

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: WHICH WAY?

Interview with prof. George Anglițoiu (National School of Political and Administrative Studies)

1. What is essential for a specialist in the field of International Relations?

Truthfulness and awareness, in order to be in real contact with the complicated dynamics of IR.

Historical comprehension and moral compass, in order to contain the temptation of pragmatism and conformism.

Anticipation and contingency planning, in order to strategize adequately.

2. Taking into consideration the main events of the last few years, which seems to be the most relevant IR school of thought at the moment?

Please allow me to be subjective and bring forth my own, called Focalism.

Focalism is not the traditional kind of theoretical thinking based on left, centre or right ideological positioning. Focalism is about what matters the most and drives outcomes.

Etymologically, it starts with Focal as origin and trigger of most important and recurrent ideas related to decision-making and doing.

Focal point, idea, belief, sentiment, fear, pleasure, reason, centre, vision are all included as potential representations of what Focalism means, based on accounts of History.

Focalism is about old and new, good and bad, balanced and irrational, conscient and oneiric, coherent and disjointed, memorable and fleeting.

When applied to International Relations it should be used as a tool for understanding victory and defeat, achievement and failure, positive and negative, at larger scale than the usual realm of domestic politics.

POLITICAL STUDIES FORUM

This thesis is about showing theoretical and practical skills at nurturing minds and wills towards academic endeavours with benefits for betterment of communities through foreign policy and international relations. But this thesis should also be about a personal mark on IR studies, enough to qualify its contributor as Author.

Focalism is meant as a toolkit for understanding both decision-making and action-doing. Science has evolved throughout the ages and has become sciences, including those of the mind. The neurosciences are very popular these days, being quite the money-makers for the practitioners who promote them by training of public servants and corporate personnel alike.

My approach is not competent to delve inside but will use some of their concepts in order to argue.

The human brain is of course under study, and its two main components, the old and the new brain, have been very much related to Security by these new sciences. Human personality has been defined and redefined: either you are a rationalist or an empathiser, a harmoniser or a rebel, systemiser or a disrupter, new words have been accepted, at least, by the alternative, wiki-like dictionaries in recognition of the evolution of such sciences about the neuronal life of humans.

Great scientists of the past, such as Aristoteles and Hegel (for instance), have tried to tackle essential issues like time, wisdom, pattern, recurrence, thesis, antithesis and synthesis. But in the end, to have and to hold and to endure in politics is about each actor's capacity to focus on what to think, understand, communicate and do. Schooled or not, trained or not, wise or self-confident, unilateralist or multilateralist, humans engaged in politics have to focus. Not constantly but nonetheless doing it. And that is what matters the most: the repetitive centre of important, must-have, essential, vital or whatever. And this drives us back to the aforementioned connection of Security with the old and new brains.

Security, with capital letter, because it is this common and overused word that has come to represent quite the magical concept for almost everything hard to explain but decisive, especially in high politics.

Thus, is not the new brain but the old, reptilian one, which connects us with the most security-related actions and reactions of humans. Basic needs, instincts, primary actions and reactions are all related to the reptilian brain of survival.

The new brain of evolution, outcome of education and personal development matters but is constantly superseded by the reptilian brain when dealing with ultimate positioning about a must-have thing.

It is beyond the goals of this thesis and skills of its author to re-write the theory and practice of International Relations. But Focalism will draw the reader's attention towards the importance of self-observance, discipline and hybris.

Since the days of early history writing both Chinese and Greek scholars had been committed to explanation of the past, especially of expansion, hegemony, rivalry, victory and failure. Throughout time, but especially in the modern and contemporary ages of Science, politics and policies have been analysed in order to capture the essence of personality-power mix.

It is this author's scientific creed that regardless of all attributes of knowledge, when the fateful moment comes the decision-maker is focused on few ideas and values. Not all of history is representative for a focused mind and body but the quintessence of human/political personality is to be embedded in selective glimpses and episodes. Hence the recurrence studied by the scholars to whom I pledge my allegiance: Arnold Toynbee and Neagu Djuvara.

When such a speculative brand of Philosophy of History meets International Relations, the result could be Focalism, meaning an interest in pointing out what drives especially the most ambitious, action-driven leaders at state, regional, continental, global levels.

Abstract words like form, substance, essence, structure, universal and persistence have been dealt with by Platon, Aristotle, Kant or Wittgenstein. But neither of them was directly involved in impacting political life, the closest nonetheless being Aristotle with his tutoring of Alexander Macedon, the Great.

"The totality of existing states of affairs is the world" makes one of Wittgenstein's key ideas. Facts, things, reality, and the world have defined his Picture theory of language. But when compared to Talleyrand's Memoirs, Kissinger's Diplomacy or Brzezinski's Grand Chessboard, the reader is puzzled by the prosaic of International Relations as the by-product of prioritisation of adversity.

Focalism deals not only with ambition, honour, prestige and eagerness to be successful but also with anxiety as focal element of not losing the already achieved

level of power or the promise of it. Therefore, especially when dealing with anarchy⁴, prioritisation of adversity is my take on the famous adagio “the enemy of my enemy is my friend”, leading to the following adaptation of it: Of my enemies, the less of an enemy who is more of an enemy to my most of an enemy is my friend.

A great political idea, at least in the mind of the decision-maker in International Relations, with the potential of being “ideal”, could be the Platonist universal form awaiting correct transposition. Aristotelian essence versus universal or not, International Relations are not autonomous of political humans making them. Also, states as main actors of International Relations are less institutions/primary substances and more people-centric and being. “L’état c’est moi” and “après moi/nous le déluge” may be short depictions of absolutist rule/image of it. But linked with so many other proofs of verbal or practical (need of) grandeur, History of International Relations appear more as large scale (if successful) transpositions of a few focused facts or things, than the Wittgenstein-like “sum-total of reality is the world”.

In conclusion, Focalism could be defined as the theory and practice of thinking, communicating, deciding and doing based on a focal centre as the top/main reason, representation and goal of power.

The focal centre consists of points and is usually recurrent, brief in description and easy to use. It could be subject to change when matters of security determine or affect the success of achieving, maintaining or justifying the use of power. Focalist decision-making can use temporary and/or pseudo-focal points meant to opportunistically conceal or preempt the real focal centre, thus protecting the inner self of reasoning and belief.

3. Why does the contribution of an IR expert matter today?

Because you can compare it with the position of pilot in classic maritime navigation at high seas: someone with proper competencies should be in charge of reading correctly the „nautical chart” of tensions, disputes and conflicts, in order to

⁴ E.g. the post-Bayazid I Ottoman and regional age of rivalry between his sons, analysed in a joint chapter with my Father, Prof. Gheorghe Anglițoiu: *The Pivot Foreign Policy of Mircea the Elder - Tismana, 1406* in Constantin Hlihor, Bogdan Antoniu, Alin Matei (eds.) - *Scripta Historica In Memoriam Professoris Emeriti Constantin Buse*, Editura Universitatii din Bucuresti, Bucuresti, 2021, pp. 455-482, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3940427

overcome high winds and storms, steer properly, and reach the calm waters of peace and security.

4. How do you interpret the long-term impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on IR studies going forward?

Ten years ago, I started introducing two concepts: Putinization and Weimarization. The former has recently been used by prestigious media outlets (Le Monde, The Atlantic, The New Yorker) in order to characterize the mimetic effect of Putin-like style of fated leadership and hegemony-seeking on the current American presidency. Meanwhile, I utilize the latter to describe the cyclical pattern of comeback to old times of golden age which cannot happen because democracy and respect for peaceful cohabitation, domestically and abroad, stand in the way of visionary leaders, bent on violent transformation but with no real conceptualization of tolerance for diversity and opposite views.

Trump's real estate geostrategic mentality and action has been fuelled and inspired by the stratocratic approach used by Putin, special operations being needed to fix historical wrongs against the countries led by this new, offensive breed of totalist overlords. In simple words, usually making one state great again means to belittle at least another state, and thence you get the unrestricted cause of conflict.

Weimarization when mixed with Putinization means the squeeze between extremes and incoming failure of consumerist, liberal democracies to cope with the making of History by Nietzsche-like, but twisted, unilateral will to power, crowned by the triumph of autocratic, hybris-driven power.

5. How do you see the future role of the European Union in the context of the contemporary transatlantic relationship?

20 years ago, I wrote my PhD thesis about EU security based on my MA thesis, the first in Romania about the Common Foreign and Security Policy. What I said then is still valid now: the EU cannot remain complacent, cannot postpone the effective establishment of an EU army based on a solid, autonomous defence industrial base. I spoke then about the risk of falling into desuetude for NATO (under the impact the Neo-conservative Bush jr. Administration), and the need for a German democratic comeback into the fold of responsible management of EU security. More than 10 years

ago, I wrote another piece about the need for an EU full-fledged intelligence service, an imperative structure which is still missing.

In a nutshell, my answer is: federalize the EU security, even in the variant of structured permanent cooperation among willing and able member states, or risk dissolution and subordination to the new medieval, global, conflictual-prone “Rome” no. X of the future.

6. Lastly, how do you see the change of IR studies in a world increasingly impacted by artificial intelligence?

I do not know. Let's ask ChatGPT! I am joking, of course.

Teachers and researchers alike will face serious challenges about still being relevant on the market of IR studies. For the first time in the history of thinking, a third, artificial party is fast becoming an archiver and net contributor to the overall field of social sciences. For IR, the challenge will be particularly tough because in a world of excessive information, systematization and insight will be needed in order to still be relevant and persuasive. The key difference that human experts could still make will be in the realm of pedagogy and linking between theory and practice.