Student Feature - A Brief Introduction to the Study of International Relations

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This feature is for the new student interested in becoming familiar with the study of International Relations (IR) and also for students struggling to grasp how IR fits together as a whole. The aim is to show how the different parts of IR fit together as an intellectual whole in such a way that it enables the student's intellectual participation in the study. As an intellectual whole, IR is based in questions. One of my best teachers once suggested that we academic students of IR might do well to think of ourselves as 'children of Vattel'. How we think about IR finds an intellectual wellspring in Emmerich de Vattel's questions about the law of nations. It comes out of his distinction between 'necessary' and 'voluntary' laws, those that all nations abide, necessarily, involuntarily, vs. those that nations construct and agreed to.[1] In this distinction we find an early expression of the kinds of questions we as academic IR students ask: What goes on amongst nations necessarily, and what does not? What goes on amongst nations voluntarily, and what cannot? Today we study more than nations, but it is these kinds of questions that bring parts of our intellectual study together – what, why, and how we study IR. For example, it is a finding of our study that wars have not occurred amongst democratic nations. Is this necessarily so? And, can a democratic peace be made amongst all nations? It is these kinds of questions about what does, can, and cannot go on in international relations that give academic students of IR an intellectual footing. The student thinks about IR in an academic way by posing these kinds of questions. IR is a specialist study. Like in Medicine or Law, each student finds their special expertise, and the student reader should begin to find what their expertise might be, via the IR questions they are concerned with. In this respect, some of this brief general introduction is an exploration of how the specialist parts form a whole, but it is also about how the whole forms the parts.

What? – International Systems

Units and Systems

What is it that we study in IR? What are Vattel's questions about? Of all the things in the cosmos, from the physics of black holes and quantum mechanics, to art, language, and music, and the biological diversity of species, students of IR study international systems. When I say international systems, I mean more than modern nation-states. I mean systems of political entities broadly speaking, those that are made up of groups of people, with some durability, like clans, city-states, empires, or the nation-states of modern times. International Relations is about the study of the *relations* of these collective political "units". When two or more political units relate and interact on a regular basis, they form a system, a system being the context of regular relations amongst multiple units. This is what I mean by an "international system". I use the term because it has some precedence, and it also finds a balance, as a term, between being too abstract and too specific.[2] The term "international" was coined by Jeremy Bentham, in modern times, but for the majority of human history, humankind has been organized into bands and clans. This form of political organization is not "national" but it is about multiple political units that interact on a regular basis, through trade, diplomacy, war, etc. This is part of what IR is about too. Many modern indigenous peoples, a significant portion of humankind, in every continent, are still organized in this form and conduct regular relations, forming systems, amongst one another, as well as with the new nation-states.

In ancient history, with agriculture and other inventions, humankind built up different kinds of units with larger

Student Feature - A Brief Introduction to the Study of International Relations
Written by A.C. McKeil

numbers, the first of which were the city-states of the Mesopotamian Fertile Crescent. After these emerged empires. The first of these imperial units was Sargon's Akkadian empire, that conquered the city-states of Mesopotamia. An empire, properly speaking, is one unit dominating one or more other units. In international systems, empires are the predators, preying upon weaker units. After the organization of bands and clans, empires are the second most common form of political organization in human history, dominating international systems from remote history up to contemporary times. Modern nation-states can be empires too, like the empire of France that expanded through imperialism dominating other units. In addition to these units, there are also a variety of non-state units that are not "peoples", but which have a life in the system. These are the small fish that still play a role in the system. The Oracle at Delphi, for example, in ancient Greece, had influential relations with all the Greek city-states. In Medieval times, the Knights Templar, for example, were not a people, but formed something of a political unit nonetheless, having relations with kingdoms and empires. In modern times, these small fish have taken on various bureaucratic forms. One form is the Non-Governmental Organization (NGO), like Amnesty International or Human Rights Watch. Another form of non-state unit is the International Organization (IO), like the secretariat and organs of the United Nations, the European Union, and older Organization of American States. These units are not states or peoples, but they are political units, with political agendas and political relations. Multinational corporations (MNCs) are included in the category of non-state units as well.

Different kinds of units have different internal forms, different kinds of internal politics, but, as students of IR, we are interested in the forms in which the units *relate* to one another, the pattern of their regular *relations*. This pattern or form of relations is often referred to as the structure of the system. Martin Wight gave us two categories of systemic forms: sovereign and suzerain.[3] We can also use the language of anarchy and hierarchy that Kenneth Waltz used to describe these categories. Sovereign systems are relations of multiple units that recognize none of the others as superior. In this abstract sense, they have no ruler, no *arkhon,* they are, categorically speaking, anarchical. The city-state system of ancient Greece is the usual example of this kind of systemic structure. Each city-state defended its independence. Suzerain systems by contrast have some units, often one imperial unit, that rules the system as a recognized superior to the rest. Suzerain systems have a hierarchical structure. The tributary system of China is often given as an example of a suzerain system, where imperial China was thought to stand at the centre of the cosmos, with a divine mandate, issuing out in circles of civilization. In historical experience, systems have almost always been a mixed type, where some units wish to be suzerains, whilst others resist, and relations have a complex form.

In sum, there are several kinds of political units: clans, city-states, empires, nation-states, and variety of non-state units. These units, through regular relations of trade, warfare, and diplomacy, form international systems that have, categorically speaking, two kinds of forms: anarchic and hierarchic. In practice, political units are almost always a complex mix of the two. This, in general, is much of *what* international relations are.

Historical Systems

Examples of past systems give us a stock of evidence to think about our questions of what does, can, and cannot go on in international relations.[4] I will provide brief illustrative examples here to cement the idea of an international system, with different kinds of structural forms, and a number of kinds of units. Most of human history, when the majority of humankind was organized as bands and clans, is prehistory, unrecorded. Its record is mostly one of the vast migrations in remote human history. The recorded history of the ancient and classical world has many international systems. The general trend, ever since the invention of the wheel and the sail, has been towards larger more expansive systems, where technology enables regular relations amongst units at ever-greater distances.

The Mesopotamian system connected, later, with ancient Egypt, altogether forming the basis of the Amarna System, stretching from Egypt and its western and southern frontiers, into relations with the Babylon, Hatti, and Asyria.[5] This system was neither entirely hierarchical nor anarchical, and was more of a "secondary" system of systems, where each empire dominated their realm but formed relations amongst one another as well. In their diplomatic correspondence, Egyptian Pharaohs, for instance, were referred to as 'brother', by their imperial counterparts, but the Pharoahs recognized no equal, referring to everyone else as 'sons'. The structure of the system was not clearly settled amongst all parties.

Student Feature - A Brief Introduction to the Study of International Relations

Written by A.C. McKeil

Periods of the tributary system of China illustrate a contrasting case. China itself formed an international system, particularly in its Warring States Period of history. Yet, its unification, especially in the Han Dynasty, began the development of a hierarchical system in the region. China, as an imperially unified unit, came to occupy the top/center of the hierarchical order, in a larger Confucian civilization that tributary states were members of.

The Mayan city-states system is a fascinating example, because so little is known of it. The Mayan city-states appear to have been independent and recognizing no superior, although some were more militarily and economically powerful, with evidence of hegemonic powers. These city-states engaged in trade, diplomacy, and warfare. An interesting practice of this system is that when an alliance was made between two city-states, it is said that a road was built between them, likely of symbolic and practical military and economic importance.

The early modern system of European empires was the first worldwide system, eventually connecting all the rest. Its structure was hierarchical. Amongst the European states no superior was recognized, but they mutually recognized their superiority over the rest. Attempts to dominate Europe by the Hapsburgs, Napoleon, and Germany were unsuccessful. Chairman Mao is said to have called World War I and II, the 'European civil wars'. This is not entirely inaccurate if we recognize the imperial pact of the Europeans against the world. The decline of European empire, and process of decolonization in the 20th century, globalized this society of sovereign nation-states.[6]

The Contemporary System

The modern world preoccupies most of IR studies because this is the period of most relevance to today. Like all past systems, relations amongst the contemporary units are primarily through trade, diplomacy, and warfare, but today these take on modern contemporary forms of capitalism, the use of embassies, and modern industrial warfare. International diplomats refer to this contemporary system of modern nation-state as the international community, and international lawyers use the language of international society to convey a sense of the contemporary system as an "internationalist" collaboration of states. This period has seen collaborative experiments in International Organization, with the League of Nations and United Nations. This period has also witnessed the rise of non-state units, with thousands of NGOs and IO's with worldwide mandates, like the World Trade Organization, World Health Organization, and International Labour Organization. The collaboration of IOs, NGOs, MNCs, and the international community has come to be referred as "global governance". This is not global government, but govern*ance,* the attempt to govern and perform the functions a government would provide, without the formal structure of a government.

The structure of this contemporary system, the extent to which IOs and NGOs matter, and which relations are of most significance, is a question of contention for students of IR. In my reading, which I think is reasonable if inevitably contentious, the contemporary system of today is a mixed highly complex system. The modern nation-states claim sovereign independence, territorial and political, and deny it to other units. Yet, as Vattel once pointed out, some states are giants and others dwarfs. So there is also a strata of "great powers", who in legal principle are equals, but by all practical purposes are not. Ideally, these great powers have the role of using their power to maintain the system, whilst watching one another with unease and posture. Beyond these great powers, one state has risen above all others. The modern nation-states recognize a *hegemon* (a leader), the nation-state with ability, will, and power, to lead the system of nation-states.[7] The contemporary system of states has seen American ascendance, with its leadership in the creation of international organizations. A major question for students of IR today is where this system is headed, particularly with the rise of China. Is it to be a world of regions, a reformed United Nations, or something else?

Future and Hypothetical Systems

The what of the study of IR is not only past and present international systems. As Iver B. Neumann has pointed out, the future and hypothetical system are also relevant, if not equally relevant, to the questions of what can and cannot go on in international relations.[8] Vattel's questions extend into the future. Martin Wight, who developed the idea of systems of states, suggested '[i]t is one of the charms of international relations that more than any of the social sciences it approximates to science fiction.'[9] Think carefully, because the future has not happened, it does not

provide the same kind of evidence. It is a thought experiment about what can and cannot happen. We might ask what necessarily must be and must not be for humankind to form a planetary polity? What kind of system can and cannot be formed by humankind when we become inter-planetary, with colonies on Mars? Beyond that? Vattel's questions extend.

Why? – International Problems

What Ken Booth calls 'big and important problems' are first and foremost what brings most students to IR.[10] Every student will have a real-world issue or concern that she brings to the study, and which she can make her specialty. It is these personally recognized public problems that make the intellectual world of IR visible to the student. It is from these problems that the questions spring. Why are these problems going on? Must they? Or, can they be otherwise? Something I have always felt is close to the spirit of studying IR, is the drive to "make the world a better place", to address the big and important problems of the world, to throw ourselves at their betterment. The study of IR is first and foremost a study, an intellectual activity, with an intellectual world, but awareness of it and interest in it issues from real-world problems. In this section, I want to introduce five of the most debated world problems in the study of IR, to convey a sense of its animating world politics. However, I advise the student to bear in mind that the problems I introduce are not the only problems, and that the problems the student brings to the study are relevant to the study and form the basis of her contribution to it. International problems are the reason why we get to the international questions.

Identity Troubles

Identity is in the realm of what can be, of what is humanly created and constructed; it is about who we are, and what we identify with, what we admire and have affinity to. When I introduced "what" IR is about, I suggested it is about the *relations* of political units. What I want to introduce here, is how these relations are necessarily identity-laden, which creates the identity troubles of domination, exclusion, and conflict. The problems of gender, race, class are identity troubles about the identity-laden gendered, racialized, and class based relations of political units in world politics. Here we encounter the problems of patriarchy, racism, and class exploitation.

Patriarchy is an international problem. It is a relation of domination between genders. Women are systematically excluded from roles of power in world politics. In dominated roles, the freedoms and liberties of women are denied, the safety and wellbeing of women is abused, and the labour of women is exploited on a global scale. Cynthia Enloe, one of the pioneer scholars of Feminist IR, gave us a simple and helpful question to address these problems: 'Where are the women?'[11] The major interactions of nations, trade, diplomacy, and war, are all gendered and patriarchy dominated. Women are excluded from roles of power in these activities, but modern trade, war, and diplomacy could not be conducted without women. The war and diplomacy between nations is coded in gendered terms, where aggressive nations are "masculine" and peaceable nations are gendered "feminine". In international trade, the "domestic" labour of women is exploited and unaccounted for, but vital for its possibility. Women are everywhere in war, assigned the power-weak role of victims. In war, soldiering is understood as a masculine activity, and warfare as such cannot be conducted without gender roles. Patriarchy, masculine domination, is a problem with international relations, because all the relations are made possible by gendered identities.

Racism is an international problem. White supremacy, the modern source of racism, ordered the hierarchical system of European domination of the globe for hundreds of years. The legacies of racist empire, legacies of economic inequity and dependence, military preponderance and diplomatic position in international organizations, were made possible by racialized relations. Imputed relations of superiority and inferiority still shape the practice of international relations today. Lines across the world political map are not only those of sovereign nation-states, there are also imputed colour lines, constituting global race relations, connected to legacies of domination, persistent exclusions and inequities, prejudice and conflicts, in every region and between them.

Class is an international problem too. The global system of capitalism enables and shapes the system of nation-states itself, raising great powers, and driving others into decline. As an identity trouble, the division of humankind into classes, owners and workers, rich and poor, upper class and lower class, elites and non-elites, creates stratified

Student Feature - A Brief Introduction to the Study of International Relations
Written by A.C. McKeil

relations within, across, and between nations. Labour relations, relations between owners and workers, are international because the ownership and trade of the capital goods and services made by workers is international. These stratified relations create international problems of exploitation, poverty, and inequality, systematically undermining the health, education, and wellbeing of workers, corrupting the social fabric of societies, leading to class conflict, and contributing to revolution and war.

War and Revolution

War and revolution are interactions of collective violence. They are the big "crash and bang" problems of IR, creating vast amounts of devastation and misery. War today is a constant activity, feeling more and more like a fact of life, but it is a problem that could potentially destroy all human civilization on earth and produce the near extinction of the human species. One thermonuclear weapon can incinerate all of France, or Texas. The great powers have thousands of these weapons built for a global thermonuclear war. Revolutions are a great problem of violence too. They spring up from the bottom of nations and boil over into international relations as every revolution creates a counter-revolution staged from and by foreign nations. War and revolution are ancient problems. They spread across international systems like fire, drawing everyone into the collective violence. Must they persist? What are their causes? Do they emerge from the violent nature of human beings? Or perhaps they follow from unjust and ideologically aggressive governments? If there were a world government with a world army capable of protecting all, wars, formally speaking, could be put into history; but civil war (war within one state) and revolution, these would not be ruled out.[12] Such is war and revolution as international problems of violent interaction.

But war and revolution are *relations* too. When we IR students study them we are not only interested in the war capacities, strategies and tactics of warring states. We are interested in them as relations too. The state of war can exist without actual violence taking place, as a state of the relations amongst the nations. A declaration of war or revolution, or the suspicion of the intent to war or revolution, creates the state of war or revolution before the fighting breaks out. The big international problems of war and revolution, apparently as old as humankind, are states of relations amongst humankind that the student of IR hopes to help humankind avoid, in a search for the state of peace.

The intellectuals of the Warring States period of ancient China developed a loose consensus that political unity was the solution to the state of war, the creation of one state out of many. During the Enlightenment period of Europe, the philosopher Immanuel Kant proposed a different solution, in his essay *Perpetual Peace.* Kant thought that if all states were republics, there would be no cause for war. Today, the idea has been developed into what we call 'Democratic Peace Theory', the empirically supported belief that a state of peace exists between democracies. In practice, this state of peace amongst democracies is a going social fact, but the problem of war between democracies and non-democracies has still not been solved.

Foreign Policy and Security

Foreign policy and security are practical international problems. They are not the same problem, but they are related, as the question of how to secure the national interest is a foreign policy decision. It is the problem of deciding on a policy, and knowing policies other states will decide on. What economic, diplomatic, and security policy is in the best interest of the state? What foreign policy needs to be taken in response to the changing policies of foreign powers? These are practical problems. Foreign policy is, in a manner of looking at it, the problem of deciding on what relations one state will have and seek with other state and non-state actors. Creating relations of alliance, war, or economic integration is the foreign policy realm. Creating these relations in a way that works together and benefits the national interest is the practical problem. Formulating a working policy, in a system of multiple simultaneously shifting policies, is difficult and can lead to disasters. The policy of "appeasement", for instance, by Britain towards Fascist Germany, granted minor concessions for the interest of peace, but in the end, did not achieve its goal. Was the policy misguided? Could a different set of policies avoided the Second World War? Will a set of policies going on today lead to a third world war?

International security is the search for safety by states. Preventing the ability of state and non-state actors to harm or

Student Feature - A Brief Introduction to the Study of International Relations
Written by A.C. McKeil

jeopardize the safety of the state is the problematic of international security. The technologies of security are numerous and increasingly elaborate, ranging from walls to cyber armies and thermonuclear arsenals. The problem is partly one of developing and acquiring these technologies, but the practical problem of security is more about the question of where to direct these technologies – which people, things, and states to direct the security apparatus towards. Not every thing can be secured from every thing. One of the best ideas to be produced from the study of IR, that every student should know, is the idea of the "security dilemma". This is the idea that when states adopt a policy and acquire technologies to increase their security, this makes other states insecure so bringing these other state to respond by increasing their security, and so back and forth, secure and insecure. If, for example, one state acquires a nuclear weapon, the other will too. Stuck in the dilemma, can they ever be safe? This question of direction also makes the security problem a political problem. What is and is not an issue of national security, who and what is put into a security relation with the state, is a highly political and complicated problem. Much of this political problem concerns the extent to which security impinges on other goods – democratic liberties, for instance. It also intersects with identity troubles, where the security apparatus is directed towards patriarchal, racist, and class based domination and exclusion. Who and what is safe from who in this game of national security?

International Organization

Because there is no world government, or world empire, international organizations (IOs) have been established by states to help address international problems. But, because these organizations have struggled to address those problems, they have themselves become problems. Understanding the many organs and offices of IOs, becoming familiar with their web of acronyms, starting with the United Nations (UN), is a basic point of knowledge for the student of IR. The main questions raised by students of IOs are about the possible and necessary reform of IOs, and the precise nature of their social relations; whether they are sites of social forces, or whether they are social forms in their own right. Are IOs pawns of the great powers? Or, with time, luck, and leadership, can the pawns become queens?

Many of the early IOs were established to manage menial international problems, basic infrastructures of international trade and communication. The Central Commission for Navigation on the Rhine (CCNR), for instance, is the oldest established in 1815 to maintain the navigability of the Rhine for trade. The second and third oldest, are the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the Universal Postal Union (UPU), established to manage lines of international communication. Today, there are thousands of such organizations successfully managing vast amounts of the daily business of international regulations and activity that most of us take for granted. Yet, IOs have been less effective with managing the big and important problems, war and peace, development and climate change, in particular. After the First World War, the League of Nations, the predecessor to the UN, was established for the purposes of maintaining world peace. The academic study of IR, by the way, was established at this same time with the aim of training people able to run this organization, people committed to peace, people who embodied the internationalist spirit of making the world a better place, and people with the linguistic and worldly knowledge needed to do so. To contribute to the spirit and project of peace, the League was provided offices in Geneva, Switzerland, longtime neutral territory unlikely to itself become the site of warfare. The main organs of the League were the General Assembly of all member states, the Council composed of great powers acting as quasi-executive board, and the Secretariat. The Secretariat was a civil service body of experts and professionals tasked with administering and regulating a vast number of international functions, international economics and finance, disarmament, travel, minority rights, the mandates, health, amongst international intellectual cooperation, amongst other matters. The big and important function of the League was world peace. Collective security was the main mechanism by which world peace was to be maintained by the League. This was the principle that the insecurity of any member state, represented the insecurity of the international community as a whole. As such, security was meant to be collectively pursued and enforced. Yet, the failure of the US to participate, and the withdrawals and deviations of Germany, Japan, and Italy effectively paralyzed the League. Was the League necessarily doomed to failure? Could it have worked in other circumstances? Did it need another design? Were its participants not up to the task?

In 1945, the United Nations was established to replace the failure of the League. It mirrored the League in many ways, but was made with amendments. With a gesture towards US participation, the UN was given offices in New York. The Council received additional authority when reformed as the Security Council, becoming specially tasked

with maintaining peace and security. This effectively abandoned the mechanism of collective security for something closer to a concert of great powers, where the great powers need to work together to maintain peace for the system in general. The failure of this new mechanism was that the great powers were oftentimes at loggerheads, particularly during the Cold War, thus sidelining international organization again. The United Nations organs have also performed poorly on the additional agenda items of development and climate change. Although the goals have been identified through the UN with the UN Global Goals for Sustainable Development, these goals are going unmet because the member states have not carried them through. In many respects, international organization cannot achieve its functions if the international community does not allow it to do so. Thus the problem of international organization, the problem of making it effective in addressing big and important international problems, again, returns to the questions: Is it doomed to failure? Can it work under different circumstances? Can reform of the United Nations amend its limitations?

International Political Theory

The last international problem I want to suggest concerns what we can think of as ethics and justice in international life. The problem has two ways in which it arises. The first is unjust and unethical international actions, be it a war or a foreign policy, for instance. Many of the actions of states, and states in particular, are unjust. They have a moral affront. War crimes, and crimes against humanity have codified the most atrocious kinds of unjust state actions, but the great powers, the US, Russia, and China, for instance, are powerful enough to avoid the law on these matters. The limits of formal international law, however, does not exempt them from the moral charges of ethical and just conduct. There are just and unjust wars.[13] Consider the 2003 invasion of Iraq. The US and coalition forces acted on flimsy intelligence, with unfeasible goals, and in contradiction of international law. Was the invasion ethical? Was it morally justifiable? A clearer example is the case of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. The international community did not intervene. Was this inaction justifiable? Was it ethical? Today we see the emerging norm of the "Responsibility to Protect", where the moral compulsion to intervene is becoming increasingly recognized, if not codified. Lastly, natural disasters also morally compel action and bring the international into perspective. Hurricanes, earthquakes, and droughts morally compel action by the international community to help.

The second way in which the problem of international ethics and justice arises, is in the injustices of the international system itself. The most discussed, by academics, is the problem of distributive justice. This is the issue of the injustice of a system that produces severe poverty for billions, and immense wealth for very few. How is this system justifiable? How can and how should the system be re-organized to produce a just distribution?[14] The problem goes further, once we begin to pose these questions of ethics and justice. If the international community is struggling to achieve its basic goals of peace and sustainable development, is the international system itself justifiable at all? If the division of humankind into multiple political units creates competing loyalties and moral conflicts between citizens and foreigners, is the organization of humankind into a system of multiple nations states justified?[15] Or, is it a matter of necessity? Political Theory, reaching back to Plato, is about the good state or society. But, International Political Theory, as a special IR problem, is about the good system of states. What is the image of a good international system? What would it look like? Would it even be international? Or, would it be a world polity? On what moral principles would a just system be based?

These moral problems, and all the kinds of international problems I have detailed above, bring the international system into focus, into our mind's attention. We often do not notice things until they stop working. You notice when your wifi fails, and you begin asking questions about it. In this way, when the international system fails, when the exclusions and oppressions of identity troubles become apparent, when war and revolution breaks out, when foreign policies become fiascos, where insecurity abounds, when international organization proves inept, and when international injustice grates our sense of right and wrong, we begin to ask Vattel's questions: What goes on amongst nations necessarily, and what does not? What goes on amongst nations voluntarily, and what cannot

How? – International Theory

How do we answer these questions? I want to suggest we students of IR build up international theories as responses to the questions raised by international problems. This is how we go about answering the questions. We approach

Student Feature - A Brief Introduction to the Study of International Relations
Written by A.C. McKeil

answers through theory. International theory, for the sake of answers, is made by abstracting international relations, by making the implicit relations explicit, and by turning the specific instance into a general statement. An "old hat" way of describing international theory is with the metaphor of lenses. Different theories construe the world in different ways and suggest different answers to our questions. We observe and participate in the same world, but make sense of it differently with different theories. I do not think international theories make sense of different sides of the same world without actual conflict between them. They do not compliment one another. The elusive quest for a single theory of IR is widely recognized as futile and misguided. Epistemology has also been a great red herring debate of IR, in my estimation. A suggestion has been made for theoretical 'integrative pluralism', meaning the combination of several theories, and parts of theories, to make sense of specific phenomena.[16] This only carves out new territory for conflict, because there are fundamental disagreements about Vattel's questions, disagreements about what does go on, what necessarily and unnecessarily goes on. These disagreements find their most pointed expression in international theory. Theory is about, I think, abstracting what things are, in response to problems. But, there is more than one way to make sense of the "what" of international relations, which suggests more than one, and at times conflicting answers to our problem based questions. I would suggest that what validates and invalidates rival answers is their pragmatic failures and successes in improving the problems they are built up in response to.[17]

Learning IR theory should not be like *a la carte* dining. Too many students pick this or the other theory off the menu, and don't look back. The best students take inspiration from the available theories, and learn how to cook for themselves. The point of learning theory is to learn to think theoretically about the personally recognized public international problems that concern you. To an extent, we all see the world differently, and to some extent, the world is also changing. Each student, to some extent, needs to be able to abstract the implicit world of international relations into explicit concepts and put them together into theories that make sense.[18]

There are traditions of thought, currents or categories, which different theories find their place in. Learning the theories and their general traditions helps inspire theoretically minded thinking about international problems. Because these theories conflict on some questions, in fundamental ways, they are not free floating. They form a web spun around different positions on how things are, necessarily and unnecessarily. What I want to convey here is that web of positions connected to different takes on the "what" and "why" of the study of IR.

International Realism

Those in the tradition of international realism claim an ancient pedigree, connected to its claim to a timeless insight. They find their point of origin in the 19th Century dynamic-foreign policy approach called *realpolitik,* but for its principles, they point towards far flung figures like Thucydides, who wrote of how 'the strong do what they can, and the weak suffer what they must', and Machiavelli, who advised the glory of the state over moral scruples of the prince, and Hobbes, who gave a grim depiction of the international system as the relations of gladiators. Thinking like an international realist finds the position that conflict and strife amongst warring states is endemic where there is no overarching leviathan to suppress it. The international realist emphasizes the problems of war, foreign policy, and security. This is because the international realist views international systems as realms of fear, uncertainty, and insecurity. For the international realist, what matters in the international system are the states, and the distribution or balance of power amongst them, because, as they see it, the strong will do what they can. Finding its origin in the practice of *realpolitik,* international realism was refined theoretically, most systematically by Waltz in neo-realist theory. This theory sees the international system as anarchic, where power shifts amongst the states. This is one way of seeing things, of construing the problems and system, one constellation of the why and what of IR. There has also been, for instance, a gesture towards "African realism" with the suggestion that realist power politics has a different and qualified form in a post-colonial African context.[19]

International Liberalism

Taking an opposing position, the tradition of international liberalism holds that is the wider political world around the states that matters most. International public opinion, international commerce, and international organization, all together, swamp the sovereigns in interdependencies and agreements. For the tradition of international liberalism, the little fish make a big difference *en masse*. As such, international organization, with all its functions of

Student Feature - A Brief Introduction to the Study of International Relations
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disarmament, international law, international commerce regulation, international intellectual cooperation, etc., is the most pressing international problem for the tradition of international liberalism. It is these things that brings the world together, makes war less desirable and less desired, making a better world possible. Many see Kant's*Perpetual Peace* that inspired the League of Nations, as an intellectual antecedent to the international liberalism of today, particularly the idea of a democratic peace. In its contemporary expression, much of this theory has pointed towards transnational non-state actors that cross-stich the states together, suggesting no state can pursue a purely self-interested foreign policy, because, as interdependent, the interests of other states are in the interests of one's own. An influential iteration of this tradition has developed "regime" theory. Robert O. Keohane has argued that, even if we accept some of the positions of the realist, and the neo-realist in particular, cooperation amongst states is still possible.[20] When the interests of states coincide, they can form regimes of rules, and complexes of multiple regimes, to govern specific realms of international relations, like arms control, trade, and climate change.

Constructivism and the English School

Both of these theoretical positions, constructivism and the English School, form a current of thought, if not a shared tradition. They both hold that culture is the meta-problem of international relations. From this outlook, it is the form of culture that gives rise to a large number of the most central of international problems. Identity troubles, from this outlook, are cultural productions. The state of war is a state of culture. Foreign policy fiascos come from the malaise of foreign policy cultures. The failures of the League and United nations are failures of international culture. Unjust war and systemic injustice, can be thought of as products of unjust cultures, although even justice itself, in this view, has cultural sources, so this current of thought supposes. It is with the axiom of culture that it makes sense of all IR's problems and relations. Theoretical questions here are about where cultures come from, how they change, and how "far down" culture goes as a sense making explanation. Do cultures bubble up from "below", as it were? Or, are they pressed down, from the elites "above"? Or, is it created by the relations of the states themselves? Is everything culture contingent, or are there some things amongst nations that are necessarily as they are, regardless of culture? Differences abound between different channels in this current of thought. The English School places a great deal of emphasis on the collaborative culture of "international society", with its institutions of international order.[21] For English School thinkers, the balance of power is not the seesaw of natural forces, shifting or swinging power here or there as neo-realists see it. Rather, it is, a search for a balance, an equilibrium. Likewise, international law, for both constructivists and English School theorists, is an expression of culture, as much, if not more, than it is an expression of the state powers that make it. Constructivists, however, avoid the English School's emphasis on the society of states. Many constructivists are interested, like liberal internationalists, in the political world beyond states. They are interested in the rules and norms constructed by NGOs and IOs around the states, how the states can be tamed, socialized, into cultures of appropriate behavior, or how they can be culturally transformed, "all-the-way-down", beyond the nation-state. Remembering Vattel's questions, constructivists and English School theorists take a meta-position with the concept of culture, beyond realist and liberal positions, seeing the international system as a voluntary cultural construction.

Critical Theories

Like the above traditions of IR theory, there are several strains of critical theory. They can be broadly divided into upper Critical theory containing a variety of Marxist positions, and lower critical theory containing a variety of feminist, post-colonialist, and post-structuralist positions.[22] Several of these sub-currents form traditions in their own right. What unites them is a discontentment with modern forms of exploitation, exclusion, and oppression. Critical theorists in general emphasize the modern international problems of gender, race, and class. Marxists emphasize the problem of class, primarily, and view the system of states as an expression of economic relations, epiphenomenal to relations of capital. Lower critical theorists, like constructivists and English School thought, take a meta-perspective, looking at the systems *in toto,* as a modern historical form of culture. Both Critical and critical theorists are distinguished from other traditions by their emphasis on modes and forms of power: patriarchal, racial, and economic. These forms of power, patriarchy, racialized empires, and global capitalism, for C/critical theorists, shape the relations of the system. Connected to this emphasis on power, is the critical position that power makes knowledge, that our knowledge of IR is made in power's own image, in the image of the usual modern suspects: patriarchy, race and empire, the state and capital.

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Persistent Questions

Realism, Liberalism, Constructivism, the English School, and Critical Theories, are not the only theories of IR, and I have brushed over their internal diversity with broad brushstrokes. The point was to convey how the theories are built up, in a web of contrasting positions on what problems, relations and units matter in the system. Today, a push towards "post-Western" theory is evident. In addition the cannon IR theories are less and less used in the study of IR. They increasingly form the background of its debates, like Durkheim, Weber, and Marx do for Sociologists. In IR today, more and more "middle" range theories are being developed, "smaller" theories about specific problematic phenomenon, be it the conditions and causes of nuclear proliferation or child soldiers. But, the big and important problems persist, sustaining Vattel's questions and the study of IR as a whole.

Postscript

I have written this brief general introductory feature on the study of IR because I feel it is needed. There are several good IR textbook length introductions, but only one or two provides the general introduction new students need to grasp the study as a whole. It is also apparent that it is more and more difficult for even advanced students to grasp the study as a whole, the more and more they are asked to specialize. The textbook, *The Globalization of International Politics,* by John Baylis, Steve Smith, and Patricia Owens, is a general introduction, but at over 600 pages and with a fixation on globalization, students do not digest it in whole, only in parts that are all overshadowed by *du jour* globular thought, limiting their intellectual grasp of the study as a whole. A second book that I recommend is Ken Booth's *International Relations: All that Matters.* This text is a quasi-masterpiece. Its intellectual glue, hanging together all the parts, is a body of wisdom about the international, accrued and rehearsed in a lifetime of study. It is a book for gaining reflection and inspiration from the wisdom of its author. In this sense it enables meditative learning. Other good textbooks miss one thing or another, falling short of a general introduction. Chris Brown and Kirsten Ainley's *Understanding International Relations* covers international theory, including international political theory, as well as contemporary international issues, but misses much of that sociological part of the picture. Paul Wilkinson's *International Relations: A Very Short Introduction* is missing more than it includes. Textbooks that only cover the theoretical cannon, Cynthia Weber's *International Relations Theory* and the collaborative text *Theories of International Relations* miss the political problems and practical subject-matter that makes these theories relevant. As a student, I read these texts as well as their forerunners, K.J. Holsti's *A Framework for Analysis* and even C.A.W. Manning's *The Nature of International Society,* Morgenthau's *Politics Among Nations,* and E.H. Carr's *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations.* How I think about IR, and what I think about it, has benefitted from these introductory texts refined by their many editions, even if they may miss one or more of IR's parts. As such, to a certain extent, writing a brief general introductory article to IR distills these texts. As a brief introduction, it is meant to compliment these and other introductory texts, whichever the teacher might be using, so to give the student an ability to grasp the study as a whole.

Notes

[1] Emmerich de Vattel *The Laws of Nations, or, Principles of the Law of Nature, Applied to the Conduct and Affairs of Nations and Sovereigns* (London: Newbery, 1759).

[2] Barry Buzan and Richard Little *International Systems in World History: Remaking the Study of International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford Univeristy Press, 1998).

[3] Martin Wight *Systems of States* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1977).

[4] K.J. Holsti *International Politics: A Framework for Analysis* Sixth Edition (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1992 [1967]), part II.

[5] Raymond Cohen and Raymond Westbrook *Amarna Diplomacy: The Beginnings of International Relations* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

Student Feature - A Brief Introduction to the Study of International Relations

Written by A.C. McKeil

[6] Tim Dunne and Christian Reus-Smit *The Globalization of International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

[7] G. John Ikenberry *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

[8] Iver B. Neumann, 'International Relations as a Social Science', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies,* 43:1 (2014), pp.330-350.

[9] Martin Wight *International Theory: The Three Traditions* Gabriele Wight and Brian Porter eds. (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1991), p.50.

[10] Ken Booth *International Relations: All that Matters* (London: McGraw Hill, 2014).

[11] Cynthia Enloe *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* Second Edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).

[12] Kenneth N. Waltz *Man, the State and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954).

[13] Michael Walzer *Just and Unjust Wars* Fourth Edition (New York: Basic Books, 2006 [1977]).

[14] Charles R. Beitz *Political Theory and International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

[15] Andrew Linklater *Men and Citizens* (London: Palgrave, 1982).

[16] Tim Dunne, Lene Hansen, and Colin Wight, 'The End of International Relations Theory?',*European Journal of International Relations,* 19(3): 405-425.

[17] Charles Taylor *Social Theory as Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).

[18] Stefano Guzzini, 'The Significance and Roles of Teaching Theory in International Relations', *JIRD,* 4:2 (2001), pp. 98-117.

[19] Errol A. Henderson *African Realism? International Relations Theory and Africa's Wars in the Post-Colonial Era* (New York: Rowan & Littlefield, 2015).

[20] Robert O. Keohane *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

[21] Hedley Bull *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* Third Edition (London: Palgrave, 2002 [1977]).

[22] Chris Brown, 'Our Side?: Critical Theory and International Relations'. In: Wynn-Jones, Richard, (ed.) *Critical Theory and World Politics* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publications, 2000), pp. 191-204.

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