

Lecture No (11).

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.

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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

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