

## Book Review: What's the Point of International Relations? by Synne L. Dyvik, Jan Selby, & Rorden Wilkinson, eds

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**Dyvik, Synne L., Jan Selby, and Rorden Wilkinson, eds. *What's the Point of International Relations?* New York: Routledge, 2017. xiii + 274 pages. Paperback, \$43.95.**

The title of this edited volume may take one by surprise. After all, are the editors challenging the very existence of International Relations (IR) as a discipline or field of study? According to these professors of International Relations, this is a question worth asking, precisely because IR's intellectual terrain is so increasingly contested. IR has become home to multiple theoretical traditions and sub-fields, and this heterogeneity could arguably militate against any kind of collective endeavor, let alone cumulative knowledge building. Given this broad conceptualization of issues examined by IR specialists, the editors argue that five features of this 'idea of IR' merit attention. First, the field or discipline of IR is a pluralist endeavor. The editors argue that "the diversity of theoretical, political, and methodological commitments, and of substantive interpretations, is a reason for celebration" (p. 2). Second, the editors favor a dialogical model of pluralism which "does not involve resorting to, and which largely abandons, the static paradigms and isms" (p. 2). Third, IR is a political subject matter in its assumptions and repercussions. Fourth, the editors favor an interpretation of IR as an open field of inquiry where IR scholars are in a constant pursuit of knowledge by incorporating pedagogical approaches from other disciplines beyond and across the social sciences. Lastly, the authors view the IR not as a "master-discipline" which holds a monopoly on understanding the "international," or which, alone among the social sciences, provides the big answers to the biggest questions (p. 2). IR as a field of study has much to learn from the other disciplines in the social sciences.

In the globalized world of the twenty-first century, along with the technological advancements brought about by the explosion of the Internet, IR is undergoing a series of significant challenges. For example, how is IR different from political science? Justin Rosenberg, in his essay "Escaping from the prison of Political Science: What IR offers that other disciplines do not," argues that IR is a prisoner of political science. The reason for the incarceration of IR to Political Science is its continuing failure to emancipate itself from Political Science preventing it from developing freely and realizing its own potential as a viewpoint on the world. Also, IR is a prisoner of Political Science due to the fact that it can receive visitors but it cannot reciprocate the visit itself. That is, IR can "import ideas from the outside, but it cannot send anything back in return" (p. 222). The final question of intellectual distinctiveness relates to how IR has been increasingly called upon to demonstrate its extra-academic worth and impact. This last challenge, according to the editors, may not be a bad thing. They argue that "IR has always been a worldly discipline, shaped by and responding to global developments while simultaneously being an advocate, for good or ill, of particular political projects and agendas" (p. 9).

International Relations as a field or discipline of study has been dominated by two theoretical approaches: Disciplinary IR Theories and Critical IR Theories. The Discipline IR

Theories encompass traditional Realism, Liberalism, and Social Constructivism. The dominance of these theories led L.H.M. Ling (and others) to critically take issue with the Disciplinary theories. Ling's selected pejorative term for Disciplinary IR Theories is 'Hypermale-Eurocentric-Whiteness' (HEW). According to Ling, hypermasculinity refers to an ideology that denigrates anything smacking of the feminine, for instance, welfare or compassion. Eurocentrism regards all things European as definitive of "civilization." Lastly, whiteness constructs a racialized order of privilege and entitlement derived from all of the above. How could Disciplinary IR Theories become less HEW? Ling's answer is to *kōanize* IR. A *kōan* "aims to startle one from complacency in thought or worship...any method that shakes us from standard thinking, stimulates self-reflection, and provokes detachment from icons" (p. 140-141). In order to create a space for the Others within Disciplinary IR Theories, Ling recommends focusing on four basic components of a *kōanic* method: questioning assumptions, investigating possibilities for action, breaking through words and letters, and cutting attachment to one's own awakening.

If International Relations has a problem of HEW, what is its value beyond the walls of academia? Indeed, according to Peter Newell and Anna Stavrianakis in their essay "Beyond the 'ivory tower?' IR in the world," as academia is being increasingly asked to demonstrate its relevance, its impact, and its value for public money, the focus of the discipline of IR has changed over time. Just as the world has undergone a seismic transformation with the fall of the Berlin wall and the implosion of the Soviet Union, IR is also transforming and evolving itself by way of policy engagement, activism, and scholarship. As Beate Jahn, in his essay "In defense of IR" argues: "The point of IR, therefore, is to provide scientific analyses of the workings of international politics as the precondition for better political practice" (p. 56).

I recommend this book to anyone interested in International Relations. The text casts a critical eye on what IR scholars are doing when they study and teach International Relations. Renowned philosopher Karl Popper postulated that no one can predict the future, except by chance, and that we all contribute to determining it by what we do. As the editors, Dyvik, Selby and Wilkinson conclude, "IR is an extraordinary resilient discipline" (p. 263) that can make a positive contribution to the world's future.

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