

Be Your Own Prince*

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I sympathise with Christian Heine and Benno Teschke's project and with what their goals seem to be.¹ It seems obvious that they are motivated by a strong sense of frustration with the state of International Relations (IR) as an academic discipline. This frustration seems both philosophical, and normative, implying that a serious political-moral commitment is largely lacking in the discipline. If this is the underlying message of their paper, then I am with them all the way. Without a minimum amount of passion and the will to change things, nothing is worth doing. This is particularly true in the social sciences, which has been taken over by too many mediocre scholars and dull craftsmen producing a never-ending flow of irrelevant articles, conference papers, and books, which are often outdated the moment they appear in print.

While I agree with their statement-that 'IR as an academic discipline is ideally placed to catch the global gales of the modern condition'-the question arises as to what the discipline has contributed to the world.² Or rather, how has the discipline conceptualised the world in which we live in order to contribute something towards its improvement? I agree with Heine and Teschke's contention that 'the real world does not remain untouched by its conceptualisation', that is, that words do matter and that the discipline could make relevant and meaningful contributions to the world, given the seemingly central role that international politics play in the lives of people and nations.³

As a matter of fact, we-the 'international relationists'-do make such contributions, and very powerful ones, at that. However, in the past these 'contributions' have tended to be rather catastrophic. I think that the disaster of the Vietnam War was partly the result of poor reasoning by IR intellectuals who had invented 'useful' concepts, including the so-called 'domino theory' and 'containment'.⁴ During the Cold War, American policymakers searching for an understanding of the various post World War II liberation movements were only too grateful for this 'intelligent' and

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¹ Christian Heine and Benno Teschke, 'Sleeping Beauty and the Dialectical Awakening: On the Potential of Dialectic for International Relations', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* (Vol. 25, No. 2, 1996), pp. 399-423.

² *Ibid.*, p. 399.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 418.

⁴ See, for example, Terry L. Deibel and John Lewis Gaddis (eds.), *Containment: Concept and Policy* (Washington, DC: Hamilton, 1986), and Louis A. Peake, *The U.S. in the Vietnam War 1954-1975* (New York, NY: Praeger, 1986).

`scholarly' explanation, which they acted upon with all the disastrous consequences that we now know.

Despite its passing, the Cold War is still important for IR. It is important not because the discipline is still dominated by the Cold War paradigm, but, rather, because the whole nightmare of the Cold War-an absurd reduction of the complexity of the world to two simple poles or camps as the 'dominant' or `salient' contradiction (the dialectics) of our time-was the outcome, or product, of IR theory. The Soviet Marxists had their version of IR and the West had its own version. Both versions reinforced each other and had complementary conceptualisations of reality, which both tried successfully to impose on the world. Considering these circumstances, I think it was a miracle that the world emerged from the Cold War without a nuclear war.

It is absolutely necessary for the IR discipline in the post-Cold War era to be radically self-critical since it has been the main intellectual culprit of 40 years of waste, destruction, and violence. For me, it is quite amazing how the discipline completely suppresses its enormous intellectual responsibility for our current global pathology-seen in the growing gap between rich and poor globally, increasing violence worldwide, and ecological destruction across the planet-as well as its perversion of our contemporary political thinking into worthless and self-referential approaches and `conceptualisations'. This is probably related to what Heine and Teschke call `the first defect' of IR-that is, its withdrawal from social and human reality into the halls of power and assumed privilege.⁵

Why did this happen? Why did `international relationists' not recognise that there was a 'Sleeping Beauty' in IR ready to be kissed to life? This is an important question to ask, particularly if we equate Sleeping Beauty not with the potential of dialectic, but rather with the potential of IR to be politically and socially relevant. Applying this equation, we see that what is missing in Heine and Teschke's paper is any attempt at a sociology - or socio-psychology - of IR as a discipline: a sociological and psychological study of the `international relationists'. My own hypothesis is that-apart from those who enter this field by accident or chance, and who would have entered any field in order to make an academic career from their ability to construct word combinations out of given conceptualisations and terminologies - most IR scholars possess a hidden and/or unconscious desire to be beckoned as an adviser to the throne of the powerful. I would call this desire the `Kissinger syndrome'. For these consultants who are eager to whisper sage advice to kings, IR seems to offer potentially more public prestige than other social sciences, since the discipline deals with *global* issues and `global players of politics', rather than with the more mundane tasks of domestic [politics](#). It is not by chance that next to the chancellors, presidents, and prime ministers in our governments, the office of foreign minister carries the most

⁵ Heine and Teschke, *op. cit.*, in note, 1, pp. 400-401.

prestige among the members of the cabinet. This is but the corollary to the academic discipline of IR-or *vice versa* - even if the Kissinger syndrome turns out to be largely, if not purely, fictitious. However, I do think that without such a socio-psychological study of IR specialists, Heine and Teschke cannot sufficiently explain why Sleeping Beauty has not found her prince: that prince is looking for something 'better' than bright, fresh, and challenging critical scholarship. Instead, he wants to be confirmed and recognised as the king.

However, I would not deny that some IR specialists do have an interest in the discipline for the sake of knowledge itself. We do get satisfaction out of analytical understanding, a well-written, well-formulated argument, or the discourses we conduct in writing with the hope that somebody, somewhere will read them and pick up our propositions by either feeling challenged or stimulated to continue where we have left off. In other words, we do not exclusively need the 'recognition of the king'. And this is where, ideally, scholarship should be.

Heine and Teschke make repeated reference to Karl Marx as their model of a committed scholar. I agree with them on this point. Marx was certainly motivated by passion, anger, and a revolutionary zeal to change the world. However, he was also a great scholar with a highly developed sense of scholarly responsibility. He had to prove his point over and over again by elaborating on a variety of empirical and historical details. He took pride in the breadth and depth of his scholarship, and he was not exclusively or primarily concerned with being relevant or revolutionary. *Das Kapital* is a great monument to his intellectual achievement and is, therefore, certainly more than a pamphlet or a manual for political action. Max Weber ranked this work with the Sistine Chapel of Michelangelo and Goethe's *Faust* among the major achievements of man. While none of us may be a Marx (or a Weber, Goethe, or Michelangelo) - what we can learn from these 'greats' is that they did not produce mere propositions. Instead, they fulfilled their own promises.

Without measuring Heine and Teschke's discussion piece against such giants, they need to submit themselves to a challenging test. They quote Marx: '[t]he dispute over the reality of non-reality of thinking that is isolated from praxis is a purely *scholastic* question'.⁶ If they apply this to their paper, in which they argue very convincingly that their/our 'praxis' is IR (i.e., the study, analysis, and explanation of international relations), then it follows that the proof of their point about Sleeping Beauty is whether *they* are able to wake her up. Waking her up does not mean, obviously, a declaration of intent ('I would if I could') but an act or action. This means that Heine and Teschke would have to write their own study of international relations, of the international system, of international politics, or of a significant section of it. The challenge is not to write a viable research programme of modern international relations for *others*, but to use such a discussion piece as an attempt at self

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 415, emphasis in original.

clarification, as a statement of intent and purpose for one's own analytical work which challenges all the non-dialectical work that is conducted and is, unfortunately, dominating the field.⁷ The seriousness of purpose and commitment that they believe are missing in the work of most scholars are criteria they have to live up to in their own work. My advice to them is simple: do not continue with this line of theoretical argumentation-it will lead to nowhere. Heine and Teschke have to be specific and concrete in order to convince others (and themselves) of the superiority of the dialectical approach over other approaches.

One of the characteristics of IR scholarship, or rather of the IR debate, is the production of an endless stream of paradigms and approaches (and in their footnotes Heine and Teschke have listed a good deal of them) without applying them concretely to the reality in which we live. There is a stale and self-reproducing theoretical discourse within the IR scholarly community which lacks any serious philosophical or methodological foundation, as Heine and Teschke point out.⁸ The real danger is that their challenge might be considered as just another contribution to 'theory' (if it is noticed and picked up at all). Their contribution would, therefore, run the risk of being rendered as irrelevant and inconsequential as all the others. However, Heine and Teschke would be responsible for such a negative reception to their work, unless they use their own programme to examine a concrete case study or develop an overall political analysis of our international system. Lest we forget, their great role model, Marx, did *not* make theoretical statements and did *not* produce theories of analysis. However, he did write *Das Kapital*. In other words, he fulfilled his own promises by filling in the framework he laid out for himself. Marx did not write most of the texts which Heine and Teschke refer to as his theoretical and philosophical foundations in order to publish them, but rather for self-clarification. We all learn by writing, but the world does not necessarily have to be involved in our self-clarification processes. Instead, it is interested in the final product of these processes, and, in Heine and Teschke's case, that would be a solid case study as a model of dialectical IR scholarship. Certainly, there are many cases that are only waiting to be kissed alive: the Eastern expansion of NATO, Chinese foreign policy, the sadly ineffective political diplomacy of the European Union, or the problems that have befallen Africa are but a few examples. In short, if the proof of the pudding is in the eating, then the proof of Heine and Teschke's challenge is in seeing them take it up themselves.

My final points on Heine and Teschke's discussion piece are concerned with style and culture. I had great difficulties reading their paper. I had to translate quite a few passages back into German in order to grasp their real meaning. Their paper is not exactly easy reading. It took me a couple of hours of concentration to read it, something that most readers will not invest, particularly if they are so radically

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 400.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 400-405.

challenged. In fact, I do not think that it can be 'read'; it has to be studied, word by word. There is nothing inherently wrong with that. Why should we not expect a reader to 'study' something new, rather than to consume what he already knows?

However, the conclusions Heine and Teschke draw are rather simple and not as radically new and earth-shattering as they promise to be at the outset. Their point that (modern) capitalism cannot survive without politics was nothing new to me, nor, I presume, to many who read their paper with great expectations. 'Pure' economics does not and cannot exist. Capitalist economics requires political cover-or 'political mechanisms', as Heine and Teschke call them-in order to make profit possible.⁹ Therefore, I read their piece more as an (impressive) attempt at self-clarification and self-preparation for future work than as a contribution in its own right.

Second, as far as 'culture' is concerned, I think their frustration with the IR discipline is also the cultural frustration of Germans working in an Anglo-Saxon intellectual and academic environment. Johan Gattung once wrote a beautiful and funny piece on national styles (Gallic, Nipponic, Teutonic, and Anglo-Saxon), noting how each has its own dignity, strengths and weaknesses, as well as internal coherence.¹⁰ In Heine and Teschke's piece, I sense the frustration that the more rigid, philosophical so-called Teutonic style has with the pragmatic, common sense, and positivist Anglo-Saxon style. However, this type of frustration could be rather counter-productive since these different styles, or approaches, cannot-and should not-be reconciled. It is precisely in these diverse approaches to scholarship (and world views) that the fascination of a multicultural world lies. Of course, we should try to speak a common language since we have common problems, but this common language can only be the result of dialogue and not, as it seems to me implied in Heine and Teschke's piece, the result of the submission of one style to the other-in this case, the Anglo-Saxon style giving ground to the more systematic, philosophical Teutonic way of thinking.

In conclusion, I do think that Heine and Teschke will have difficulties making themselves understood by the audience they want to reach. In a way, Heine and Teschke's piece is written more for a German than for an Anglo-Saxon audience, which creates difficulties in generating the types of responses and reactions that they should rightly expect.

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⁹ *ibid.*, p. 422.

¹⁰ Johan 'Structure, Culture and Intellectual Style: An Essay Comparing Saxon, Teutonic, Gallic and Nipponic Approaches' *Social Science Information (Vol. 20, No. 6, 1981)*, pp. 817-56 447