

The politics of the philosophy of science

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Monteiro and Ruby (2009) argue that International Relations (IR) scholars should look to adopt a more ‘tentative attitude’ towards the philosophy of science (PoS) frameworks in IR. This is an attractive and timely call for more open-minded PoS argumentation in the field. Yet, the logic of Monteiro and Ruby’s argument is not (rather characteristically of PoS debates) infallible. As other commentaries in this forum show, it is not self-evident that Monteiro and Ruby’s account is ‘post-foundational’, or that it is premised on an accurate reading of existing PoS positions in IR. However, I do not here wish to elaborate further on the critiques that could be made of the internal coherence of Monteiro and Ruby’s argumentation or their reading of core philosophical schools. Instead, I want to discuss a different kind of an issue raised by Monteiro and Ruby’s intervention: their treatment of the interaction of political forms of argumentation and PoS debates.

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Monteiro and Ruby’s piece, interestingly, makes brief reference to the occasional intertwining of ‘political’ and ‘philosophical’ debate in International Relations (IR). Monteiro and Ruby (2009: 39) argue that the philosophy of science (PoS) discussion can ‘camouflage’ what is in fact political debate. This is considered problematic, for ‘political’ debate, it seems, should be conducted at the level of substantive political interaction, not inconspicuously hidden in meta-theoretical forms of argumentation. Monteiro and Ruby’s brief acknowledgement of the potential ‘politics of PoS’ taps into an issue that has been of great interest to many critical theorists over the years: the notion that PoS positions can be ‘politically charged’. Yet, the potential politics of PoS are made little of in Monteiro and Ruby’s piece. In fact, they end up reproducing the tendency – characteristic

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of much of current IR PoS debate – to side-step discussion of the ways in which PoS positions may interact with or reflect political worldviews that scholars hold.

My aim here then is to ask whether it is plausible to assume that PoS positions can be ‘politically charged’ and that they can have ‘elective affinity’ with some or another political worldview. If so, what might be the consequence of this for Monteiro and Ruby’s argument and for PoS debates in IR in general? I argue that drawing any direct causal links between PoS positions and specific political views is impossible, yet there seems to be something to the claim that PoS positions can be politically charged, even if in complex ways. Indeed, for the sake of provoking discussion, I advance here some (inevitably contentious) interpretations of the ways in which political predilections might be embedded in PoS frameworks. I also argue that Monteiro and Ruby’s vision of IR is affected by consideration of the politics of PoS positions. While I agree with Monteiro and Ruby that PoS debate does not need to aim for a consensus on a single foundational meta-theoretical position, ignoring the politics of PoS runs the risk of misunderstanding why PoS debates matter in IR and what is at stake in them, why PoS positions are often strongly (rather than merely tentatively) held and, crucially, why having a plurality of PoS positions around might be a good thing.

The curious case of apolitical PoS

Philosophy is often treated as an apolitical and ahistorical activity (see Bhaskar, 1989: 158). Philosophical questions are commonly seen as universal, timeless, and abstract in nature. As for PoS, it is classically conceived to involve the study of abstract questions of logic, epistemology, and ontology, specifically in relation to how scientific claims are justified or structured. While in the 17th and 18th centuries, PoS questions were enmeshed with the scientific enterprise, and in the social sciences with the study of economics, politics, political theory, or moral philosophy, in modern academe, PoS inquiry has been seen as a distinct ‘philosophical level’ enterprise. It is not entirely surprising then that in IR too there has been a tendency for many commentators to treat philosophical debate as abstract and distinguishable from the more ‘concrete’ study of politics or international politics. Curiously, as PoS debates have unfolded in IR, they have taken on an increasingly autonomous and abstract ‘philosophical’ nature.

It follows that the social and political context from which PoS positions themselves arise from and the kind of theoretical or political positions that they may be attached to, facilitate, or disenable has received relatively little

attention (despite the fact that a key element of post-positivist PoS has been to argue that all theoretical practice is socially and politically contextualised). Thus, not only is there little discussion of the ‘politics of knowledge’ among positivist and instrumentalist philosophers of science (King, Keohane and Verba, 1994; Nicholson, 1996), discussion of the possibility that there may be politics implicated in PoS debate has been lacking also among constructivist and pragmatists engagements with PoS in IR (Wendt, 1999; Kratochwil, 2007). Neither is the political role of PoS argumentation commented on in any great detail by the critical realists (see e.g. Patomäki and Wight, 2000; Wight, 2006; Kurki, 2008). There is a tendency to engage in a curious pretence of apoliticality in PoS debates in IR.

Monteiro and Ruby’s article seems to reproduce the unnecessarily abstract ‘apolitical’ vision of PoS. Monteiro and Ruby seem to suggest that philosophy can be left for philosophers to deal with, and that philosophical matters can be separated from IR theoretical or everyday concerns. Their argument assumes that ultimately philosophical inquiry can stand somehow outside and independently of what concerns ‘IR’. Attached to this argument is an essentially apolitical reading of PoS – philosophical argumentation is viewed as distinctly philosophical, not political, in nature. This is despite the fact that, interestingly, Monteiro and Ruby also observe that some interaction can take place between political and philosophical debate. They recognise that political dynamics in IR debates can on occasion be ‘camouflaged’ behind PoS argumentation. Philosophical argumentation, they suggest, can act as a front for political argumentation, a tendency that they disapprove of (2009: 39). They imply that by not holding philosophical foundations ‘dogmatically’, we can ‘expose’ and avoid such ‘hidden’ political debate in IR.

Monteiro and Ruby’s reflections on the politics of PoS are interesting. Yet, they remain all too brief, considering the interesting, if also a frustratingly complex, nature of the questions involved. In what follows, I attempt to explore whether we can find ‘politically charged’ conceptual framings embedded in PoS positions, and what this might mean for IR and Monteiro and Ruby’s argument.

Politics of PoS?

In IR, Steve Smith (1997) has explicitly argued that some of his most political work in IR is on epistemology and PoS, and suggests that PoS positions can be linked to the social positions of their authors. Other post-positivists have supported this assertion, highlighting the hidden politics of philosophical level of argumentation (Zehfuss, 2002). Importantly, these works have chimed with those of classical critical theorists, such as

Habermas (1971); Horkheimer and Adorno (1972), and the feminists (Harding, 1991), if in no other sense but in their acceptance that philosophical critique can be seen as a politically motivated, or at least a politically implicated, exercise. We should not forget that the classical critical theorists with their philosophical critique of positivism sought to challenge not only the ‘abstract’ philosophy of science dominant in their time, but the structures of conformism, hierarchy, expertise, and disempowerment that this philosophy was seen to encourage socially and politically. As Keat summarises, for critical theorists:

Scientific knowledge, positivistically conceived ... is inherently repressive, and contributes to the maintenance of a form of society in which science [and positivist philosophy of science] is one of the resources employed for the domination of one class by another in which the possibility for radical transformation and a more rational society are blocked and concealed (Keat, 1981: 2).

However, it is not exclusively critical theorists who have highlighted the politics of PoS. Karl Popper also saw PoS positions as morally and politically significant. His commentaries on the social sciences (Popper, 1966), for example, drew a linkage between the PoS position one advocated and one’s general political attitude to social change and emancipation (for a fascinating discussion, see Fuller, 2004). These kinds of engagements suggest that PoS debates can be ‘implicated’ with the kind of political visions or outlooks that scholars work with.

But, what exactly does this mean? Let me first clarify what is meant by PoS positions here. I take this term to encapsulate two aspects: (i) understandings of the knowledge production process of science, or specifically social science, and (ii) views on the core ontological objects that social science is concerned with (cf. Keat, 1981). Second, What might we mean by political commitments here or by PoS positions being ‘politically charged’? By political I refer to authors’ general worldviews, for example, their leanings in left–right debates (socialist vs. liberal), their views on order vs. transformation in society (radical vs. conservative), their views on nature and extent of democratic governance (democrat vs. anti-democrat). I do not mean here individual’s specific political alignment with a specific party or their specific position on events such as the war in Iraq.

As for the term ‘implication’ in describing the connection between PoS positions and political views, this term is vague and indeterminate, and could mean many things. Hence, a close analysis of its possible meanings is necessary. It could mean that (a) PoS positions are directly politically motivated, that is, philosophers of science, or those that adopt PoS positions, come to choose or formulate these positions for particular

political reasons. Implication can also mean; (b) that PoS positions, regardless of individuals' motivations, are nevertheless directly related to specific political positions – that is, out of particular PoS positions flow almost mechanically particular political positions. I do not wish to maintain either of these positions here. This is because, first, while there are indeed some PoS scholars who imply that they have been politically motivated to create or disseminate a particular PoS, it is not my interest here discuss these authors, but rather to suggest that even those who do not see their philosophising as political, may in fact have to consider the possibility that politics may be involved in PoS debates. Second, it is not my aim to show a direct or mechanical causal link between PoS positions and political positions. This is because, as I see it, PoS positions, like any single discursive system, do not 'solely determine' what individuals think, nor do they directly cause discourses on other levels of discourse. In other words, they are causally underdetermining. They are also causal in 'constraining and enabling', rather than 'efficient' manner (Kurki, 2008).

Nevertheless, I wish to suggest that we should not abandon inquiry into the political underpinnings of PoS positions. I explore here whether we can assume that (c) a more subtle 'constraining and enabling' relationship might exist between PoS positions and IR theorists' political outlooks, whether we can identify 'political charges' of certain kinds in PoS debates? Might there be conceptual frameworks at work in PoS positions that lead to some form of 'elective affinity'² between PoS positions and certain kinds of political theories or viewpoints?

Critical realism: a critical left philosophy of science?

I start here by the examination of critical realism, a philosophy of science that has recently been argued to be 'politically charged'. Chris Brown (2007) has recently suggested that critical realism is a Marxist or historically materialist philosophy of science; its contribution to IR being that it facilitates the re-emergence of historical materialism and Marxist form of analysis in IR. This claim has been contradicted by some critical realists; yet, others have welcomed Brown's intervention, accepting that left-leaning, if not specifically 'Marxist', political viewpoints are encouraged, or enabled, by it.³ But, is it plausible to suggest that critical realism as a PoS position has certain affinities with Marxist, historically materialist, and new left thinking? I think so.

One reason to suspect some sort of a linkage is that the founding father of critical realism has always been open about the close link between

² This phrase was helpfully suggested by the editors.

³ At a panel in ISA 2007, this claim was vigorously debated between Chris Brown, Colin Wight, Jonathan Joseph, and myself.

critical realism and Marxism or socialism in his thought (Bhaskar, 1991: 143), as have other key critical realists, such as Andrew Collier (1988, 2003). Another reason seems to be that there is a rather pervasive interest by many critical realists in the workings of capitalism and other related forms of oppression. But, even if we ignore Bhaskar's statements or the interests of many critical realists, arguably the conceptual universe of critical realism also suggests certain, arguably 'politically charged', interests. Critical realism's insistence on the language of material reality and causality, for example, and its suggestion that social life exists as a stratified, layered reality beyond the 'observable' could be seen as 'politically charged'. These arguments are widely utilised by critical realists to reject idealist and relativist strands of argumentation, seen as suggestive of political conservatism (see e.g. Sayer, 2000, see also Collier, 2003). Simultaneously, the language of layers and depth ontology is used to reject the atomistic image of society as constituted by autonomous individuals espoused by many positivist 'liberals'. Critical realism's insistence on the belief in 'objective' knowledge could also be characterised as politically charged; it is only because knowledge claims can be treated as non-relative that we can use knowledge about social inequalities to transform society. Relativist philosophies of science in their celebration of pluralism provide inadequate justifications for holistic political action, a key aim for an 'emancipatory' philosophy of social science such as critical realism.

Also, crucially, critical realism seems to be a structurally inclined PoS position; it emphasises socially conditioned agency and a 'transformational model of social reality'. This is crucial in facilitating a worldview that enables theorists to conceive of the existence of unobservable structural factors, the reality of which is often rejected by positivists or idealists. Being able to conceive of social structures as real and causally efficacious social objects, ontologically emergent from but separable from individuals and their conceptions, enforces the importance of struggling politically for collective and structural transformation of social structures such as capitalism and patriarchy. It seems that the use of critical realist philosophical language then seems to encourage – or at least enables – dealings with the world through a framework attuned to structural forms of power. Crucially, this is why positivism and social constructivist inter-subjectivism, for many critical realists, are inadequate; their epistemological and ontological tool-kit cannot adequately capture the kinds of materially embedded and 'emergent' social forces that critical realists are interested in (see Kurki and Sinclair, forthcoming).

In sum, brief as this examination has been, it does seem plausible to suggest that the philosophical language of critical realism has some affinity with broadly left-leaning, transformationalist, and critical theory perspectives. It is not inconceivable to think that this is why a number of

neo-Gramscians, feminists, social democrats, and Marxists have chosen critical realism, or closely related philosophical standpoints, as their philosophy of science of choice (Rupert, 2000: 156; Patomaki, 2002; Joseph, 2007; see also Kurki, 2008: Ch. 8).

But, what about other PoS positions in IR? Are they more 'neutral'? Grounds exist to suspect not.

Constructivism: a politically charged philosophy of science?

The politics of social constructivism as an IR theoretical school have received increasing attention in recent years as some critics have claimed that constructivist research implicitly contributes to the maintenance of a liberal worldview. Further, two key constructivists have sought to directly take on such accusations by explicitly provoking constructivists to engage with their political and normative agendas rather than entertaining the pretence of normative neutrality (Price, 2008; Reus-Smit, 2008). In reflecting on constructivist politics, Christian Reus-Smit argues: '[I]ike all theories of international relations, constructivism betrays a lurking set of (largely liberal) ethical commitments' (Reus-Smit, 2008: 73). But, might political and normative leanings lurk not just in social constructivism as an IR theoretical approach, but also in the 'meta-theoretical' principles that social constructivists in IR appeal to? Meta-theoretical PoS principles certainly are crucial for social constructivist theorising, even if social constructivism as a PoS and as an IR theory are not identical.⁴

But, what are 'social constructivist PoS' principles? Despite the somewhat different meta-theoretical orientations that can be identified as constructivist, we may perhaps be permitted to accept that the key guiding principle of social constructivist philosophy of science is that it emphasises the social construction of both social objects and our knowledge claims. As a philosophy of science, social constructivism emphasises the inter-subjectivist aspect of the social world; the social world is made up by various inter-subjective rule systems and beliefs. These beliefs direct not only our understandings and actions in social life but also our knowledge claims in that knowledge is constructed in socially constructed settings. Drawing on hermeneutic 'interpretive' strands of thought, the epistemological principles of constructivism instruct us to pay close attention to the 'understanding' of rules and norms that social agents work with, and this impacts also the analysis of social truths – these too are subject to double hermeneutic

⁴ As Monteiro and Ruby note, there are some 'IR constructivists' that are explicitly scientific realists, others yet refer to themselves as empiricists. I set out below what I take to be core principles of social constructivism in a philosophical sense. These overlap in many cases, although not always, with IR theoretical understandings of social constructivism.

relations. There is disagreement among social constructivists 'broadly conceived' over what this condition of social construction means exactly. Some 'moderate constructivists' (both in PoS and IR) say that we can, by understanding the socially constructed context of action, gain a better understanding of social reality, while others, 'radical constructivists', argue that no objective social reality can be said to exist in a socially constructed world.

But, are there political charges in the constructivist approach(es) to the social world? Arguably there are, which is why constructivism has been contentious among philosophers of social science. The first thing that can be noted is that because of its focus on analysis of inter-subjective normative frameworks, a strong emphasis emerges among (especially moderate) social constructivists on tracing the contours of existing 'normative consensus' in society, or in social sciences. This emphasis arguably has some affinities with classical liberal interests in understanding and facilitating social consensus, legitimate 'shared' norms, and social harmony (Kurki and Sinclair, forthcoming).

But Richard Price (2008) has gone as far as to argue that social constructivism, in IR at least, has a moral and political purpose, and in that it emphasises the possibility and desirability of moral and political progress through the study of change in normative contexts of social life. Can such a drive be identified in the social constructivist PoS more widely? It is a bold claim to maintain, but, arguably, we should at least recognise that the emphasis on open-ended and contingent forms of social interaction, and thereby the meta-theoretical challenge to the positivist tendency to reify social reality, can have important 'politically charged' consequences; it encourages optimism on the possibility of progress in human affairs and reinforces the role of people themselves in redirecting their interactions. If there are liberal predilections in constructivist research, then, it is not inconceivable that they gain, in important senses, support from the very meta-theoretical premises of social constructivist PoS.

Of course, views of the politics of social constructivism differ. Crucially, some philosophers of science are unhappy with the directions that social constructivist principles push social research. Many critical realists, for example, point out that the classically 'social constructivist' meta-theoretical focus on studying the predominant rules and norms that agents work with, and how social agency brings normative change and consensus about, can leave out from view aspects of social reality that others, critical theorists for example, would like to focus on, for example, the material and structural context of normative consensus (Joseph, 2007; Kurki, 2008). Social constructivists can come to see, as Peter Winch (1990), a key interpretivist in the 20th century, recognised, a rather 'cozy'

social world *vis-a-vis* more structurally and materially inclined critical theorists/realists. Such tendencies, it has been suggested, arise also in part because of the meta-theoretical emphasis of many social constructivists on the ‘mutual constitution’ of agency and structure in society. Not only does this notion suggest that agents are somehow ‘equal’ actors, but also it highlights agents, rather than structures, as key movers in society, again a tendency central to liberal theories (Kurki and Sinclair, forthcoming). This is, arguably, why the precise formulation of the agency–structure relation has gained such interest among the critical realists.

Moreover, it should be noted that the tendencies towards liberal progressivism within constructivism has also generated disagreement between different factions of ‘constructivism broadly conceived’. There is, of course, among social constructivists, a disagreement between the so-called radical social constructivists who emphasise relativism of all knowledge, and the more ‘moderate’ social constructivists who wish to retain a belief in some form of at least small-t truths. This disagreement at the heart of social constructivism (both as PoS and IR theory) is, I would argue, deeply politically charged, and related precisely to the question of whether social constructivism can/should be progressive; it is, arguably, because of their belief in moral progress (or at least their reluctance to give up on it) that some constructivists maintain the importance of being able to make judgements about the reality and desirability of some norms over others, whereas others reject this in favour of a more politically pluralist politics (see discussion of poststructuralism below).

Politics of constructivism are not straightforward, but, nevertheless, it seems that constructivism, as an IR theory and as a philosophy of social science, is not void of normative and political leanings or charges, even if many constructivists may remain oblivious to such leanings. And it is also because of the potential for political charging of either relativist or liberal kind that critical theorists and critical realists have been critical of social constructivism (Keat, 1981: 4).

Pragmatism: primacy of pluralist politics

What about pragmatism, a PoS that has made a powerful return to IR in recent years, and one which (while not discussed in their piece) could be seen to underpin Monteiro and Ruby’s ‘prudential attitude’?⁵ The politics of pragmatism are rarely discussed in IR, but it should not be forgotten

⁵ Just like pragmatists, Monteiro and Ruby emphasise pragmatic knowledge, avoidance of truth-seeking philosophical foundations and pluralism as a core safe guard of socially useful and trustworthy knowledge.

that pragmatism is not, nor did it claim to be, an apolitical PoS position. Pragmatist philosophers, from Dewey to Rorty, have always been open about their political predilections; they are liberal pluralists. Core concern for them is maintaining open debate on social and political realities (Rorty, 1989, 1991).

Arguably, this liberal political ethos is fundamental to pragmatist PoS; it is reflected in the adoption of an anti-foundationalist stance to truth, an open-ended approach to method, and a non-committal, or as Rorty would have it, 'ironic' attitude to political and philosophical commitments. At the same time, pluralist politics is also advocated because pragmatists believe that the best chance we have of gaining good, pragmatic knowledge is by maintaining a form of philosophical and political pluralism. Philosophical, pragmatic, and political viewpoints become intertwined in pragmatism. These liberal pluralist undertones, while (necessarily) open on specific political worldviews, should not be forgotten by those in IR who wish to turn to pragmatism. Nor should we ignore the very similar political tendencies in poststructuralism. If not openly 'liberal' in their stance, poststructuralists also argue for open-ended pluralist politics. It is precisely this 'philosophical' priority, of course, that the critical realists, as well as some positivists, find so politically problematic; it generates, for them, conservative political tendencies.

What this discussion seems to suggest is that pragmatist philosophy of science as well as poststructuralism are despite their avoidance of committing to specific philosophical or political positions, also 'politically charged'; their viewpoint prioritise a particular political ethos, if not particular political views (this would be impossible by definition). 'Let thousands flowers bloom' is the answer to social knowledge, social life, and social problems. Universalist and essentialist statements to fixed truths are dangerous – philosophically but ultimately politically.

The complex politics of positivism

Is it only the 'critical' PoS positions that have political motivations and consequences built into them? I do not think so. The politics of positivism are very interesting, if rarely openly addressed.

Positivist PoS is based on the analysis of society on the basis of deductive logic of objective scientific method, search for law-like regularities, and focus on strictly observable objects. This has often, although not necessarily, gone hand in hand with support for a methodologically individualist approach. But, what do positivist principles mean for moral and political frameworks of thought theorists work with? Interestingly, they may mean a variety of different things. Critical theorists argue that

positivism is an anti-revolutionary PoS that maintains a belief in liberal-conservative, and for them, oppressive societal structures. They point out that positivist assumptions about law-like regularities reify the social world, making present social systems appear natural. Positivists' emphasis on atomistic ontology and efficient causality on the other hand has, it is argued, tended to bolster, or at least have productively failed to contradict, core liberal assumptions of individualism, voluntarism, and linear 'progressivism'. Focus on instrumental and empirical knowledge, moreover, is seen to render science the manipulation-enabling tool of dominant social forces in which alternative forms of reasoning or self-consciousness are disabled.

Yet, it is important to note that this reading is far from unproblematic. Not all positivists have been liberals, certainly right-wing liberals. Some have in fact been self-avowed socialists, others reform liberals. Indeed, interestingly, as Keat (1981) and Fuller (2004) have argued, positivism, at least in its insistence on commonly accepted criteria for scientific knowledge, can also be seen as a defence of democratic social control over science and of transformational 'emancipatory' social change. Positivist insistence on objectivity of science then need not entail right-wing or conservative liberalism only, but is also consistent with reform liberalism and social democratic notions. There is no singular political interpretation of positivism then. Yet, this does not mean there is no politics arising from positivism, or that the political charge of positivism has not been important for positivists (see e.g. Popper, 1966).

Significance of paying attention to politics of PoS

The reflections above have been brief and suggestive; many of the claims above are open to challenge, not least by the representatives of the schools of thought in question. Yet, it seems that we should at least remain open to the proposition that PoS positions can have certain political predilections built into them. However, some important caveats are in order:

First, I would still maintain that political viewpoints, certainly on specific issues, cannot simply be 'read-off' meta-theory (Wendt, 1999: 6). PoS positions are underdetermining of specific thought processes of individuals. Thus, it is not simply the case that a theorist that applies a positivist PoS becomes a liberal overnight or one that resorts to critical realism becomes a Marxist; but it does mean that there are certain kinds of avenues of inquiry and explanatory interests that are more natural within some PoS positions than others. For example, the study of capitalism as a causally efficacious relational social structure, of interest to (post-)Marxists, makes more sense within critical realism than (at least

methodologically individualist) positivism. So does the feminist study of 'gender roles' within social constructivism or critical realism. PoS positions are underdetermining of specific political viewpoints, certainly on specific issues; yet, it would be foolish to assume that they are not constraining and enabling in important senses.

Second, it may be difficult to concretely identify political positions embedded in PoS. This is not only because we have been discouraged from paying attention to this aspect of PoS, but also because there may not be any simple interpretations to be had of the politics of PoS positions. We must also note that it can also be difficult to identify the 'political charge' of positions because our own philosophical and political reasoning may be difficult to decipher and internally contradictory. Indeed, we should not forget that even in everyday political debates, our political commitments and forms of reasoning can be multi-directional and often even confused. It follows that in IR PoS debates too, there may be not only implicit but also contradictory political charges at work. Thus, it is possible, for example, that social constructivists perceive themselves as critical transformationalists, while at the same time reproducing 'socially conformist' knowledge. Critical realists may be paradoxically philosophically reliant on objectivist arguments precisely because of reasoning that is politically charged.

Third, we should note that it may of course be the case that not all PoS arguments are necessarily as politically important or politically laced as others. Arguments about the existence of reality or over the idea of structural causation may be more political than specific methodological debates. Arguments about objectivity may be more charged than discussions of commensurability. Not all PoS debate is necessarily or has to be interpreted as politicised, and certainly not intentionally politicised.

These caveats are important. But, why should we, despite them, recognise the political aspects of PoS debate? First, because it allows us to understand why PoS has been an important area in IR to consider. PoS, as it is suggested by the discussion here, is not just an abstract field for the philosophically minded, but an area where political debate in IR can be, in important ways, grounded. This is because differing views of the ontological objects of science or differing epistemological emphases can constrain and enable the kind of social and political relations scholars see, how they analyse power relations, and consequently, their views on desirable forms of political action. Thus, although it may seem for a constructivist or a positivist that his choice of meta-theoretical position is politically neutral, this may be a rather naïve conclusion to accept. It is not only naïve, it misses how philosophical systems of thought and conceptual choices can come to enable and constrain (or

reflect – determining causal connections is surely difficult) the direction of our wider thinking.

Second, and crucially for the current symposium, paying heed to the politics of PoS allows us to understand why debate on PoS is bound to continue in IR even in the absence of any ‘single meta-theoretical framework’, and, indeed, why such debate is important. Monteiro and Ruby are right to emphasise the importance of thinking about meta-theoretical frameworks in IR in more tentative and plural terms. Yet, with the politics of PoS, in mind, we may understand their argument in somewhat different light. Two comments are in order.

First, if PoS positions are political, this may be why they are often rather strongly and, indeed, passionately held. PoS positions and the leaps of faith involved may be wrapped up (even if unconsciously) with the political worldviews and interests people have, and hence can be embraced on ‘extraphilosophical’, as well as purely ‘philosophical’ grounds. If this is the case, to call for tentative PoS debate maybe desirable (especially from a ‘pragmatist’ pluralist viewpoint), but it may also be somewhat unrealistic.

Second, and crucially, it may be the case that the importance of Monteiro and Ruby’s argument for ‘prudential attitude’ lies neither in that we hold PoS positions tentatively, nor in the consistency of the philosophical justifications for such a move (on pragmatist or any other lines), but rather in their position’s ability to maintain and foster not only philosophical pluralism but also thereby indirectly political pluralism of perspectives in IR theorising. Instead of feeling frustrated of PoS debates and seeking to curb them, I would suggest that it is precisely because of the many disagreements that PoS debates are important. They can provide a lively source of difference in political views and argumentation in IR – and that is why they are so interesting and important in IR. Emphasis on pluralism for me, however, does not mean that IR theorists or any philosopher of science should have qualms about holding PoS positions ‘strongly’. Political views (and philosophical views) are often held strongly, and this, I would suggest, is not a bad thing. It follows that disagreement on philosophical matters too is quite natural and desirable. PoS debates, however, matter and they do so, even if (and especially if) they are confrontational; they provide, even if indirectly and in complex ways, an important grounding for political forms of argumentation in IR theory.

Conclusion

The recognition of politics of meta-theory may add fuel to the fire of some of the critics of PoS debates in IR, and may lead to some suggestions that we ‘do away’ with this level of debate altogether. If all positions are

political, they are also relative. Yet, we should remember that politics is not the enemy of PoS argumentation and, indeed, of social science. Even if political consequences are embedded in philosophical argumentation, this does not mean the philosophy is valueless. Philosophical debate is not only unavoidable but, like science, can be politically charged and still produce informative and persuasive knowledge about the conditions of specific forms of activity or thought (for excellent discussion on politics in science, see Harding, 1991). We should, however, try to gain a better understanding of the politics of PoS, for it seems that they are poorly understood and also rather complex. Staying open to the possibility that political undercurrents may be at play in PoS debates provides us with a new angle to evaluating PoS debates in IR, but also to assessing Monteiro and Ruby's claims. They are right to claim that PoS debates are, indeed, full of 'leaps of faith'. Yet, I am not convinced that this is a bad thing, or even avoidable. What is crucial, instead, is that we remain attuned to the possibility that we may (for various extraphilosophical as well as philosophical reasons) be more inclined to take some leaps of faith than others and that socially and politically consequential leanings may arise from the leaps we do take.

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