this search for data to falsify a theory is the foundation of any scholarly work. But from an historian's point of view, there are several problems with this "technical" use of historical data which challenge the claim to neutral scientificity of the neorealist edifice.

Some Epistemological Problems

The first problem, and, in my estimation, the most serious one, lies with taking history as a vast objective field, where all one needs to do is dig diligently to unearth incontrovertible facts. This conception is flawed since the variables employed and the cases cited do not emerge from some transparent historical past, but rather arise from constructed narratives. Referring to History with a capital "H" evokes the notion of an objective historical science; it is a denial that historiography actually consists of histories rather than History. As Allan McGill puts it:

this historian interprets the past – that is, views the past from some present perspective [...] Since the historical account is necessarily written from a present perspective, it is always concerned with the meaning of historical reality for us, now [...]. To the extent that the concern with present meaning is dominant, the historian becomes not simply a historian but social or intellectual critic as well.¹⁸

This vision of the historian's work challenges the old and misleading narrative/analysis distinction. In any historical or theoretical explanatory account, explanation presupposes recounting – which is to say that explanation presupposes a presentation of narrative elements¹⁹. Even John Lewis Gaddis, who is by no means a postmodern historian, acknowledges that whenever one tries to explain phenomena which cannot be replicated, one cannot but rely in one way or another upon acts of imagination.²⁰

In opposition to McGill's contentions, Waltz assumes that theory can be distinguished from fact²¹. On this point, we can find a contradiction, or at least conceptual confusion in Waltz's theory. A close look at *Theory of International Politics* reveals a contradiction which is never resolved, that of "abstraction" versus "reality"²². On page 80, Waltz insists that anarchy is an abstraction, that it is not a structure *per se*. Instead, it is a concept which helps to clarify a complex situation :

Both the structure and the parts are concepts, related to, but not identical with, real agencies and agencies. We discern structure in the "concrete reality" of social events

18. Allan McGill, "Recounting the Past : "Description", Explanation, and Narrative in Historiography", *The American Historical Review*, vol. 94, no. 3, June 1989, p. 647.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 651.

20. John Lewis Gaddis, "History, Theory, and Common Ground", *International Security*, vol. 22, no. 1, summer 1997, p. 78.

21. Kenneth Waltz, "Realist Thought and Neorealist Theory", *Journal of International Affairs*, vol 44, no. 1, Spring/Summer, 1990, p. 21-37.

22. I would like to thank Professor Dan O'Meara for bringing this crucial and controversial point to my attention.

only by virtue of having first established structure by abstraction from “concrete reality” (Fortes 1949, p. 56). Since structure is an abstraction, it cannot be defined by enumerating material characteristics of the system. [...] For realists, anarchy is a general condition rather than a distinct structure.²³”

The abstract notion of anarchy comes from the co-action of like units, as he states on page 90. But elsewhere, the structure appears to be more than an explanatory concept which helps to describe reality, for it *is* a reality: “Just as economist define markets in terms of firms, so I define international-political structures in terms of states. [...] So long as the major states are the major actors, the structure of international politics is defined in terms of them. [...] States are the units whose interactions form the structure of international-political system²⁴.”

This helps us to understand the main problem with Waltz’s theory, namely the difficulty in determining whether it is an abstract one or if it applies to the real world. If, as he states, “structure and the parts are concepts, related to, but not identical with, real agents and agencies”, then how can he possibly apply his methodology, which entails subjecting hypotheses “to experimental or observational tests” and devising “a number of distinct and demanding tests”²⁵? On the contrary, if it is assumed that the structure (anarchy) and units (states) of international relations are not merely abstract concepts but concrete realities, the only facts which can be relied on to test or falsify the theory are historical facts, which brings us back to our initial concern with historical facts as objective ones. There are only two ways to falsify a theory: 1) By an empirical demonstration to refute the theory or 2) By proving that the initial claims were wrong. We thus have to establish the necessary conditions for the falsification of the theory. If it is impossible (which Waltz assumes to be the case now, although he leaves the door open to another “better” theory), it implies that there are no alternative explanations of the true essence of state behavior.

It seems to me, therefore, that Waltz’s neorealism is not so much a theory as a dogma, for it purports to explain *everything*: because of the structure, it is possible to find evidence to support the theory and explain why a state expands, bandwagons, balances with another state and so on. Historian Paul W. Schroeder, who is thoroughly familiar with the foundations of Waltz’s theory and has written many articles on the subject, decided to give up the dialogue with proponents of neorealism when he reached the conclusion that authors such as Colin and Miriam Elman could employ neorealist theory to justify any tenable position in any historical case:

[Colin and Miriam Elman’s] whole case that history fits the neo-realist paradigm falls to the ground because they fail to see that it is their neo-realist assumptions, as they understand and use them, which simply put all state action in the state system into a neo-realist mold and neo-realist boxes *by* definition. [...] I attacked

23. Kenneth Waltz, *Theories of international Politics*, Reading, Massachusetts, Addison-Wesley, 1979, p. 80.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 94-95.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

Waltzian neo-realism because I believed that it was a coherent, influential theory which had something definite to say about history, which could be falsified and should be. [...] Hence I will devote myself from now on to the history of international politics, and leave neo-realists to deal with the results, or ignore them, as they see fit²⁶.

Even if we limit ourselves to Waltz's own conception of his theory as one which can be tested, we are still confronted with the use of history as a database for the elaboration and testing of theories, which necessarily entails, among other problems, the bias of selection. The issue of this bias of selection is carefully avoided by neorealist theory, for when one turns to positive social science, there is an implicit expectation that "the phenomena of human subjectivity [...] do not offer particular barriers to the treatment of social conduct as an 'object' on a par with objects in the natural world."²⁷ We have to bear in mind that the selection process poses problems not only with respect to primary sources (which sources to choose, which to focus on, and why), but especially in relation to monographs. As Ian S. Lustick has remarked, the work of historians "cannot legitimately be treated by others as an unproblematic background narrative from which theoretically neutral data can be elicited for the framing of problems and the testing of theories."²⁸ The process of selecting the sources that will corroborate Neorealist theory is in and of itself a subjective and normative one. As Lustick further observes, "searching for facts for an historically minded social scientist may mean searching high and low for monographic work containing the kinds of information and narratives needed and organized in roughly the necessary ways, or even constructing the work oneself, with one's own theory as a guide for data collection."²⁹

Furthermore, I would venture to say that, insofar as they refer more often than not to monographs, the Neorealists get into an obvious hermeneutic circle where the data they refer to is not empirical data as such, but more specifically data included in a specialized monograph or article – so much for the experimental or observational test required by Waltz's testing of theory! We can even go further and analyze the data and facts themselves. Indeed, if one were to take a postmodern perspective, the hermeneutic circle in which Neorealists are caught could not be avoided, even if Neorealist work were limited to the use of primary sources. Of course, one can rely on primary sources alone, rather than on monographs, to prove the validity of neorealist theory in explaining World War I. But would the process be more objective and scientific, and respond correctly to the positivist criteria set forth by Waltz? Antoine Prost offers a clear answer to this: even if you have an authentic document, the document in itself

26. Paul W. Schroeder, "Correspondance: History vs Neo-realism : A Second Look – The Author Replies", *International Security*, vol. 20, no.1, Summer 1995, p. 194-195.

27. Anthony Giddens, quoted in Richard K. Ashley, "The Poverty of Neorealism", in *Neorealism and Its Critics*, Robert O. Keohane (ed.), New York, Columbia University Press, p. 281.

28. Ian S. Lustick, "History, Historiography, and Political Science : Multiple Historical Records and the Problem of Selection Bias", *American Political Science Review*, vol. 90, no. 3, September 1996, p. 605.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 607.

does not have a precise meaning. As such, there are no historical facts *by nature* as there are chemical or demographical facts³⁰. As Paul Schroeder correctly observes, political scientists misuse or even abuse history when they take historical facts as formal facts and understand them as behavior instead of purposive agency³¹.

But let me be clear : this is *not* to say that any quantitative work done by an historian is automatically flawed and useless. The objectivity question is in no sense a methodological issue:

To say of a work of history that it is or isn't objective is to make an empty observation ; to say something neither interesting nor useful. If two historians, one a "nihilist" relativist and the other a dyed-in-the-wool objectivist, set out to produce a history of the Civil War [...] there is nothing about their "relativism" or "objectivism" per se that would lead them to do their research differently, frame their narrative or analysis differently, or, indeed, prevent their writing identical accounts.³²

To reconsider the objectivity of historical data and primary sources by shedding light on the precise role of the historian puts in question the very *epistemological* foundation of Neorealist theory : there would be no historical facts detached from a theory, a mental scheme or from a subjective narrative. For historians, events are not intrinsically significant. It is the historian who renders them meaningful by inscribing them in an historical narrative within his or her particular interpretive framework. Historian Hayden White goes so far as to say that the distinction between historical stories and fictional stories is a question of content, not a question of form³³. Taking into account these theoretical considerations, which have been at the centre of history's theory of knowledge for at least the last twenty years, raises serious doubts about the supposed "objectivity" of the done in the field of International Relations (especially neorealist work), thus confronting the nature of their work, their ways of thinking about how it is produced and the claims they make for it³⁴.

Another problem with the Neorealist use of history is the way in which recurrent patterns of state behaviour are drawn upon in support of the systemic theory. These recurrent patterns are allegedly proven in the history of nations and international

30. Antoine Prost, *op. cit.*, p. 60 and 68.

31. Paul Schroeder, "History and International Relations Theory: Not Use or Abuse, but Fit or Misfit", *International Security*, vol. 22, no. 1, Summer 1997, p. 71.

32. Peter Novick, "My Correct Views on Everything", *American Historical Review*, June 1991, p. 699-700.

33. Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*, Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1987, p. 27.

34. Peter Novick, *loc. cit.* We should note that there are still many historians, like Oscar Handlin, who find that this turn of the discipline is misleading. Others, like David Hollinger, try to find a middle ground. For an overview of the debate among historians on the objectivity question, see Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988. A special edition of *The American Historical Review* also provides a worthwhile account of the debate. See, "AHR Forum: Peter Novick's That Noble Dream: The Objectivity Question and the Future of the Historical Profession", Vol. 96, No. 3. June, 1991.

affairs. Waltz presupposes (as do many in the humanities and social sciences) that the nation-state's territorial representation of space is the horizon of its own understanding, but some historians such as Thomas Bender are quick to point out that there are serious debates among historians about the history of nations and international affairs. I believe he rightly emphasizes the degree to which, as he puts it, "the professional practice of history writing and teaching flourished as the handmaiden of nation-making [...]. Only recently and because of the uncertain status of the nation-state has it been recognized that history as a professional discipline is part of its own substantive narrative [...]."³⁵ Taking the nation-state as the basic "natural" unity of analysis is thus a specific political and normative commitment to a certain view of the world.

Recent cultural and political developments related to globalization have shaken the belief in the State as an objective and neutral framework and have put in question the role attributed to the State and to national histories as the mainspring of identity formation and socio-economic activities. These reflections stem from the belief that a nation is grounded in an agreement to find significant unity in diverse personal memories and public historical narrative; it is, as Benedict Anderson has so famously described it, the imagined community *par excellence*. Added to this reflection upon the development of nationalism and the nation-state, some historians, notably Michael J. Hogan, have recently expressed concern about the future of diplomatic history. In a world that is growing more and more interconnected, information and technology, more than territory, form the bases of the economic and the political. To the same extent and in the same way that a history of the Nation-state grounded on territoriality can be challenged on these grounds, so too can the empirical bases of Neorealism founded on national or international narratives.

Casting doubt on the role of the nation is not a novel historical phenomenon; we find examples in contemporary history in the nineteenth century writings of Renan and Acton. History is created in an imaginative space that can be national, transnational or relational, that is global. The current process of globalization is precipitating a rethinking of the spatial frame of reference of historical studies. The historian's delineation of the spatio-temporal framework already betrays a normative and subjective perspective: whether one chooses to look at history from the vantage point of the short or the long term is a significant decision, as is whether we confine ourselves to studying a war itself or the long process leading up to it. Thus, for historians, periodization, causality, and the delineation of the State as an historical space bind the self to the space created. This is no mere technicality as it contributes to creating an identity. Similarly, in the field of International Relations, dominated by Neorealist theory, treating the State as a basic ontological unity contributes to maintaining the character of the discipline and offers normative approval to one type of history, mainly diplomatic history, to the detriment of others. Among the historical approaches which Neorealism tacitly considers inferior,

35. Thomas Bender, "Historians, the Nation, and the Plenitude of Narratives", in *Rethinking American History In A Global Age*, Thomas Bender (ed.), Berkeley, University of California Press, 2002, p. 7.

I am thinking in particular of the field of Cultural Studies which has rapidly expanded in the United States in recent years³⁶. However, the rejection of certain approaches to history implicit in the Neorealist perspective on International Relations goes beyond mere methodological and instrumental considerations; it has significant political implications.

The Issue of Normative Identity in the Field of IR

In theoretical or meta-theoretical discussions, it is important to consider the ways in which history is used, since it bears on how we address the question of what constitutes sound theory. I noted earlier that Neorealists constitute the dominant theoretical community in the discipline of IR. To give you an idea of the extent of their dominance, consider the study of four US and four European International Relations journals conducted by Ole Weaver between 1970 and 1995. It was a convincing demonstration of American hegemony in the field. In US journals, nearly 80 per cent of authors are American, while in European journals American authors represent roughly 40 per cent³⁷. By establishing a classification system based on authors' theoretical allegiances, Weaver showed that approximately 70 per cent of the articles in US journals employed a theoretical framework that shared the basic assumptions of Neorealism³⁸. In European journals, the proportion drops to about 30 per cent³⁹. Moreover, in a 1985 study of International Relations articles, Kalevi Hosti showed that 74.1 per cent of references were to US authors⁴⁰. This confirms a specific US commitment to a Neorealist view of the world which is not apolitical at all. As Steve Smith mentions, "[This reality] skews the discipline toward the policy concerns of the US, and [...] ensures that the available theories for studying these concerns are theories that fit the US definition of proper social science."⁴¹ Thus, the US School of International Relations, namely that of Neorealism, rules the discipline and shape its legitimate/illegitimate boundaries.

Of course, this leads to a narrow conception of world politics, for Neorealism is not very helpful in explaining political phenomena beyond the framework of the state and cannot entertain historical ideas outside that framework. There is therefore a real possibility that a "myopic discipline of IR might contribute to the continued development of a civil society in the US that thinks, reflects, and analyzes complex international events through a very narrow set of theoretical lenses, when what is needed is [...] understanding cultural diversity and difference."⁴² The current dominant theoretical position rests on a limited conception of what constitutes international politics and is an impediment to

36. See, for example, Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease, *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 1993.

37. Ole Weaver, quoted in Steve Smith, "The Discipline of International Relations : Still an American Social Science?", *loc. cit.*, p. 395-396.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 396.

39. *Ibid.*

40. *Ibid.*, p. 393.

41. Steve Smith, "The United States and the Discipline of International Relations : 'Hegemonic Country, Hegemonic Discipline'", *International Studies Review*, vol. 4, no. 2, Summer 2002, p. 80.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 68.

building a better understanding of other cultures and discourses. In short, Neorealist theory is a historically and culturally specific approach that takes for granted the universality of its regime of truth. It seems clear, however, that simply pointing to historical recurrences among nations is not sufficient to demonstrate this universality — especially in light of the epistemological and theoretical problems neglected by Neorealists in their use of history.

Conclusion

To sum up, the particular use made of history in the framework of Neorealism indicates to what extent mainstream theorists of IR remain largely oblivious of ongoing developments in the discipline of History. In Political Science, this lack of awareness contributes to perpetuating the hegemony of the Neorealist approach in IR and to consolidating the perceived character of the field. Mainstream International Relations in Political Science is ultimately an ethnocentric perspective marked by a particular conception of the world. The reign of so-called scientific approaches calls for setting up criteria for judging the validity of knowledge. However, it is interesting to note that in History, as in Political Science, the legitimacy of the knowledge produced by intellectuals is being questioned. In both disciplines, there is some reluctance to distance oneself from Positivism for fear that it will lead to complete relativism — a development associated in the minds of some scholars with the rise of postmodernism in the last two decades. This sense of uneasiness clearly indicates the need for debates in both disciplines about theory, epistemology and methodology.

It is increasingly clear that historians have become reluctant to adopt an inflexible position on both the ontological and epistemological assumptions surrounding the discipline. After all, for historians as well as political scientists and specialists in International Relations, positivism and empiricism can become unexamined methodological and theoretical premises, the more insidious for being implicit rather than formally expounded and defended. Yet, we should consider theory as practice, since our choices have a normative and political value which allows us to divide the important from the incidental. As a result, whereas once historians only studied the history of great men and Nation-States, today we accept that women's history and African American history are just as important. It is unfortunate that these so called theoretical debates are all too often neglected on the pretext that they have nothing to do with the "real world" studied in both history and political science. But what people see as the "real world" implicitly has a lot to do with the epistemological, methodological and ontological stance they take. It is true for International Relations, but it is also true elsewhere.

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