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What does Europe have to offer IR? Exogenisation and real-life data

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Knowledge production takes many forms. The ones where I have decided to spend my life were institutionalised around the turn of the last century, under the name of social sciences. International relations arose in Europe as a particular constellation and mix of already extant knowledge traditions. As a result of the Nazi takeover in Germany and the Second World War, the hegemony of the discipline moved across the water to the United States, where it was almost subject to another social science with another history, namely Political Science. What Europe, and particularly Britain, where the discipline has maintained the strongest institutionalised autonomy, may offer IR today, is an escape from that hegemony. In this article, I will concentrate on two concrete ways in which this may be done, one conceptual and one methodological.

Conceptual offer: Studying the changing state

In a long list of *anni horribili* for IR under US hegemony, the outstanding one is arguably 1965.¹ In that year, David Easton published two functionalist books where he argued that political science should bracket the question of what a state was, and rather focus on what already existing institutions of government did in response to external demands.² This was clearly a plea for policy relevance, for the underlying concern was how political scientists could help government officials perform better. It was also a blatantly reductionist programme. First, the area of validity of the framework proposed by Easton turned out to be democratic systems. If the relationship between state and society and the competition between parts of government follow other logics than the democratic one, Easton's approach is of very limited value. I found this out to my cost when I started my career and tried to apply standard political science models to the study of the Soviet Union. It did not work. The second reason why Easton's influence on political science was so damaging was his exogenising of the state. Easton reduced to a given assumption what should have been the

¹ This paragraph draws on my inaugural lecture at the LSE, 13 February 2013.

² David Easton, *A Framework for Political Analysis* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1965); David Easton, *A Systems Analysis of Political Life* (New York: Wiley, 1965).

very focus of political inquiry, namely how there may be such a thing as a state, or a polity for that matter, in the first place. American and global political science was, seemingly indelibly, marked by Easton's reductionism. In the case of the US, Easton basically moved social inquiry back to what it had looked like before the arrival of exiled European intellectuals in the 1930s for, as John Gunnell³ has demonstrated, American political discourse traditionally did not know the concept of the state. In Europe, the recoils from Easton's salvoes served to play down the significance of state theory. As a result, the important questions of what makes states and relations between states possible in the first place were pushed into the background by intellectually less but bureaucratically more interesting questions about how specific institutions and humans relate to one another inside a political system that is simply treated as a given. This is an historical loss for Political Science, which is supposed to have the state as its central object of study. Indeed, in German, as well as in the Scandinavian languages, the discipline is known as *Staatswissenschaft/Statsvetenskap/Statskundskab/Statsvitenskap* – the study of (or knowledge about) the state. Easton's move was an attack on the European roots not only of Political Science, but on the social sciences in general, for the state remains central to our understanding of large-scale social life, historically as well as contemporaneously.

With the rise of globalisation, the nature of the state is changing.⁴ If the study of the *modi operandi* of states is still central to our understanding of IR, if states are different in this regard, and if they are changing at that, then it stands to reason that any attempt at grasping changes in global politics must start by treating the state as a phenomenon to be studied, and not as a given entity. To put it in American English, the state cannot remain an independent variable, it must be exogenised and studied as a dependent variable.

There are only three ways to go about this. We may study states historically, we may study them comparatively, and we may study imagined states. Let us bracket the latter possibility and focus on the two former. They were already the key approaches to the study of social life suggested by the likes of Durkheim and Weber. They were both historical thinkers, and matters historical dominate their work. They remain the acts to follow. Key early IR scholars were acutely aware of this, and behaved accordingly. E. H. Carr was decisively influenced by German social science, mainly through the towering figure of the early sociologist of knowledge, Karl Mannheim.⁵ Morgenthau was a Weberian.⁶ We cannot simply follow Henry Ford, and treat history as if it were mostly bunk. That would cut us off from studying most relations between polities, for these are to be found in the past.

Methodological offer: Real-life data

3 John Gunnell, *Imagining the American Polity: American Political Science and the Discourse of Democracy* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004).

4 Iver B. Neumann & Ole Jacob Sending, *Governing the Global Polity* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2010).

5 Susan Stedman Jones, 'What Does Durkheim Mean by "Thing"?' in *Durkheim: Critical Assessments of Leading Sociologists*, Vol. 1, pp. 300-312 (London: Routledge, 2001 edition)

6 Michael C. Williams, 'Why Ideas Matter in International Relations: Hans Morgenthau, Classical Realism, and the Moral Construction of Power Politics', *International Organization*, Vol. 58, Issue 4 (2004), pp. 633-65.

If our object of study should be political and social life involving a plurality of polities, and if the state remains central in this regard, the next question would have to be *how* to study these relations. If the first major thing Europe has to offer IR is the study of the full gamut of cases, the second is a set of methodologies for studying extant relations. We should not begin by assuming this and assuming that. We should analyse the exchanges between the rulers and the ruled. These are mostly textual exchanges. We should mingle with policy makers – state-employed or otherwise – and find out what they are doing, what they think they are doing, and the difference between the two. As Weber⁷ put it, ‘The dilettante differs from the expert [...] only in that he lacks a firm and reliable work procedure’.

This is another regard in which American hegemony in IR has been destructive. These days, methodology has basically become a question of how to count. Counting is fine. Correlations are interesting. They do not, however, help much in our understanding of what politics means to those involved. Quantitative methods are nice for the scholar who sees her calling in furnishing the powers that be with data that may be used to engineer social relations. They are not necessarily so nice if we want to understand the logic of social relations. That is a quantitative system. The problem is that scholars who work qualitatively have a tendency to duck questions of methodology. We do not take our forays into the social seriously enough to maintain a running conversation about how to do it.

For this reason, I believe that it is the blossoming of political anthropology that keeps the classical study of politics alive.⁸ If we go to the classics of political theory, we find a focus on the preconditions for political order and a focus on how that order is maintained. Present-day political scientists seem to have forgotten about preconditions. With very few exceptions, they take the existence of particular institutions, or the need to create them, as a starting-point of analysis. To take an example, they study how elections are held and how they should be held, and who wins, but not why they are held, and how they interact with other social practices. An anthropologist would find it interesting that donors spent around \$1 billion on the Congo’s first-ever election in 2006 and would concentrate on how that event reflected and changed social processes. A political scientist would ask if the election adhered to established practices that have emerged elsewhere, which parties ran, and who won. Anthropologists focus on the constitutive, political scientists on the outcome. Anthropologists tend to define politics as a question of who we are, political scientists tend to define it as who gets what, when, how. In the terms of classical political theory, anthropologists focus on the preconditions for political order, and political scientists on how that order is maintained.

Ian Hacking⁹ problematises modes of knowledge as what he calls styles of reasoning. Styles of reasoning are characterised by the objects that constitute the world

7 Max Weber, ‘Science as Vocation’ in H.H. Gerth & C. Wright Mills (eds.), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946 edition), pp. 129–156. Available at https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&q=cache:mPSTU8MQuAAJ:mail.www.anthropos-lab.net/wp/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Weber-Science-as-a-Vocation.pdf+max+weber+science+as+a+vocation&hl=no&pid=bl&srcid=ADGEESiXuTOn6T7f0zJ6vj5XnlATX5QXXn0v7cSOd8ST3V9nH62cNx9cmcb1B1yVM-I2mLicqXYonUUSXqXxxudvY_LRDimL41Oy5g1n2lBEjE2FdYeZNgPrGTfCeQG18e20vaTJtiVd&sig=AHIEtbRqm49_nsfWw4nHgCTaKTF-pGg8scQ, accessed 20 January 2013.

8 Iver B. Neumann, *At Home with Diplomats: Inside a European Foreign Ministry* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012).

9 Ian Hacking, *Historical Ontology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

to be known, preconditions for making truth claims, and ‘criteria of proof and demonstration’¹⁰ – that is, an ontology, an epistemology, and a methodology. The difference in object of study (constitution v outcome) reflects an ontic difference between seeing the social world as emergent, like most anthropologists, and seeing it as structurally given or in terms of methodological individualism, like most political scientists. This ontic difference is tied in with how the two disciplines lean towards different epistemological commitments (in Weberian terms, understanding v explanation) as well as towards different methodologies (some variant on the phenomenological themes of intent and reflexivity v defining the object as a ‘dependent variable’ to be studied by other stuff that is held to be invariant – independent variables).

Political science started, back in the seventeenth century, as a state-induced science of governing people. Small wonder that relations to the state are doxic, and small wonder that the discipline’s gaze is top-down. This disciplinary closeness to the subject matter and to the state is a problem in its own right. Not so with anthropology, which was a bottom-up project, concentrating on ‘the native’s point of view’ (this undertaking was also financed by the state, who wanted knowledge about the natives which could be used, but never mind that; the point for now is how these two disciplines spawned different ways of producing data about the social). The differences between the two disciplines may be summed up as follows:

	Anthropology	Political science
Ontology	Reality constructed	Structure or agents given
Epistemology	Constructing knowledge	Excavating truth
Methodology	Reflexivity	Identify means and intent

Matrix one: Ideal-typical styles of reasoning in anthropology and political science

I would argue that we need a lot more anthropology-style work in IR, and that we have a glut of political science-style work. Since the mismatch between the two is stunning in the US, whereas it is fairly balanced in Europe, it stands to reason that Europe has something to offer in this regard.

Conclusion

IR is a social science. The social consists of relations between individuals and groups. These relations may be studied in a number of different ways, but they cannot simply be assumed. That would not be a social way of studying the world, and so it would not count as a fully *social* science approach to the world at all. IR must be placed on a sounder footing in terms of what our objects of study should be, as well as in terms of how we should study those objects of study. Europe, and by ‘Europe’ I mean in this regard not least our institutional publication outlets – *European Journal of Inter-*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

national Relations, Review of International Studies, Millennium and now *European Review of International Studies* – has two key things to offer. The first one is a cluster of exogenous perspectives on the state, which makes it possible to study variation between types of states, relations between them and change in state-society relations. The second is a cluster of ways to go about that task. Not a small contribution, and one that thousands of scholars are working full time trying to improve further.