



The eurocentric conception of world politics: western international theory 1760-2010

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After the First World War, in 1919, the International Relations (IR) were founded and performed ever since unbiased analysis about international phenomena. Central to the discipline is the idea of theoretical evolution through numerous debates. Hobson tried hard mainly to deconstruct myths about the nature and the development of the discipline. According to him, a discourse about the international could be traced at least till 1760. Although authors were not especially self-aware of a field of IR, this idea was certain. Since then the discourses had been put forth to their core, racist and Eurocentric, in order to promote the West as a normative reference to be followed. Representative of such a claim was the “White man’s burden”, even though Hobson proved in his pages that many other examples existed and continued to be.

One of the main objectives which Hobson set for himself was to deliver a revisionist narrative, attempting to fulfill two very precise goals: if, on one hand, he sought to accomplish an alternative narrative as that one of the well-known Eurocentrism/Orientalism understanding, by the same token; on the other hand, he claimed that the international theory, which had been developed both inside and outside the discipline of IR in the last 250 years, was an Eurocentric construct.

Central to his framework were the notions of Eurocentric Institutionalism and Scientific Racism, as well as their variations and interplay between them. While the former could be either paternalist or anti-paternalist, the latter could be either offensive or defensive. Eurocentric Institutionalism was basically concerned with the amount of agency power attributed to non-European peoples. As long as paternalists defended European (and then the Western), the intervention in non-European (and non-Western territories afterwards) on the grounds that they “had” to be “civilized”, anti-paternalists agreed that the non-European World was naturally going to follow Europe’s (and later in West’s) footsteps. It represented a sort of “beacon on the hill”, interfering in their affairs, disrupted this “natural” chain of events. As for defensive racism, it was a reinforcing discourse to anti-paternalism since it gave imperialism a bad name; while it disrupted the “self development” of the undeveloped, so much contact with the uncivilized people could effectively contribute to “decivilize” the

white population. Thus, immigration controls were especially favored by those who defended this point of view. As for offensive racism was concerned, some went so far to advocate extermination of certain population considered “perils” (for example, Hitler and his *Endlösung* policy). These four “strands” of thoughts articulated themselves to form what Hobson labeled pro-imperialist and anti-imperialist purposes. This formed the core of his “non-reductive” conception of Eurocentric institutionalism and scientific racism.

In order to advance and plausibly sustain these claims, he identified and countered six underlying and deep-seated myths in International Relations’ own understanding of itself as a discipline. The first of these concerns – the “foundationist myth” – confirmed firmly that the field was born out of the flames of World War, after a 4-year gestation period, in 1919. The second pondered on the “positivist myth”, holding that the field’s science production activities are ideologically neutral. The third consisted of the “great debates myth”, which debated that knowledge production in IR was progressive, evolutionist and, above all, linear. The fourth concern – the “sovereignty/anarchy myth” – claimed that many theories in IR tend to theorize upon inter-state, sovereign-actor exchanges, excluding other forms of interaction that, without any doubt, were also present. The fifth – the “globalization myth” – set forth in words that globalization only recently began to be effectively theorized; however, the theme had already been present since 1760. The sixth – “the theoretical great

traditions myth” – declared to be true that great theoretical traditions had been linear across time, what did not exactly hold water. All of these myths played their role in legitimating and promoting European/Western society/norms in face of non-European Others. In a sense, they were a way, although biased, of viewing the world which only catered Europe’s/the West’s interests. It was especially interesting to see how this Eurocentrism/Racism had been embedded in theoretical readings. That was precisely what Hobson showed from chapter 2 to 12 – he followed the theoretical development of the discipline since 1760 and revealed to readers how these notions permeated international thinking.

In doing so he was masterfully able to classify different authors and their theories in two sets of frameworks. The first revolved around imperialism and the type of relationship proposed for Europe/the West and for the non-European/Western world changed over time. The second classified a large spectrum of theories and authors according to paternalism and coerciveness of approaches. This only yielded to further the readers’ understanding of the argument being put forth.

This book, well put together, consists of five parts. The last of them presents the conclusions to the whole investigation. It is an excellent reading, especially for those interested in revisionist accounts of IR and/or for those who looks for new approaches of research outside the mainstream. This book might also appeal those interested in the history not only of the IR, but also of the political thought, in a general way.

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