

## Staging a Battle, Losing the Wars? International Studies, 'Science' and the Neoliberalisation of the University

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In this short response to Patrick Jackson's absorbing and provocative keynote at a very enjoyable *Millennium* conference, I want to highlight some problems with the arguments presented therein for the logical distinctiveness of 'science', before briefly reflecting on the neoliberal pressures on universities globally and how these interact with 'diversity' issues. Speculatively, I want to suggest that they may be connected in this historical moment.

At the outset I should say I do genuinely appreciate and welcome the *practical* effect of Jackson's interventions in philosophy of science for our discipline – the stories of graduate students waving the *Conduct of Inquiry* book at unfriendly dissertation committees are to be broadly celebrated, to that extent that it helps overturn rigid, unthinking neopositivist intellectual prejudices about what 'inquiry' should look like.<sup>1</sup> But, I hope there are very few of those left in the field,<sup>2</sup> and if you're already reading *Millennium*, chances are you don't need to hear the story for those reasons. For those already sold on the critique of positivism, it is the *intellectual* story of logical incommensurability as a basis for pluralism that has been controversial, for reasons already articulated in this journal by Wight and others.<sup>3</sup> Others, myself included, have interrogated the reasoning behind the ideal-types presented in that project elsewhere.<sup>4</sup>

Moving on from *CoI*, in this keynote the central argument made is for *the logical* distinctiveness of 'epistemic knowing' – or 'science' or the 'knowing-that' of 'facts' – from other kinds of knowing.<sup>5</sup> According to Jackson, all of those kinds of knowing

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<sup>1</sup> See Jackson's rejoinder to the *Millennium* forum on his book for an extension of this rationale. Jackson, Patrick Thaddeus. 'Preparing the Ground for a More Hospitable International Relations'. *Millennium - Journal of International Studies* 41, no. 2 (1 January 2013): 367–78.

<sup>2</sup> And if not, please, do whatever you need to do to diminish their power over you.

<sup>3</sup> Wight, Colin. 'The Dualistic Grounding of Monism: Science, Pluralism and Typological Truncation'. *Millennium - Journal of International Studies* 41, no. 2 (1 January 2013): 326–45; Chernoff, Fred. 'Science, Progress and Pluralism in the Study of International Relations'. *Millennium - Journal of International Studies* 41, no. 2 (1 January 2013): 346–66. Humphreys, Adam R. C. 'Applying Jackson's Methodological Ideal-Types: Problems of Differentiation and Classification'. *Millennium - Journal of International Studies* 41, no. 2 (1 January 2013): 290–308.

<sup>4</sup> *The Disorder of Things* blog forum on Jackson's *The Conduct of Inquiry*; <http://thedisorderofthings.com/symposia/>

<sup>5</sup> To a certain extent the title of the paper is misleading, it deals little with the broader purposes of international studies, but extensively with the relative qualities of different 'flavours' of knowing.

might contribute to interesting and useful knowledge about the international, but they are not all 'epistemic knowing'. We should be open to these other kinds of knowing in international studies, and to some extent perhaps we already are. However, we should not confuse these types of knowing with each other philosophically.

In fact, there are two lines of argument for the distinctiveness of 'epistemic knowing' in the piece – one is for the distinctiveness of scientific *practice* as emphasising 'systematic claims', 'public scrutiny' and 'worldliness', and the other is for the character of scientific *knowing* as being characteristically 'detached' and 'impersonal'. Working with these as ideal-types, Jackson argues that they will not perfectly map onto actual *practice*, but provide *logically* distinctive characteristics of 'epistemic knowing' / 'science'.

This logical defence of 'science' might be distinguished from its *sociological* defence, gestured to in the response here by Iver Neumann, in which 'science' is more a genre, a community, operating in a specific way with as many technical and aesthetic attributes as other kinds of fields which are integral to its practices.<sup>6</sup> Inanna Hamati-Ataya has made this case in much more depth elsewhere in *Millennium* with regard to IR theory in particular as well as 'science' in general.<sup>7</sup> I would support this line of reasoning, and add that in addition, the logical distinctiveness of 'science' as proposed by Jackson cannot be sustained (actually, as opposed to its self-conscious objectives, technical habits and aesthetics, which arguably *are* distinctive).

In part, this is because on the first line of argument regarding method, at least both the requirements for 'worldliness' and 'public scrutiny' are integral to all the other kinds of knowledge Jackson proposes – aesthetic, technical, normative.<sup>8</sup> Regarding the 'systematicity' of claims, this is a little more complex and task-dependent, and also dependent on the expectations of the observer / evaluator. Is Roger Federer's knowledge of tennis not 'systematic'? Monet's knowledge of how to represent light? Buddha's knowledge of the ego? Are they more or less 'systematic' than Wendt's conception of the conduct of states?<sup>9</sup> Are they less 'worldly', or less amenable to public scrutiny? At very least, these criteria on their own cannot be used to argue for

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<sup>6</sup> See Neumann, 'Must International Studies Be a Science? Yes', this issue.

<sup>7</sup> Hamati-Ataya, Inanna. 'IR Theory as International Practice / Agency: A Clinical-Cynical Bourdieusian Perspective'. *Millennium - Journal of International Studies* 40, no. 3 (1 June 2012): 625–46.

<sup>8</sup> As an aside, it's not clear that Jackson doesn't confuse 'writing about art' with 'producing aesthetic knowledge' – under his schema these should be different things.

<sup>9</sup> See also Wight's query about the systematic knowledge of one who has read the cinema listings, 'Dualistic Grounding', p. 342.

the *logical* distinctiveness of what 'science' is doing. For those leading their respective fields of knowing, I would suggest that the expectations for systematicity – understood here as some form of rigour – and accountability to the relevant communities are shared dynamics.

What about when we turn to the new matrix offered by PTJ, distinguishing the 'engaged' from the 'detached', and the 'impersonal' from the 'value-perspectival'? This on first glance appears to resonate with Weber's argument that 'even a Chinese' – by which Weber means a moral alien – should accept the validity of scientific reasoning, and that must be its aspiration. But on further inspection, all this means is that the logic of the knowledge has to be in principle specifiable and transparent in such a way as to make sense to someone currently uninitiated – and, frankly we can also say this of tennis, and art, and spirituality, and any form of knowledge which attracts a community of followers and a space of reasoning about that knowledge. One does not have to believe in the principles behind that form of knowledge to understand how its conclusions are reached. The existence of religious cults or artistic or political movements in which some people are 'brainwashed' (i.e. have suspended their critical reasoning) does not mean that people do *not* have rigorous and reasoned intellectual disagreements about the nature of religious teaching or art or politics which are comprehensible to newly-initiated and 'morally alien' outsiders. Conversely, the fact that the validity of statistical tables is not immediately transparent to an uninitiated onlooker does not mean that they may not become so by virtue of training and so forth. All knowledges require that people undergo forms of initiation, education and deliberation.

Moreover, for reasons that PTJ himself elaborates through reference to Sandra Harding's critique of intellectual sexism, the failure to explicitly deal with the situated and embodied (i.e. *always-somehow engaged* and *value-perspectival*) character of scientific inquiry and its pretensions to disinterested universality are highly pernicious - in practice de-legitimising a key *intellectual* basis for expanding the kinds of people included in research on 'society'. A huge frustration for many 'reflexive' scholars is the philosophical insulation the mainstream has constructed for itself via the affectation of disinterestedness and 'impersonal' conduct, which inhibits the kind of 'public scrutiny' ethos we might find desirable in science. For example, feminist arguments that most of economics is only concerned with the position of waged labourers, firms and capitalists and systematically misses out the work and redistributive efforts of unwaged women *should have* revolutionised the 'science' of economics if it aspired to being a worldly, systematic, impersonal, universalisable accounting of 'facts' about the distribution of goods and services. But it didn't. Most

economists made *zero* adjustments to their models and theories. So what can we conclude? Either, economics is not *really* a science because it structurally lacks the capacity to make its claims systematic and publicly accountable, and/or most economists at most institutions do not engage in 'scientific inquiry'... Or – and as already indicated – what we call 'science' in practice is not actually accounted for by *the philosophical distinctiveness of the kind of knowledge it produces*. We might say that we have ourselves expressed values of public accountability, reproducibility etc but these values are neither *logically distinctive* about what we do, nor structurally embedded in what we do.<sup>10</sup>

Why does this matter? Why rehearse this fairly standard critique now for our readers? In part, this is occasioned by the fact of being engaged in this dialogue, perhaps with some new readers if we are lucky. The other, and more important, answer is because we need to think about how the ways in which we understand 'science' interact with the global political conditions and pressures upon the university system in the present, in which the ideals of public education, academic freedom and democratic contestation are being chipped away.

There is much here to say and think about, for which there is little space and time, but two issues of interest may give us pause for thought on what we do when we fight the 'science' wars.

First, the context for this 'science anxiety' is one where the 'hard' sciences are dominating public funding and attention, with arts, humanities and social sciences becoming increasingly de-valued as sites of public knowledge. This is because they are perceived as having potentially marketable value to the private sector, contributing to a high-tech 'knowledge economy', and having 'impact'. This is accompanied by the increasing commodification of higher education, the turning of students into consumers (via the institution of indebtedness) and the pressures to evaluate pedagogy via specific and fairly uniform observable 'outputs'. By fighting for a definitional fiat for social sciences as 'science', perhaps we are trying to avoid the fates of our colleagues in arts and humanities. Yet, we are also perhaps buying into the logic of thinking of 'science' as something which must be both 'applied' by 'user groups' and otherwise marketable. This runs against the spirit of democratic contestation and critical thinking which I would argue represents the best potential use for the kind of research and teaching in which we are engaged. This requires us

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<sup>10</sup> A brief illustrative anecdote on the frustrations of the 'reflexive' scholar: I was once asked at a job interview whether my work wasn't too 'political'... by a professor who had written speeches for a government in favour of a humanitarian bombing campaign.

to be able to explicitly take forward our expressions of political 'citizenship' (in whatever sphere) within the context of our knowledge production spaces.

Second, an insulated pluralism, in which we rapidly proliferate texts and sub-fields during the 'incommensurability' ceasefire, is also implicated in the extent to which corporate publishers have managed to exert a substantial grip over the academy, consuming much of the diminishing research funds that we have in an expanded array of journal subscriptions. This is not to say that this pluralism has had no value; on the contrary, it is almost certainly the case that under conditions where specific orthodoxies are hegemonic, there needs to be space to cultivate other approaches. But at what cost? At the same time, processes such as the REF make it necessary for academics to pursue specific forms of 'output' for their research in the form of regular peer-reviewed journal articles, increasing the demand for such outlets. We should be cautious of the ways in which our 'pluralism' and 'diversity' is sold back to us as the academy and its funding are being transformed.

To conclude, I am not saying that Jackson is somehow responsible for the neoliberalisation of the academy. On the contrary, he is one of the many fantastic colleagues that makes it a much more congenial place to work. Whilst I disagree here with the argument given in the keynote regarding the logical distinctiveness of science, I think it is necessary to raise the question so that we may confront the public role and purpose of academic endeavours. But, if we are having that conversation, we cannot do so without a look beyond our immediate academic institutional horizons, and a thought for whom and for what our intellectual pluralism serves. When we look at the political context in which the contemporary university exists, and the forces which are transforming it inside and out, we cannot afford to remain 'detached' from the outcomes.