

# Linkage - Don't Blame Theory!

Written by A.C. McKeil

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A.C. MCKEIL, JUN 3 2012

- Christian Reus-Smit, 'International Relations, Irrelevant? Don't Blame Theory' *Millennium Journal of International Studies*, vol. 40 (2012), pp.525-540.

Christian Reus-Smit correctly diagnoses IR's disciplinary ailment in *Millennium's* latest special issue, 'Out of the Ivory Tower: Weaving the Theories and Practice of International Relations.' According to Reus-Smit, the measurement of IR's research impact is actually under-researched and the degree of theorizing in IR is not the correct source for discontent over IR's social and public relevance.

The problem as Reus-Smit sees it is caused by IR's lack of interest in politics "as a distinct form of social action," the loss of IR's early "practical intent," the problematic "bifurcation of explanatory and normative inquiry" and most crucially for this reader, "the virtual extinction of the figure of the inter-national public intellectual." From this assessment, an anti-theoretical turn to pragmatist problem-solving research is not the correct prescription for IR's relevance anxiety.

Theory and methodology have an important function for determining what questions are important and relevant. Abandoning theory would actually give the IR community less ability to be relevant. From a thoughtful and scholarly reappraisal of IR's early thinkers such as E.H. Carr, the problem in sum is IR's loss of identity and purpose. Underlying calls for more relevance and less theory is the malaise of a lack shared core questions of social import and a need for a return to IR's founding function of engagement with the life of the public.

This article provides a healthy dose of critical points questioning the purpose of IR and whether the scholarly community is fulfilling its role in the life of international society. Points worth reflecting upon by any aspiring or accomplished scholar.

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**Aaron McKeil** is a Commissioning Editor for *e-IR*.

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