

Advancing a Reflexive International Relations

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Abstract

This article advances a call for greater reflexivity in International Relations (IR) to uncover various intellectual and political biases that may obscure the research process. Inspired by existing reflexive practices in IR and, in particular, Pierre Bourdieu's use of such a method, it argues that reflexivity matters for enhancing ethically grounded research, in terms of not only the choice of subjects to study, but also how specific problems are treated, and hence what kind of results can be expected. However, the argument also goes beyond the appeal to autobiographical reflexivity to embrace other dimensions. This includes attention to institutional forces that shape the agency of the scholar and, in turn, the complex relationship between the academy and the wider political world. In the most ambitious sense, the potential for reflexivity can also be conceived collectively in terms of activist intellectuals who seek to reward reflexive practices through dialogue and political intervention. The social space of international trade politics is taken as an empirical example.

Keywords

Bourdieu, international trade, knowledge, methodology, objectivity, reflexivity

When scholars identify themselves as studying international politics, they are frequently bound to, or rely on, certain epistemological commitments, which may or may not be made explicit to the reader or, indeed, appreciated by the author. In an effort to understand the political world, researchers draw upon their existing visions and dispositions, but such conceptions and habits may result from, and be shaped by, what they are trying to describe and explain. The struggle for objectivity can thus be characterised as an enduring problem which colours the relationship between the scholar and the research object. Yet within the study of International Relations (IR), one is often struck by how the field has tended to lack a sociology of itself, including its participants and multiple

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relations with political agents and forces.¹ This is particularly surprising when one considers how IR has experienced a general turn towards more sociological theories and ideas, to the point where constructivism has become a mainstream conceptual approach. But when it comes to turning those techniques of sociology upon themselves, to critically interrogate their own interested actions as cultural producers, many IR analysts are silent. This arguably presents a problem for the examination of world politics. If every scholar carries with them their own social histories, political inclinations and ideological biases, how can we control for such factors in the research process? How do we minimise the danger that such socialisation may remain hidden from others and yet inform various research choices? In short, how can we objectify the IR theorist for the purposes of enhancing the science of objectivity?

In this article, I seek to explore these problems and propose an agenda for the practice of methodological reflexivity in IR. As the term suggests, to be reflexive is to actively ‘turn or bend back’, to take account of the self in relation to other subjects and objects. In broad terms, one can identify this basic research posture in the work of different IR scholars, particularly those who have addressed issues of gender and other critical perspectives. In debating the concept, I discuss these contributions and how such writers have conceived of the idea of reflexivity. I will argue that an investment in learning reflexivity could reap rewards for two main reasons. Firstly, at the most basic level, reflexivity matters for good research, in terms of not only identifying the choice of subjects and issues to study, but also how the specific problems are treated and, hence, what kind of results can be expected.² Secondly, and of equal importance, a reflexive orientation can help reveal how the interested actions of IR theorists can be positioned in relation to a broader struggle for recognition and authority, a struggle which operates within both the academy and the political arena. Advancing the method of reflexivity in IR thus bears upon how we conceive of the politics of dialogue, including questions regarding the legitimation of IR knowledge; the barriers to communication within certain power relations; and the potential means by which critical discourses may be strengthened. In particular, practising the craft of reflexivity matters if IR scholars are to tease out the subtle ways in which the field may be informed by larger institutional and discursive structures of power.

At the same time, in terms of a more distinctive contribution, the article also seeks to draw inspiration from the work of Pierre Bourdieu and his ‘signature obsession’ throughout his career with developing the reflexive method.³ Although Bourdieu was an extremely ambitious scholar who made an important contribution to the social sciences and humanities, the examination of his work in IR has only recently become a focus of

1. Ole Wæver, ‘The Sociology of a Not So International Discipline: American and European Developments in International Relations’, *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (1998): 687–727; Steve Smith, ‘The United States and the Discipline of International Relations: “Hegemonic Country, Hegemonic Discipline”’, *International Studies Review* 4, no. 2 (2002): 67–86; and Arlene B. Tickner and Ole Wæver, eds, *International Relations Scholarship around the World* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009).
2. Anna Leander, ‘Do We Really Need Reflexivity in IPE? Bourdieu’s Two Reasons for Answering Affirmatively’, *Review of International Political Economy*, 9, no. 4 (2002): 601–9.
3. Loïc Wacquant, ‘Toward a Social Praxeology: The Structure and Logic of Bourdieu’s Sociology’, in *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, eds Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 36.

attention. Within these discussions, however, a particular focus on the notion of reflexivity is almost non-existent. Bourdieu is certainly not the first or only scholar to invoke the idea of reflexivity; for instance, in sociology, one can find similar formulations and traces in the work of Émile Durkheim, George Herbert Mead and Alvin Gouldner.⁴ But his concern for continually testing the possibilities and pitfalls of the reflexive method makes him a useful resource for IR scholars. In particular, I will seek to explore how Bourdieu can offer IR theorists certain forms of guidance in terms of mastering the craft of reflexivity. This includes warnings on the risks of personal introspection, as well as the difficulties of building collective enterprises of critical scholars.

The article is divided into three parts. Firstly, I debate how IR theorists have explicitly or implicitly adopted the notion of reflexivity. Secondly, I examine Bourdieu's contribution to the literature. In the third part, I further ground the concept through a focus on the study of international trade politics and the extent to which understandings in this area could be enhanced through the method of reflexivity. I will suggest that reflexivity can be used to better reveal the internal logic of this important field and, in the process, gain a measure of freedom from some of the social determinants of intellectual practice.

Reflexivity in IR: Methodological Departures

For some researchers, this call for reflexivity may appear to be not so much a radical departure as a reaffirmation of existing tendencies and common attitudes. Under different concepts and guises, one can trace how the idea of 'being reflexive' has a long history in social theory and philosophy. The notion is clearly not monopolised by Bourdieu alone. At a deeper level, reflexivity speaks to debates within the philosophy of science, including questions on how subjects should be separated from the social world in order to provide a basis for knowledge claims. In Patrick Jackson's recent examination of a 'pluralist science of IR', he takes reflexivity as one of four major 'ideal-type' methodologies practised in the field (the others being neopositivism, critical realism and analyticism).⁵ Jackson draws upon different inspirations in order to historically ground the notion of reflexivity. For instance, one can see how Immanuel Kant characterised reason in terms of self-reflexive, intersubjective practices: it was only through critique that reason could examine itself and, hence, the proper authority of reason could be determined.⁶ Extending such logic, Georg Hegel argued that the subject arrived at self-consciousness through an awareness of others as self-conscious creatures who, moreover, appreciate each other as self-conscious entities.⁷ And for Karl Marx, critical theory was always driven by the need to raise the consciousness of workers on the destructive effects of capitalism, accepting the dominant ideology as a 'technical' or

4. Émile Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method* (London: Macmillan, 1982 [1895]); George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society: From the Perspective of a Social Behaviorist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934); and Alvin Gouldner, *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1971).

5. Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, *The Conduct of Inquiry in International Relations: Philosophy of Science and Its Implications for the Study of World Politics* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011).

6. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (London: Penguin, 2007 [1781]).

7. Georg W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977 [1807]).

‘natural’ thing, without attention to power relations, risked perpetuating alienation and false consciousness.⁸

In Jackson’s reading, the IR reflexive methodology is informed by similar central motivations: firstly, to ‘denaturalise’ the existing order and, secondly, to ‘provoke social change, by unsettling supposedly firm notions and freeing up the possibility for dialectical transformation’.⁹ Reflexivity thus centres on how the subject is viewed as imbricated within the social environment, or the ‘mind–world hook-up’ as Jackson expresses it, a position opposed to the mind–world separation found in the neopositivist tradition. Although not all IR scholars who reveal reflexive inclinations may use the precise term, one could say that they are conducting, in general terms, similar practices that Bourdieu supported, only under different names and frameworks. As a prelude to debating Bourdieu’s understanding of the method, this part is organised into a discussion of three distinct, but related, practices of reflexivity explored by IR researchers: autobiographical, institutional and collective. The theme of dialogue laces throughout these modes. In particular, the discussion pays attention to processes of legitimation and contestation within IR knowledge production and, specifically, the types of engagements researchers have among themselves and the wider political world.

Autobiographical Reflexivity

In different critical traditions of IR, one can find researchers who have sought to contextualise their own writing, particularly when they seek to explain to audiences their own research trajectory and how environmental circumstances have shaped certain enquiries. Feminist IR scholars have been key advocates of such approaches and are often found describing to readers ‘how they have been motivated to conduct projects that stem from their own lives and personal experiences’.¹⁰ For instance, in Carol Cohn’s classic account on being a feminist participant observer within a male-dominated US institute for nuclear arms control, she recounts her own initial inexperience and reflects upon the links between language, gendered presumptions and agenda-setting.¹¹ Elsewhere, Stephen Gill, as a neo-Gramscian, has remarked how his scholarly interests originally stemmed from not only observing a world of superpower rivalry, but also the ‘pernicious effects of the British class system’ which served to ‘forge a sense of injustice and resistance to illegitimate power that have been driving forces in much of my intellectual and political work’.¹² In other areas, in regards to studying civil society actors, Cecelia Lynch has argued that constructivist scholars have a duty to analyse their own positionality and how

8. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1974).

9. Jackson, *Conduct of Inquiry*, 201.

10. J. Ann Tickner, ‘What Is Your Research Program? Some Feminist Answers to International Relations Methodological Questions’, *International Studies Quarterly* 49, no. 1 (2005): 1–22, at 8. Also see Cynthia H. Enloe, *The Curious Feminist: Searching for Women in a New Age of Empire* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004); and Brooke A. Ackerly, Maria Stern and Jacqui True, eds, *Feminist Methodologies for International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

11. Carol Cohn, ‘Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals’, *Signs* 12, no. 4 (1987): 687–718.

12. Stephen Gill, *Power and Resistance in the New World Order* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 1–2.

‘all assumptions embody ethical ideas and judgements’.¹³ While in a larger and richer ‘autobiographical IR’ project led by Naeem Inayatullah, a series of authors sought to explore the limits of conventional social-scientific prose and how writing emerges out of ‘traumas, wounds, [and] needs’ that can be difficult to express.¹⁴ The desire for introspection, to expose personal struggles, and to use alternative narrative styles, in these examples, can take on an almost therapeutic purpose, particularly when it appears that research is intimately connected with the researcher’s sense of being. Indeed, in the view of Roxanne Lynn Doty, this potential of reflexive analysis to change academic writing has been highlighted as an exciting potential: ‘Including the self, accepting things like intuition and bodily sensations and felt experiences are bound to affect our choice of words and the way we put these words on paper’.¹⁵

However, notwithstanding these notable attempts, a critical appreciation of the role of the self within IR research is not a widespread practice across the field. Two reasons could be suggested here to explain this situation. Firstly, in the opinion of Morgan Brigg and Roland Bleiker, who have articulated a desire for an ‘autoethnographic’ IR, one needs to recognise how established methodological norms in the field tend to downplay the potential significance of the social conditions of the author.¹⁶ This is clearest in neo-positivistic approaches in which the values and ‘idiosyncratic’ decisions of the author, if acknowledged, become conceptually marginalised, in a purposeful move, from the research object.¹⁷ Thus, as Jackson has put it, if most IR scholars conduct some form of neopositivism, then for many of these researchers ‘good’ scholarship only acquires ‘rigour’ when the analyst adopts an objectivist gaze free from personality.¹⁸ But as Brigg and Bleiker rightly argue, one can also find this habit of autonomising the self in other IR approaches that are not inclined towards positivist techniques, indicating the presence of a wider disciplinary norm.¹⁹ Even where an aspect of autobiographical reflexivity is

13. Cecelia Lynch, ‘Reflexivity in Research on Civil Society: Constructivist Perspectives’, *International Studies Review* 10, no. 4 (2008): 708–21, at 712.

14. Naeem Inayatullah, ‘Falling and Flying: An Introduction’, in *Autobiographical International Relations: I, IR*, ed. Naeem Inayatullah (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 9. For an earlier and similar project involving leading IR scholars reflecting on their biographical trajectories, see Joseph Kruzel and James N. Rosenau, eds, *Journeys through World Politics: Autobiographical Reflections of Thirty Four Academic Travelers* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1989).

15. Roxanne Lynn Doty, ‘Autoethnography – Making Human Connections’, *Review of International Studies* 66, no. 4 (2010): 1047–50, at 1050. One can also draw a bridge between these debates on autoethnography and the agenda for studying emotions in international relations by Roland Bleiker and Emma Hutchison in ‘Fear no More: Emotions and World Politics’, *Review of International Studies* 34, S1 (2008): 115–35.

16. Morgan Brigg and Roland Bleiker, ‘Autoethnographic International Relations: Exploring the Self as a Source of Knowledge’, *Review of International Studies* 36, no. 3 (2010): 779–98. Other authors within the Brigg and Bleiker forum on autoethnography made similar points regarding the dominance of standard IR methodologies. See, for instance, Oded Löwenheim, ‘The “I” in IR: An Autoethnographic Account’, *Review of International Studies* 36, no. 4 (2010): 1023–45.

17. Gary King, Robert Keohane and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 14.

18. Jackson, *Conduct of Inquiry*.

19. Brigg and Bleiker, ‘Autoethnographic International Relations’.

explored, it is often limited in scope to, perhaps, no more than a paragraph.²⁰ For instance, in the cited Gill text, the class analysis of himself is represented in a brief sketch within the preface; the possibility for an extended examination is seemingly declined.²¹ A similar remark is also made by Jackson who argues that even when critical theorists display certain reflexive sympathies, such as Robert Cox's attention to the conservatism within 'problem-solving' theories, there remains 'very little guidance [for other scholars] about *how* to go about generating a good critical theory'.²² In other words, although Cox may offer an admirable historicist approach, it remains harder for other scholars to work out how, in practical steps, they could enhance their own reflexive posture. Secondly, autobiographical reflexivity brings forth concerns related to potential narcissism (actual or perceived) which could, in turn, potentially blunt experiments with autobiographical analysis. This is a serious risk – acknowledged by Inayatullah, Löwenheim and other feminists – and will be returned to below through a critique by Bourdieu.

In short, for these IR writers, reflexive practices are viewed as essential for accounting for various subjective preconceptions and distortions that may infiltrate the decision-making process. The point of such work is to communicate with others, primarily within the immediate field of scholarship, that an attempt has been made to acknowledge autobiographical references and uncover dispositions that have shaped the choice of research questions. In this process, the author may not only raise their own ethical standards, but also encourage a wider consideration for how such behavioural habits could be adopted by others.

Institutional Reflexivity

But perhaps the focus on introspective interrogation is not the best approach for practising reflexivity. In terms of enhancing our appreciation for patterns of dialogue in IR and, in particular, the organisation of agendas deemed 'orthodox', to what extent do we need to widen the lens of analysis? For some IR researchers who exhibit reflexive tendencies, they choose to focus not (or not only) on the social coordinates of the individual, but, rather, on the academic field itself and its position in the political world. In this sense, the attention shifts from personal considerations to a series of larger related enquiries around the nature of epistemology and pedagogy.

Debates on the 'proper' relationship between IR and 'policy-relevant' knowledge can be highlighted as one enduring question in this area. A number of writers, representing different theoretical perspectives, have discussed the ways in which 'being useful' to the policy world should be examined for understanding the co-constitutive relationship between knowledge production and power.²³ Perhaps most visibly, under the leadership

20. In general terms, this same observation is made in Ersel Aydinli and James N. Rosenau, 'Courage versus Caution: A Dialogue on Entering and Prospering in IR', *International Studies Review* 6, no. 3 (2004): 511–26.

21. Gill, *Power and Resistance in the New World Order*.

22. Jackson, *Conduct of Inquiry*, 183. For comments by Cox on his method, see Robert W. Cox, 'Reflections and Transitions', in *The Political Economy of a Plural World: Critical Reflections on Power, Morals, and Civilization*, eds Robert W. Cox and Michael G. Schechter (London: Routledge, 2002), emphasis in original.

23. William Wallace, 'Truth and Power, Monks and Technocrats, Theory and Practice in International Relations', *Review of International Studies* 22, no. 3 (1996): 301–21; Smith, 'The United States and the

of J. Ann Tickner, such questions framed the 2007 International Studies Association (ISA) convention on the theme 'Politics, Policy and Responsible Scholarship'. In her keynote address, she argued that interdependent power relations should always be scrutinised, including the advisory services many IR analysts have provided to modern politicians. In this light, Tickner claimed that all scholars bear 'responsibility for being critically reflective about how the knowledge we teach to our students has been constructed historically and the research traditions to which we subscribe are formulated'.²⁴

Take, as one prominent case, the relationship between IR and the political field in the USA. In Stanley Hoffman's famous essay on IR as an 'American social science' one can see how the analysis of institutional reflexivity is present in his discussion of the special state-civil society relations within the US. Among his claims, Hoffman points to those IR academics and policy officials who move between university positions and seats of government; as well as the existence of foundations which tie together the 'kitchens of power' with the 'academic salons', creating in the process a 'seamless pluralism'.²⁵ In recent years, Hoffman's point continues to have relevance when one considers major IR scholars who have temporarily served in the US government, including Stephen Krasner who led Policy Planning at the US State Department under George W. Bush or Joseph Nye who chaired the National Intelligence Council under Bill Clinton. Inspired by Hoffman, other authors have also investigated the extent to which IR is characterised by a US or larger Anglo-Saxon 'hegemony' and what consequences this generates for the diversity of scholarly debates.²⁶ For Arlene Tickner and Ole Wæver, the gravitational pull of the USA on the field of IR, such as in terms of access to prestigious journals, has tended to marginalise how IR is practised in the rest of the world. In broad terms, therefore, the 'periphery' is either excluded from established outlets of IR scholarship or what is produced on the Third World is often negatively defined (for instance, seeing concepts of sovereignty or security as 'deviations from IR normality' when applied to some Southern countries).²⁷ Thus, the way in which dialogue is policed and curtailed, often in implicit moves, has a notable bearing upon the structure of knowledge production in the IR field.

Discipline of International Relations'; Stephen Walt, 'The Relationship between Theory and Policy in International Relations', *Annual Review of Political Science* 8 (2005): 23-48; and Christian Büger and Trine Villumsenb, 'Beyond the Gap: Relevance, Fields of Practice and the Securitizing Consequences of (Democratic Peace) Research', *Journal of International Relations and Development* 10, no. 4 (2007): 417-48.

24. J. Ann Tickner, 'On the Frontlines or Sidelines of Knowledge and Power? Feminist Practices of Responsible Scholarship', *International Studies Review* 8, no. 3 (2006): 383-95, at 392.
25. Stanley Hoffmann, 'An American Social Science: International Relations', in *Janus and Minerva: Essays in the Theory and Practice of International Politics*, ed. Stanley Hoffman (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1987 [1977]), 10.
26. Kalevi Holsti, *The Dividing Discipline: Hegemony and Diversity in International Theory* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1985); Wæver, 'The Sociology of a Not So International Discipline: American and European Developments in International Relations'; Robert M.A. Crawford and Darryl S.L. Jarvis, eds, *International Relations - Still an American Social Science?: Toward Diversity in International Thought* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2001); and Jörg Friedrichs, *European Approaches to International Relations Theory: A House with Many Mansions* (London: Routledge, 2004).
27. Ole Wæver and Arlene B. Tickner, 'Introduction: Geocultural Epistemologies', in *International Relations Scholarship around the World*, eds Tickner and Wæver, 2.

Collective Reflexivity

The third approach to reflexivity can be considered a reformulation of an old problem: to what extent, and how, can scholars engage in practical political dialogue beyond the trappings of the academy? Collective reflexivity, in this sense, points to the ways in which academics encounter, contest and potentially aid a variety of political actors. In some ways, this mode could be considered analogous to institutional reflexivity in terms of dissecting the interested organisational ties between scholars and the political world. But collective reflexivity differs in drawing attention to how researchers pursue more assertive and activist agendas, among themselves and through mobilising other groups. Such issues have a considerable legacy across different national settings. The idea of ‘intellectuals’ in the plural, conceived to indicate a category of persons, can be traced to the early 19th century, although the common usage appeared later. Writers such as Alexis de Tocqueville, Marx and Max Weber were early ‘public intellectuals’ who debated the social forces of their time, including questions of democracy, nationalism and imperialism. By the 20th century, in the shadow of the First World War, Antonio Gramsci’s key notion of ‘organic intellectuals’ aimed to highlight how certain thinkers could lead subordinate classes in movements of ‘counter-hegemonic’ change, against hegemonic forces that could include ‘traditional intellectuals’ who served the status quo. Importantly, for Gramsci, the organic intellectual could only be effective if they became deeply engaged with the working class, including social organisations and political parties.²⁸ In recent decades, one can also point to a range of prominent intellectual figures who have received attention for their political activism and ability to shape public discourse through protests and media interventions, including, but in no way limited to, Jean-Paul Sartre, Raymond Aron, Michel Foucault, Edward Said, Noam Chomsky and, as will be discussed below, Bourdieu.²⁹

In light of this historical context, some IR theorists have argued that researchers have a duty to pursue their scholarship in ways that could serve broader causes. For instance, in George Lawson’s call for a ‘public IR’, he speaks of the need for scholars to conduct ‘normative, politically engaged work’ involving ‘multiple publics’, incorporating not simply the powerful, but ‘everyday’ movements and citizens.³⁰ Moreover, for him, an approach to public IR could experiment with different modes of communication, such as via online media, in order to enrich sources of dialogue with voices that are not always represented in established publications. In a different respect, collective reflexivity can also be understood as a response by IR academics to different threats to their scholarly ‘freedom’, particularly under conditions of persecution and violence, but also with regards

28. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, eds Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971).

29. For a recent historical and biographical reflection on the role of the intellectual in society, see Christian Fleck, Andreas Hess and E. Stina Lyon, eds, *Intellectuals and their Publics: Perspectives from the Social Sciences* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009). Edward Said’s views on the status of public intellectuals have been widely cited, including *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures* (New York: Pantheon, 1994), and ‘The Public Role of Writers and Intellectuals’, *The Nation*, 17 September 2001.

30. George Lawson, ‘For a Public International Relations’, *International Political Sociology* 2, no. 1 (2008): 17–37, at 31. See also John M. Hobson and Leonard Seabrooke, eds, *Everyday Politics of the World Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

to more subtle ideological agendas. Such problems were, for instance, the subject of a recent special forum in *International Studies Perspectives*. In his article, Martin Heisler argued for action to confront such threats, including ‘fostering transnational civil society (TCS) activities and, where appropriate, engaging in transnational contention for projecting the values of academic freedom in the subject area of international studies’. Heisler proposed that the ISA in particular could collaborate with groups such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch where necessary.³¹ Nevertheless, in a broader reflection piece on the state of critical theory in IR, Craig Murphy has noted how few IR scholars can be characterised as Gramscian ‘organic intellectuals’ in any strong sense. Unlike, to take one limited example, William Robinson’s work with civil society groups at the World Social Forum, most other scholars choose not to play such active roles.³²

In sum, one can see how the engagement with reflexive practices is part of the agendas of different IR researchers. The methods of autobiographical, institutional and collective reflexivity are inter related and, when considered in this sequence, represent increasing degrees of critical ambition. Still, these interventions are not mainstream in the field at large and there still remains ‘strikingly little disciplinary sociology done in and on International Relations’.³³ It is on this note that we can turn towards Bourdieu as a potential source of inspiration for further refining and applying the practice of reflexivity to IR.

Bourdieu and Reflexivity: Possibilities and Warnings

In the social sciences, the progress of knowledge presupposes progress in our knowledge of the conditions of knowledge.³⁴

As with any effort to discuss Bourdieu and apply a concept strongly associated with him, it is helpful to be aware of his larger scholarly ambitions. At a higher level of abstraction, he argues that reflexivity is needed for the purpose of objectifying the very conceptualisation and action of scientific objectification. When Bourdieu speaks of ‘enhancing the science of objectivity’ this does not therefore mean a defence of forms of objectivism, such as positivism. Rather, reflexivity aims to illuminate a more profound need to think through, and break from, the many dilemmas and biases contained in both objectivism and subjectivism. For instance, objectivist accounts, such as those produced in the rational actor tradition, often project images of agents engaged in purposeful calculation when it may be more accurate to define their behaviours as experimental or non-intentional. At the same time, purely subjective accounts also have problems, such as often over emphasising the individual as a category of analysis at the expense of groups and structures. In other words, reflexivity offers a strategy of ‘participant objectivation’ for Bourdieu, focusing on ‘objectivizing the subjective relation to the object which, far from leading to a relativistic and

31. Martin O. Heisler, ‘Academic Freedom and the Freedom of Academics: Toward a Transnational Civil Society Role’, *International Studies Perspectives* 8, no. 4 (2007): 347–57, at 355.

32. Craig N. Murphy, ‘The Promise of Critical IR, Partially Kept’, *Review of International Studies* 33, S1 (2007): 117–33.

33. Wæver and Tickner, ‘Introduction: Geocultural Epistemologies’, 11.

34. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 1.

more-or-less anti-scientific subjectivism, is one of the conditions of genuine scientific objectivity'.³⁵ In a bridge back to IR, it is interesting to note how Bourdieu's desire to reshape the meaning of 'science' here (still within the Enlightenment tradition) is also shared by Jackson who argues that the term should be broadened in a Weberian sense. From Jackson's position, we need to move beyond principles of hypothesis-testing and empirical generalisations to consider how to systemically connect presuppositions with conclusions and how knowledge claims can be subjected to public criticism.³⁶

In recent years, the potential utility of Bourdieu to IR has received greater attention, particularly in relation to theoretical debates and in security studies. Bourdieu has been framed in light of the so-called 'practice turn' in IR that has sought to conceive of political action in ways not captured by instrumental rationality (logic of consequences), norm-adherence (logic of appropriateness) or communicative action (logic of arguing).³⁷ For instance, in perhaps the most richly developed use of a Bourdieusian conceptual framework, Vincent Pouliot has discussed how the notions of habitus and field can be used to better grasp the practical sense of social games in international diplomacy, including how conditions of peace become 'taken-for-granted' over time.³⁸ Similarly, Michael Williams has applied Bourdieu's concepts of cultural capital and symbolic power to tease out the practical and theoretical ways in which culture can be understood in the post-Cold War security environment, while Frédéric Mérand has explained the creation of the European Union's Security and Defence Policy through attention to the interplay between practices, social representations and power structures.³⁹ Stefano Guzzini has also subjected Bourdieu's conceptual treatment of power to critical scrutiny.⁴⁰ In the field of international political economy, at least for now, Bourdieu has received less interest, notwithstanding a notable sketch from Anna Leander and Liliana Pop's use of habitus and field to examine post-communist change in Romania.⁴¹

35. Pierre Bourdieu, 'Participant Objectivation', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 9, no. 2 (2003): 281–94, at 282.

36. Jackson, *Conduct of Inquiry*.

37. Vincent Pouliot, 'The Logic of Practicality: A Theory of Practice of Security Communities', *International Organization* 62, no. 2 (2008): 257–88. In particular, see the work of Iver B. Neumann, including 'Returning Practice to the Linguistic Turn: The Case of Diplomacy', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 31, no. 3 (2002): 627–51; and 'To Be a Diplomat', *International Studies Perspectives* 6, no. 1 (2005): 72–93. Also see Frank Gadinger and Christian Büger, 'Reassembling and Dissecting: International Relations Practice from a Science Studies Perspective', *International Studies Perspectives* 8, no. 1 (2007): 90–110; Emanuel Adler, 'The Spread of Security Communities: Communities of Practice, Self-Restraint, and NATO's Post-Cold War Transformation', *European Journal of International Relations* 14, no. 2 (2008): 195–230; Didier Bigo, *Terror, Insecurity and Liberty: Illiberal Practices of Liberal Regimes after 9/11* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008); and Peter Jackson, 'Pierre Bourdieu, the "Cultural Turn" and the Practice of International History', *Review of International Studies* 34, no. 1 (2008): 155–81.

38. Vincent Pouliot, *International Security in Practice: The Politics of NATO–Russia Diplomacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

39. Michael Williams, *Culture and Security: Symbolic Power and the Politics of International Security* (London: Routledge, 2007); and Frédéric Mérand, *European Defence Policy: Beyond the Nation State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

40. Stefano Guzzini, 'Applying Bourdieu's Framework of Power Analysis to IR: Opportunities and Limits', paper presented at the International Studies Association Convention, San Diego, CA, 22–5 March 2006.

41. Leander, 'Do We Really Need Reflexivity in IPE?'; and Liliana Pop, 'Time and Crisis: Framing Success and Failure in Romania's Post-communist Transformations', *Review of International Studies* 33, no. 3 (2007): 395–413.

Nevertheless, with the exception of Leander, an explicit engagement with Bourdieu's key concept of reflexivity has remained underexplored and unspecified in this emerging literature. The neglect is unfortunate because Bourdieu's notion of reflexivity, like his social theory more broadly, is intensely political.

How, then, does Bourdieu argue reflexivity should be practised? In what ways does he offer IR researchers potential new enquiries and subjects of analysis, and where does he issue cautions on particular interpretations of the method? With regard to the first sense of reflexivity, the autobiographical meaning, Bourdieu is not opposed to questioning how, for instance, geography or class may predetermine certain scholarly judgements and interests. One can see this explained in his own *Sketch for a Self-Analysis* in which he attempts a social analysis of his own career trajectory. At one point, he speaks of the significance of having a 'cleft habitus' torn between 'high academic consecration and low social origin'. Bourdieu argues that such conditions – born the son of a Béarnese postmaster who rising to work among the Parisian intellectual elite – tended to 'institute, in a lasting way, an ambivalent, contradictory relationship to the academic institution, combining rebellion and submission, rupture and expectation'.⁴² In 1954, following his graduation in philosophy, Bourdieu's experience in Algeria, first as a conscript in the French Army and then as a lecturer in the University of Algiers, was a 'pivotal' experience that strongly shaped his theoretical and political understandings.⁴³ His rejection of philosophy and embrace of sociology and ethnology was thus accomplished in the context of war, a reorientation that Bourdieu admits was 'fraught with social implications', including his own status as an intellectual known for disavowing the most prestigious subject in France. Thus, this type of evaluation provides those who seek to better understand Bourdieu's oeuvre with some insights into the social contexts that have informed his thinking.

However, as soon as one engages with this type of reflexive method, problems regarding practical boundaries appear. Put simply, what exactly is necessary to include within a self-analysis and, perhaps most crucially, where does the researcher stop? As Bourdieu underscores, one is never able to eradicate all potential sources of prejudice or deconstruct all the cognitive schemes that can shroud the scholar.⁴⁴ At best, one should perhaps try to exercise, as Leander has expressed it in her reading of Bourdieu, 'epistemological prudence'; that is, to be as conscious as possible of the motivations involved in research practices and how such motivations structure the results that are obtained.⁴⁵ But where this mode of reflexivity becomes problematic or, indeed, unproductive is when the researcher sinks into a mindset of navel-gazing divorced from a larger political context and, in particular, practical politics. For Bourdieu, this 'explosion of narcissism sometimes verging on exhibitionism' was present in postmodern writing, not only in anthropology, but in other areas of the social sciences.⁴⁶ One can speculate

42. Pierre Bourdieu, *Sketch for a Self-Analysis* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 100.

43. *Ibid.*, 58.

44. Pierre Bourdieu, 'Understanding', in *The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society*, eds Pierre Bourdieu et al. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).

45. Anna Leander, "'Thinking Tools'", in *Qualitative Methods in International Relations: A Pluralist Guide*, eds Audie Klotz and Deepa Prakash (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 25.

46. Bourdieu, 'Participant Objectivation', 282.

here, as a warning, how dialogue, when defined in terms of cultivating exchanges across the sub-fields and factions within IR, could be undermined by excessive autobiographical reflexive methods. Indeed, in the previously cited Inayatullah-led autobiographical IR project, the risk of narcissistic regression, while noted, is still rather unconvincingly discussed. Inayatullah argues at one point that such fears 'may be calmed when we entertain the possibility that rather than being indulgent, we are actually not indulgent enough'.⁴⁷ But if one is hoping to advance reflexivity, these types of remarks need to be handled with greater care. If sceptical IR audiences paint such opinions as indicative of the entire method of reflexivity – with claims or allusions to intellectual 'shallowness' – then the craft will continue to remain a parochial activity in the field.

For sure, every IR scholar is encumbered by his or her individual past, but such history needs to be scrutinised in the context of the relations of institutions that are tied to the subject. In this regard, reflexivity, for Bourdieu, does not refer so much to personal, idiosyncratic moments of introspection, but, rather, the organisational and mental structures that shape the work of researchers.⁴⁸ What needs to be objectified, therefore, are the social conditions that have formed the theorist and, in particular, how their relative position in the professional universe shapes their interests and investments. It is here that Bourdieu offers IR scholars inspiration for more penetrating political critiques of their field, particularly when he wears his cap of educational sociologist. Two potential avenues can be outlined here.

Firstly, institutional reflexivity means developing awareness of how academics, like other cultural interpreters, owe something to their position in a social space 'where all define themselves in part in relational terms, by their distance and difference from certain others with whom they compete'.⁴⁹ It is well acknowledged that scholars struggle in multiple ways for attention, praise and objective titles. But Bourdieu was keen to expose those moments when this constant jockeying for recognition could cloud and distort the research process, leading to a public motivation (such as aspiring for social or political change) that was disconnected from a potentially more important private motivation (increased power in the field, including denying others such status). Since the former motivation has greater legitimacy according to the principles of the field, he argues that scholars have a stake in underplaying the pursuit of the latter motivation. In short, they have 'an interest in disinterestedness'.⁵⁰ To be clear, 'disinterest' here does not mean an absence of interest, but, rather, the projection of an apparent sense of impartiality, often through an appeal to whatever is defined as the 'universal'. As Bourdieu sees it, academics are particularly adept at appealing to the logic of disinterestedness and often seek ways to intertwine their personal stakes with 'universal' standards and norms.

Secondly, as has been noted, institutional reflexivity brings attention to how the academy is situated in relation to other structures of power in domestic societies and cross-nationally. One could argue that the academy often appears to be intimately embedded in the political at every level (structural, institutional and personal), but the

47. Inayatullah, 'Falling and Flying', 8.

48. David Swartz, *Culture and Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1997).

49. Wacquant, 'Toward a Social Praxeology', 39.

50. Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), 110.

depth and quality of this embeddedness clearly varies and requires careful delineating. Nevertheless, it was one of Bourdieu's major arguments that the education system in France had become the most efficient mechanism for (re)producing social hierarchies and ensuring that a 'state nobility' was perpetuated across generations.⁵¹ It is perhaps not surprising that his *Homo Academicus*, a study of the inner politics of the elite Paris universities, complete with dense statistical analysis, provoked intense domestic criticism since it was shedding an intimate spotlight on these types of processes. The challenge for Bourdieu was always to explain how such an arbitrary organisation of social affairs was conducted and came to acquire a considerable degree of legitimacy. Particularly in relation to prestigious academic institutions, we need to pay attention to such complex legitimation mechanisms because they may serve to insulate and normalise unequal patterns of power. In short, these investigations were undoubtedly ambitious and brave, but also empirically rewarding for mapping the detailed forms of power and recognition at work within and around the French academy.⁵²

Could one envisage IR – including its scholars and institutional ties to networks of political and economic power – being subjected to a similar critical dissection? In one respect, the Wæver and Tickner planned three-volume book project on 'Worlding beyond the West' represents the kind of large-scale commitment needed for a sociology of IR.⁵³ But there are other empirical enquiries, at different scales of analysis, that could provide insights into the process of IR knowledge production and the types of dialogue that become either 'established' or 'marginalised'. Take, as one example, the relationship between research funding bodies, frequently associated with the state, and IR academic agendas. What social and political problems merit the economic and symbolic capital that funding provides, particularly in an environment of constrained government finances? How are these problems constructed over time and who has greater control over the levers of supply and demand in the intellectual market? How is the craft of successful application-writing mastered, particularly within elite institutions that capture large resources? What concerns get downgraded, trivialised or even forgotten because they cannot be easily squared with the definition of 'policy relevance' (which often passes under-examined, not least by those who utter it so frequently)? In a Bourdieusian social world, these are the types of questions a reflexive method would pose. They could help uncover those mechanisms of academic consecration that are often hidden from view and, thus, disclose the specific interests of intellectuals and how, depending upon the context, such interests may align or dovetail with the interests of the state.

Yet, for Bourdieu, the craft of reflexivity does not, and should not, stop at this point. As with the previous attention to calls for a 'public IR' that moves away from 'cloistered scholasticism', Bourdieu himself was a very prominent activist intellectual.⁵⁴ From the 1980s, he became increasingly visible both in France and elsewhere as a contributor to various causes of the 'political left' (although, in a somewhat humorous manner, he often said that he was located on '*la gauche de la gauche*', the left of the left). He made a range of interventions, including opposing the Russian suppression of Solidarity in Poland in

51. Pierre Bourdieu, *The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996).

52. Pierre Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990).

53. Wæver and Tickner, eds, *International Relations Scholarship around the World*.

54. Lawson, 'For a Public International Relations', 34.

1981, supporting the strikes in France in 1995 and, by the turn of the century, backing various ‘alter-globalisation’ groups.⁵⁵ In part, these actions were an outcome of his continuous thinking on the relationship between reflexivity and public intellectuals. As one of his closest colleagues, Loïc Wacquant, expressed it, the call for ‘scholarship with commitment’, a phrase that echoes May 1968, can be linked to Bourdieu’s most ambitious reading of reflexivity: to encourage critical theorists to engage in practical problem-solving in the political world beyond the Ivory Tower.⁵⁶

It is here, however, that Bourdieu again issues warnings on the potential for generating such activity; points that, indeed, have value to those who wish to advance a form of public IR. To clarify, in parallel with Lawson, Bourdieu is not advocating the strengthening of an army of ‘media-savvy IR public intellectuals’ who are often removed from detailed ‘grounded’ scholarship.⁵⁷ Those ‘*fast-thinkers* who offer cultural “fast food” – predigested and prethought culture’ were to be condemned in his view because they transmitted, rather than critiqued, the received political ideas of the moment.⁵⁸ They often acted, in subtle ways, to broadly legitimise and cushion powerful interests from more intensive forms of scrutiny. In terms of collective reflexive ideas, Bourdieu had some notable successes, such as *The Weight of the World* project where a team of researchers investigated the everyday lives of workers in the context of neoliberalism. When published, this massive sociology volume sold over 100,000 copies and triggered a substantial debate on social policy in France.⁵⁹ But other grander ideas, including a proposal for an ‘International of Intellectuals’ to break free from dominant institutional frameworks, failed to lift off the page.

In light of these experiences, Bourdieu was somewhat pessimistic on the chances of developing collective reflexivity that is, a large-scale mobilisation of activist intellectuals. He often struggled with the question of why there were relatively few activist intellectuals who sought to mobilise others, or submitted themselves to a process of enhanced dialogue and organisation. At a deeper level, he argued that this pattern could be partly explained by pointing to how the scholastic vision of the world – the leisurely condition of *skhole* – contains presumptions and privileges which tend to work against direct, political activism. What does this entail? As understood by Wacquant in conversation with Bourdieu:

The *intellectualist bias* which entices us to construe the world as a *spectacle*, as a set of significations to be interpreted rather than as concrete problems to be solved practically, is more profound and more distorting than those rooted in the social origins or location of the analyst in the academic field, because it can lead us to miss entirely the *differentia specifica* of the logic of practice.⁶⁰

55. For a more detailed history, see David Swartz, ‘From Critical Sociology to Public Intellectual: Pierre Bourdieu and Politics’, *Theory and Society* 32, nos 5/6 (2003): 791–823; and Franck Poupeau and Thierry Discepolo, ‘Scholarship with Commitment: On the Political Engagements of Pierre Bourdieu’, *Constellations* 11, no. 1 (2004): 76–96.

56. Wacquant, ‘Toward a Social Praxeology’. See in particular, Pierre Bourdieu, *Firing Back: Against the Tyranny of the Market* (London: Verso, 2003); and Pierre Bourdieu, *Political Interventions: Social Science and Political Action* (London: Verso, 2008).

57. Lawson, ‘For a Public International Relations’, 27.

58. Pierre Bourdieu, *On Television* (New York: New Press, 1998), 29, emphasis in original.

59. Bourdieu et al., eds, *The Weight of the World*.

60. Wacquant, ‘Toward a Social Praxeology’, 39, emphasis in original.

In other words, the scholastic gaze was a central problem for Bourdieu for two reasons. Firstly, it is an orientation that necessitates the theorist separating themselves from practice in order to obtain an 'external' and supposed 'superior point of view'. But the danger of this is that the scholar starts to conflate and confuse practical knowledge with theoretical knowledge (to take the things of logic for the logic of things, as Marx put it). Secondly, to recall an earlier point, Bourdieu argues that intellectuals tend to be 'blinded by their own professional ideology', as with appeals to universality or neutrality, rather than probing how their own career trajectories are often strongly shaped by the self-interested accumulation of honours and distinctions.⁶¹ In no way do such problems disable all ventures of collective reflexivity. Rather, Bourdieu is trying to highlight how academic dialogues with the social world may be constrained in deeper and more enduring ways than is conventionally assumed.

Putting Reflexivity to Work in the Trade Field

In this final part I turn the attention towards a specific issue area in IR: the politics of international trade. The objective is to offer a sketch, largely through a series of propositions, for how the methodology of reflexivity could be conducted and what research outcomes may be derived. In part, trade politics is selected because it represents a 'hard case' for reflexivity, with the appeal to social constructivist techniques of analysis only very recently entering this field.⁶² Notwithstanding a general movement towards political critique – such as signalled by the emergence of a multitude of critical observers of the World Trade Organization (WTO) – I would suggest that the trade field continues to valorise only certain forms of knowledge and position-taking, which are, at the same time, often an expression for control over particular types of power, including academic authority. The trade field is thus an interesting site for studying how the craft of reflexivity could be practised because it continues to display features of an 'insider' community, complete with certain rules or codes of participation between authoritative agents.

To return to the mode of autobiographical reflexivity, questions regarding the gender or class identity of specialists in the literature on international trade are conspicuous by their absence. How can one explain this situation? Again, as alluded to, it could be argued that an examination of autobiographical reflexivity is not desirable because the method is too introspective without any 'tangible' sense that it could increase our understanding of trade politics 'out there'. Far from strengthening social science, it may be read as a rather distracting pursuit, without a clearly defined end point. More specifically, one could also suggest that such presumptions have been shaped by the dominant systems of knowledge that have historically informed the analysis of trade. A glance at major textbooks is illustrative of this point. For instance, in Bernard Hoekman and

61. Swartz, *Culture and Power*, 274.

62. For the best examples, see Robert Wolfe, 'See You in Geneva? Legal (Mis)Representations of the Trading System', *European Journal of International Relations* 11, no. 3 (2005): 339–65; Andrew T.F. Lang, 'Reconstructing Embedded Liberalism: John Gerard Ruggie and Constructivist Approaches to the Study of the International Trade Regime', *Journal of International Economic Law* 9, no. 1 (2006): 81–116; and Andrew T.F. Lang, 'Reflecting on Linkage: Cognitive and Institutional Change in the International Trading System', *Modern Law Review* 70, no. 4 (2007): 523–50.

Michel Kostecki's *The Political Economy of the World Trading System*, a mainstream volume of more than 700 pages, there is no explicit discussion of how WTO rules as constituted could have detrimental consequences on the livelihoods of women in many countries.⁶³ The closest one gets to the subject of gender is through a short discussion on labour standards, leading to an impression that the WTO is gender-neutral in its culture and material impacts. A similar limited treatment is also found in Michael Trebilcock and Robert Howse's *The Regulation of International Trade*, another popular textbook.⁶⁴ Thus, since economics and law act as the major gateways for students to study the international trading system (IR being a subservient third), and since each discipline has tended to ignore such categories in approaches to teaching trade issues, it would only be 'inevitable' that gender or class would not be seen as a problem by many theorists, either in explaining trade in the 'real world' or in their own intellectual make-up.

Yet the potential value of autobiographical reflexivity in the study of trade politics should not be so readily discounted. One potentially interesting enquiry would be to question why some scholars choose to study less powerful actors in the trading system (relative to, conventionally, the USA or the EU). This is usually justified by stating that such players represent empirical problems and, therefore, are worthy of investigation. Some researchers argue that the WTO Aid for Trade initiative is important because of preference-erosion concerns voiced by African countries.⁶⁵ Others have chosen to address strategies of coalition-building pursued by countries such as Brazil and India in recent negotiations.⁶⁶ These are certainly legitimate research enquiries, but are there other motivations which go unstated? For instance, are such research questions informed by a deeper normative conception of justice on the part of the scholar? If so, what is this thinking and how has it been shaped by life experiences? In particular, how can one avoid the risk that the scholar projects under-examined interests onto their research object, such as claiming for the existence of agency when relatively little, or perhaps none, may exist in practice? Does the researcher believe that they have some degree of 'affinity' with the less privileged actor and can, indeed, even speak on behalf of them? If so, where did such presumptions come from and how valid are they?

In terms of institutional reflexivity, there are a number of potential applications and leads that one could suggest. As I have argued, it is important to exercise this form of reflexivity for the purpose of understanding what types of knowledge (and thus position-stances that one could select) become part of the accepted orthodoxy. Monitoring how these complicated processes operate – within organisations such as the World Bank, academic journals like the *World Economy*, conferences such as the annual WTO Public Forum or media outlets like the *Financial Times* – is not easy. It would certainly be wrong

63. Bernard Hoekman and Michel Kostecki, *The Political Economy of the World Trading System: The WTO and Beyond* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

64. Michael Trebilcock and Robert Howse, *The Regulation of International Trade* (London: Routledge, 2005).

65. Dominique Njinkeu and Hugo Cameron, eds, *Aid for Trade and Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

66. Andrew Hurrell and Amrita Narlikar, 'The New Politics of Confrontation: Developing Countries at Cancún and Beyond', *Global Society* 20, no. 4 (2006): 415–33; and Amrita Narlikar and Rorden Wilkinson, 'Collapse at the WTO: A Cancún Post Mortem', *Third World Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (2004): 417–30.

to make blanket or conspiratorial assertions, such as claiming that all forms of knowledge, including ‘heretical’ propositions on the trading order, are somehow ‘co-opted by the system’. For instance, if one examines the connections between a number of prominent trade scholars and the WTO Secretariat, there often appears to be a more circular, complex relationship that does not necessarily result in a weakening of critique. Lawyers like Joost Pauwelyn and Thomas Cottier have gained valuable experience working within or close to the Appellate Body, before returning to teach in universities. In other examples, the Secretariat increasingly conducts various training courses in WTO law in Southern countries, often targeting education establishments. Yet, observing these direct relationships is only the first step towards mapping the boundaries of the arguing universe and attempting to assess, among other enquiries, how certain ideas and interests may be privileged, either deliberately or unintentionally.

The more challenging analytical task is to trace how dominant patterns of dialogue on the trading system are reproduced through agents that are at a distance from each other, either spatially, temporally or both. In particular, this involves searching for the arbitrary particularisms in what passes for the ‘universal’ viewpoint. For instance, a country such as the USA cannot obtain its goals in the trading regime simply through repeating its own interested, particular opinions. In order to legitimise its personality, it has to appeal to and, ideally, disguise its own interests under the banner of the ‘universal’ (using frames such as ‘global competitiveness’). One major way in which the USA can accomplish this is to draw upon the work of different ‘experts’ who, armed with the tools of Ricardian science, present themselves as ‘removed’ from ‘arbitrary politics’. The Columbia economist Jagdish Bhagwati could be highlighted as an example.

Bhagwati has worked tirelessly across four decades to monitor, defend and refine orthodox theories, classifications and histories on international trade.⁶⁷ He intervenes in media debates and has consulted for numerous international organisations, including the WTO. But can we trace any chain of legitimation, or even a link in a chain, connecting Bhagwati’s ideas to the political objectives of the Office of the US Trade Representative (USTR)? It would be very difficult, although not impossible. This is because, to apply one of Bourdieu’s arguments, the symbolic efficacy of any legitimation process is generally enhanced the more the chief consecrator – the USA in this case – does not appear too closely tied to the acts of consecration.⁶⁸ For sure, a USTR spokesperson may publically praise a Bhagwati commentary in the *Wall Street Journal* and use it for evidence that, say, protectionism should be avoided at all costs. But it is not in Bhagwati’s interest to claim that he is too close to the praiser, that he has lost independence from power in the classic conceptualisation, since that could invite charges of partisanship and political bias. Rather, if the question was ever explicitly raised in these terms, his work would probably be put into a ‘global’ context, where all could potentially benefit (of which substantial evidence could be marshalled), thus taking the direct spotlight away from any type of relationship between the hegemon and himself.

67. Jagdish Bhagwati, *In Defense of Globalization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Jagdish Bhagwati, *Free Trade Today* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); and Jagdish Bhagwati, Arvind Panagariya and T.N. Srinivasan, *Lectures on International Trade* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998).

68. Bourdieu, *The State Nobility*.

Finally, what options exist for engineering collective approaches to reflexivity in the trade field? Most efforts in this respect continue to be individual and sporadic, with little indication of a broader mobilisation. For instance, scholars such as Robert Howse and Walden Bello, respecting different intellectual backgrounds, have offered legal pro bono work and negotiating advice to under-resourced delegations in Geneva. Other researchers have called for an increase in this type of direct policy engagement in order to assist Southern countries. Gregory Shaffer, for example, has argued that ‘by working with developing countries on international trade cases, academics would better learn how the WTO process works in practice. They could write contextualized analyses of WTO jurisprudence that are more informed by a developing country perspective’.⁶⁹ One can, however, point to groups such as the Canadian-based International Lawyers and Economists against Poverty (ILEAP), a network of more than 60 prominent trade experts, who aim to improve the technical skills and capacities of Southern countries. Yet, once again, one can debate the organisational strength of this type of collective and, indeed, the extent to which they are offering a critical perspective that is substantially different from the norm.

Conclusion

When viewed through a Bourdieusian lens, one can see in conclusion that reflexivity is more complex and adaptable than might initially appear. I have argued that the concept matters for conducting good research and strengthening objectivity. As a methodological notion, it stems from a phenomenological questioning of knowledge creation, asking the analyst to conduct mutual and self-criticism. In the process of uncovering the deeper motivations involved in the production of research, reflexivity offers for Bourdieu an almost ‘therapeutic function insofar as increasing awareness of the social determinants of behaviour increases the possibility for freedom from the unknown’.⁷⁰ But it is a difficult craft to practise, one that needs to be carried out by degrees. Such benefits are in many ways only truly realised when the attention is shifted away from the individual *per se* to a field analysis of the practice of science. In using the concept, this is perhaps where empirical studies in IR, including the politics of the trading system, should begin. The game-like logic of the academy is mirrored in the game-like logic of politics: both are founded on a relational struggle for recognition and, ultimately, forms of power. In blunt terms, therefore, Bourdieu is pointing to how academic legitimisation strategies may be imbricated with power, how some scholars work, through manifold ways, consciously or perhaps unwittingly, to protect power. In these fields, every viewpoint, for Bourdieu, is a view taken from a particular point in space and time. As I have argued here, it is hoped that the idea of reflexivity can be treated as a ‘horizon’ or ‘guiding principle’ to aim at.⁷¹ Through developing the reflexive instinct, one can contribute, in metatheoretical terms, to an IR that uses social-scientific techniques in a twin move so as to unravel the political world through a simultaneous critical questioning of the scholar in their social milieu.

69. Gregory Shaffer, ‘The Challenges of WTO Law: Strategies for Developing Country Adaptation’, *World Trade Review* 5, no. 2 (2006): 177–98, at 193.

70. Swartz, *Culture and Power*, 277.

71. Cécile Deer, ‘Reflexivity’, in *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts*, ed. Michael Grenfell (Stocksfield: Acumen, 2008), 212.

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