

Rethinking the Division of Labor in IR: 'Critical' and 'Problem-Solving' Theories

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ABSTRACT

Decades after their incorporation into the discipline, the argument that 'critical approaches in International Relations Theory (IRT) are marginalized' is increasingly becoming questionable. Thus, it is a good time to reflect on critical approaches' evolution and achievements, as well as their 'marginalized position in IR' and relations with conventional approaches. To this aim, this paper focuses on realist and critical schools of thought while asking whether these two research traditions are conducting 'fair criticisms' of each other based on the other party's own promises and whether their criticisms help develop IRT's capacity in explaining and/or understanding world politics or undermine it. It also questions the assumed division of labor in IRT that holds conventional approaches responsible for solving the problems, while expecting 'non-conventional' theories to merely criticize the existing ways of theorizing and analyzing world politics. Accordingly, the paper first analyzes the realist school of thought in IR, going through the main arguments of different approaches to realism as put forth in seminal works. Second, it focuses on the development and main assumptions of critical theory mainly by focusing on Cox and Ashley's works and critical scholars' readings of them. Third, the paper discusses the main points of cleavages between the two approaches mainly based on the abovementioned division of labor, and their criticisms of each other while assessing the pearls and pitfalls of each. Following the discussion, it asks if there is a way out of these dichotomies and if it is possible to create a productive dialogue between 'problem-solving' and 'critical' theories.

Keywords: International Relations Theory, Great Debates in International Relations, Critical Theory, Problem-Solving Theory, Realism.

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INTRODUCTION

Critical theory has been introduced to the literature of International Relations theory (IRT) in the 1980s with the main claim that conventional theories of International Relations (IR) fall short of comprehending certain aspects of world politics. Although they differ in their main assumptions, what critical approaches share is their critique of conventional theories and especially their positivist approach to studying world politics. Decades after their incorporation into the discipline, critical approaches now have an almost central position within the discipline at least in several academic circles and multiple fields of research, rather than being an exception. Thus, the development and achievements of the critical approaches, as well as their 'marginalized position in IR' may require looking back on. Developed upon such starting point, this paper presents a critical look at realist and critical approaches to IR by relying on their own promises. It analyzes realist and critical schools of thought to give an account of their depiction of the world, their definition of problems of world politics, their

strategy in handling/solving problems, and their potential and performance in keeping their own promises.

Questioning realist and critical approaches' claims and potentials so far, the paper asks whether they are conducting 'fair criticisms' of each other based on their own claims and whether their criticisms help develop IRT's capacity in explaining and/or understanding world politics or establish boundaries to claim their own territory within the field. It also questions the assumed division of labor in IRT that holds conventional approaches responsible for solving the problems, while expecting 'non-conventional' theories to merely criticize the existing ways of theorizing and analyzing world politics. Accordingly, the paper first analyzes the realist school of thought in IR, going through the main arguments of classical realism, structural realism, and neo-classical realism. Second, it focuses on the development and main assumptions of critical theory with a strong focus on Cox and Ashley's works and critical scholars' readings of them. Third, the paper discusses the main points of cleavages between the two approaches and their criticisms of each

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other. Following the discussion, the paper asks whether there is a way out of these dichotomies and a possibility to create a productive dialogue between 'problem-solving' and 'critical' schools of thought. The paper concludes that building a bridge between distinct research traditions that challenge the imagined boundaries between conventional and critical approaches to IR may be a promising solution to resolve the crisis of IR theory in terms of its relevance to world politics.

REALIST THEORY

Starting from the very establishment of the IR discipline, realism has been one of the most influential approaches to world politics that almost dominated the field. Since then, realist thought has evolved and given birth to different variants. Thus, the 'realist school of thought' refers not to a single unified theory, but a bunch of different approaches that share a realist view of the world. Realist thought has evolved especially within the so-called first and second debates in IRT, as well as the neo-neo debate. The dialogue between realism and idealism in the interwar period constituted the so-called first great debate within which scholars of IR discussed the causes and the prevention of war, as well as the role and place of institutions in international politics. Thus, although realist thought has its roots in Ancient Greek (see Thucydides's *History of the Peloponnesian War*) and continued to assert itself in the following centuries (See Machiavelli's *The Prince*, and Hobbes's *Leviathan*) realist theory of IR has been incorporated into the discipline in the interwar period.

In his landmark book *Politics Among Nations*, Morgenthau (1948, pp. 4-15) arrayed six main principles of the realist theory of international politics. First, politics are grounded in observable laws of human nature and an attempt to challenge these laws will lead to failure. Second, states act in terms of interest defined as power. Third, although power is a universally valid concept that remains at the center of realist theory, the meaning of this concept is not fixed and once for all. Fourth, political realism emphasizes the moral significance of political action. Fifth, it rejects the idea that a particular nation's moral aspirations can be moral laws that govern the universe. Sixth, political realism acknowledges the primacy and significance of political analysis. That period was marked by realist scholars' attempts to come up with a realist theory of IR and Morgenthau's principles signal that debates on a positivist research program and the centrality of empirical research were on the way.

The debate of the 1960s between behavioralists

(defending scientific methodology) and traditionalists (defending historicist/interpretivist methodology) was about the question of 'scientific methodology' in IR which also paved the way for further alterations within realist theory. When it comes to the 1970-80s, the dominant way of making research in IR was positivism and realism has evolved to a more 'scientific' theory through its dialogue with the liberal school of thought within the so-called neo-neo debate. With positivism's dominant position in the IR discipline, scholars started to defend the implementation of scientific ways of doing social science like the unity of science, parsimony, falsification, and objectivity in theorizing and focused particularly on the empirical approach to IR. Waltz's structural realism was also influenced by this interest in scientific scholarship and he implemented his views on contemporary social sciences philosophy (Rengger and Thirkell-White, 2007, pp. 3-4).

Waltz's *Man, the State, and War* (1959) presents a debate on the causes of war, in which he comes up with the levels of analysis approach in IR. Waltz argues that the interplay between two or more of the provided images rather than one specific cause (man, the state, or its structures) may be to blame for the cause of conflict (1959, pp. 14-15). Thus, before formulating his theory two decades later in *Theory of International Politics* (1979), Waltz acknowledges the possible causes for war, without necessarily taking the others as constant and focusing on structure. However, according to Waltz (1979, p. 7), "explanatory power is gained by moving away from reality, not by staying close to it." While laws may only describe a correlation with a given probability, theories explain them. Structure acts as a selector and it puts constraints on agents, which are states. Structure selects by rewarding some behaviors and punishing others, and states become like units via socialization and competition (Waltz, 1979, 74). It is an organizational concept, in other words, an abstraction that is made to form a systemic theory (Waltz, 1979, p. 89).

This specific understanding of theorizing inspired Waltz's (1990) criticism that classical realism was a 'thought' but not a 'theory' due to its lack of systematic methodology and its historical method. He argues that reality is certainly complex, but theory helps us to simplify/abstract that reality (Waltz 1990, 26). Scholars such as Morgenthau and Aron misunderstood the very process of theorizing in IR¹ and this is why their approach became unsuccessful in becoming a theory of

¹ 'Problem-solving' theories conduct a very similar yet more comprehensive critique to 'critical' approaches as well.

IR.¹ As theories with traditional methodologies (see the arguments of the second great debate in IR theory) did not solve Aron's first problem, the issue of 'complexity,' they now cannot move to other steps of theorizing (Waltz, 1990, p. 27). What neorealism does is make international politics an autonomous domain thus making its theory possible (Waltz, 1990, p. 29). For him, the theory is an abstraction and it is never possible that it fits perfectly with the realities of the world.

At the empirical level, the main point of divergence between classical realism and neorealism is embedded in their analysis levels. While realism argues that power-seeking states are the reason for an anarchical international system, and a state-level analysis is the key to understanding international politics, neorealism argues that states are functionally similar, and anarchy is a 'permissive cause' for states' behavior. In other words, wars happen "because there is nothing to prevent them" (Waltz, 1959, p. 232). The levels of analysis discussion led to a new approach to occur in the early 1990s: neo-classical realism. For neo-classical realism, a one-level analysis falls short to understand state behavior in the international arena. The term 'neoclassical realism' was first mentioned by Gideon Rose, in his piece in *World Politics* journal (1998). As he summarized and many IR scholars agree upon, neoclassical realism combines domestic-level variables of classical realism with systemic analysis of neo-realist theory. Neoclassical realism relies on "the rigor and theoretical insights of the Neorealism of Waltz, Gilpin, and others without sacrificing the practical insights about foreign policy and the complexity of statecraft found in the classical realism of Morgenthau, Kissinger, Wolfers, and others" (Lobell et al., 2009, p. 4). Yet for Rose (1996), neo-classical realism aims to explain the foreign policy behavior of a specific state and to fill this 'gap' in the literature of IR theory, rather than to establish a general theory of IR.

Although there are objections to neoclassical realism being an IR theory, and criticisms that realism has become a degenerative research program by neoclassical realist attempts (See Legro and Moravcsik, 1999) there are certain points that all these realist approaches including neoclassical realism share and aim to contribute to. According to Donnely (2008), the realist school of thought has been established upon four common propositions. First, anarchy is the operating principle of the international since it lacks any higher authority over agents. Second, states are the main actors that have agency in this anarchical system. Third, states are rational and unitary actors. They pursue self-interest and as many

sources as possible (they care about relative gain) Fourth, the primary concern, goal, or state is survival. This is why states seek to increase their military power, which may lead to a security dilemma. Relying on these common assumptions, the realist school of thought also shared (either loose or strict) a positivist understanding of social sciences. This constitutes the main criticism of critical theory towards the conventional approaches to IR, which the following section presents in detail.

CRITICAL THEORY

Although conventional theories (realism being in the first place) almost dominated the discipline through decades, two different approaches to the study of world politics were established during the same period: the international society approach (English School) in the UK and the Marxism- inspired approaches of Frankfurt School in Germany (Rengger and Thirkell-White, 2007). Specifically in the 1980s, a critical approach to international relations emerged within the discipline that was inspired by Marxism's emancipatory approach (See Hobden and Wyn Jones, 2020). Two articles that came out in 1981, written respectively by Cox and Ashley, are widely referred to as the critical approach's founding texts. Two different paths led to the development of critical theory following these seminal works: Cox and his Marxian-inspired search for "the counter-hegemonic structures" that builds on the empirical method of historical sociology, and Ashley's structural realism critiques that are influenced by Habermas and his views of knowledge constitution (Hutchings, 2007, pp. 73-4).

As such, the so-called fourth debate of the discipline started in the mid-1980s between reflectivist and rationalist approaches (Sula 2021). In the development of these approaches, the focus was on the issue of science and the history of the IR discipline (Kurki and Wight, 2007). These divisions also work as a principle according to which the discipline is also currently organized. Cox's 1981 article was one of the initiators of this debate, which is also the main subject matter of this article. Cox, (1981, pp. 128-30) divided theories of IR into two in terms of their distinct purposes: critical theories and problem-solving theories. Problem-solving theories of IR refer to conventional theories, which serve as a guide to help solve the problems of world politics. These theories aim to keep existing structures, institutions, and relations effective by solving the problems that might have collapsed them otherwise (See Sula and Luleci 2016). Critical theories are reflective approaches, which are aware that there is no theory in itself, in Cox's (1981, p. 128) words, "divorced from a standpoint in time and

space."They aim to point out the possibility of alternative worlds and ways of theorizing. To put it differently, while the so-called problem-solving theory' is interested in the practice of the world, critical theory's focus (or subject matter) is on theorizing itself. This raises the question of whether critical theory is a meta/pre-theory which is not interested in the problems of the real world. This has also become the most important breaking point regarding the development of two approaches following the 1980s. The main premises of critical theory are as follows: first, human action is not free but it is possible within a historical framework; second, theory is relative; third, the principle goal is understanding changes; fourth, this framework consists of thought patterns, material conditions, human institutions; and finally, this framework (structure) should be viewed adopting a bottom- up approach (Cox, 1981, p. 135).

In line with the first assumption of critical approaches mentioned above, Cox relies on the analysis of history while developing this critical understanding (See Cox, 1983). For Cox, progress, and change are immanent in history, and can either be made or diagnosed. In the former (diagnostic mode) the potential for progress immanent in history is identified by critique, while in the latter (making mode) acting on the potential in history critique helps to have progress (Hutchings, 2007, p. 74). If we produce history through action, then it should be open for change. Cox aimed to demonstrate the possibility of change toward an emancipatory future by analyzing history. According to Cox (1981), critical theory refers to a theory of history because it is concerned not only with the past but also with historical change which is a continuing and dynamic process rather than being stable (See also Devetak, 2011). However, as the next section argues, it is misleading to assume that critical theory is only interested in the problems of history or theorizing while overlooking the current issues of world politics.

Adopting the idea that theory is relative, critical theory "always distinguishes itself from other forms of theorizing in terms of its orientation towards change and the possibility of futures that do not reproduce the patterns of hegemonic power of the present" (Hutchings, 2007, p. 72). Critical approaches encourage to rethink the established modes of theorizing in IR. Cox reconsiders the relationship between theory and practice by approaching the process of theorizing as a political act. For him, as well as for other scholars of critical theory, practice, and theory are in a mutual and interdependent relationship, and theory is made for either a practical or

political interest (Hutchings, 2007, p. 74). Theorists are engaged in practice while they are theorizing. Ignoring this kind of theory and practice relationship, theories serve the preservation of the status quo that accordingly maintains and even strengthens existing inequalities. By recognizing that there is no clear distinction between practice and theory, critical theories have the potential to serve to transform the existing status quo (See Cox, 1983).

As Linklater (1996) suggests, we can talk of four main achievements of critical theory that are inspired by Marx (See also Lülecı and Sula, 2016). The first one is related to the Marxian approaches' emphasis on the relationship between object and subject. Following Cox, Marxian critical theory suggests that approaching subject and object as completely independent from each other reproduces certain interests, which in the end produces unsatisfactory social outcomes (this is also their main criticism against Neorealism). The second point is about critical theory's argument that change, in contrast to what traditional approaches argue, is possible. Established social structures are neither perpetual nor unchangeable. Since agents constitute the existing structure, they are also capable of transforming it. Third, critical theory is originally inspired by Marx, but it overcomes certain weaknesses by also following Habermas' ideas on discourse ethics, boundedness, as well as social learning. Fourth, and again following Habermas, critical theory judges social arrangements by their capacity and capability to grasp and incorporate dialogue with others. What mostly happens in social relations is that human beings become part of bounded communities that are established by excluding others, which led certain approaches to suggest that such bounded communities have to deal with each other with military means.

Habermas (2001) presents different social learning forms and what humans learn at the highest level of morality as ethical reflectiveness. This concept points to multiple agents' capacity to identify that these moral codes are not immutable and stable conventions to which they must submit, but they are alterable malleable social products. Once people reach a certain level of ethical reflectiveness, they start to question and then reject boundedness. Then, as Habermas suggests, agents engage in dialogue without necessarily excluding other communities and moral standpoints. This situation refers to the discourse ethics of Habermas according to which human beings need to reject systems and relations of exclusion and inclusion while they aim to engage in dialogue (See Habermas, 2001). One cannot exclude any persons or moral standpoints in advance.

Ashley, in his critiques of structural realism, also based his argument that IR needs an emancipatory change on Habermasian concepts of social learning and morality (Ashley, 1981, p. 208). Ashley (1981) argued that knowledge acquisition goes beyond three different types of interests, which are practical interest in understanding (social science theories), technical interest in controlling (natural science theories), and finally the interest in emancipatory potential, or in short, emancipation (critical theory). Ashley suggests that structural realism has a technical interest in controlling, which especially during the Cold War period dominated classical realism's practical interest in understanding. This situation makes realism, in its technical form, a self-fulfilling prophecy, mostly related to the nuclear deterrence politics of the Cold War (Hutchings, 2007, p. 75; see also (Lüleci and Sula, 2016). Based on this argument, Ashley called for a 'reflective understanding of realism' because of this argued need to rethink structural realism's (or the so-called technical realism) main assumptions. He emphasized the need for progress based on not technical or practical but emancipatory interests while also calling for the broadening of phenomena that are originally taken as relevant to world politics.

Critical theory's critique targets neo-versions of conventional theories more than classical realism and liberalism. Similar to Ashley's argument above, Cox (1981, pp. 131-2) argues that Carr's realist theory is historical in its origin but since the Second World War realist scholars such as Waltz created a new American realism that reinforces the historical mode of thinking by applying the idea of common rationality. This is what makes Neorealism a non-normative theory that omits moral goals. This change happened during realism's polemic with liberal institutionalism (Cox, 1981, p. 132). Shimko (1992) further argues that realism adapted itself to American politics by omitting some assumptions (i.e. pessimism about human nature) in the process of its dialogue with liberal approaches.

As analyzed so far, realist and critical schools of thought have their arguments and also criticisms toward each other. The fact that the history of IR theory has been established on the differences and debates between conventional and critical approaches makes these dichotomies even more persistent. The next section discusses these dichotomies in detail to find an answer to the question of whether there can be a constructive dialogue between two schools of thought.

Discussion: Problem-solving vs Critical Theory

After Ashley and Cox's 1981 article, critical theory has evolved in two different directions. Some scholars of critical theory directed their studies toward a neo-Marxian analysis of Cox's writings, while other scholars started to produce on post-structuralism and post-modernism. The latter emphasized the significance of social learning, and discourse, as well as how social and political structures are constantly (re)produced. This distinction is of course not as solid as mentioned here since some researchers utilize both ways in an integrated manner in their critiques of traditional approaches. However, although they differ in most of their specific assumptions, one common point that the critical approaches share is the rejection of what Cox names problem-solving theories and the methodology that they apply.

Problem-solving theories have two main characteristics: positivist methodology; and the tendency to legitimize the existing status quo (Devetak, 2022). Although critical theory presents objections to both, its most remarkable critique of problem-solving or conventional approaches is related to the former, their meta-theoretical stance, or in other words the way they theorize and the methodology/methods they prefer. According to Cox (1981, p. 128-9), problem-solving theories deal with particular and fragmented sources of troubled reality. Although their strength lies in their ability to fix certain parts of reality to analyze the other(s), this *ceteris paribus* assumption that they borrowed from economics makes them ahistorical and ignorant of certain parts of reality. Both critical theory and problem-solving theory take some aspect of human activity as their starting point for analysis, problem-solving theory makes further analytical subdivisions for the sake of analysis, while critical theory looks at a larger picture (Cox 1981, p. 129). According to Cox, by assuming that international politics is made up of clearly defined problems to be solved, conventional theories overlook "key dimensions of world politics that do not fit squarely into a problem-solving mindset" (Peoples and Vaughan-Williams 2021, p. 33). Unlike conventional theories' problem-solving approach that has 'a narrow focus', critical theory regards the political and social complex as a whole, not separating it into smaller portions and parts. It is interested not in solving the problems of the existing order but instead aims to question "the problem of the status quo" (Booth 2005, p. 10). Critical theory does not ignore the historical and spatial aspects of reality and asks how things (such as orders, structures, and institutions) came about, which makes it "a theory of history" (Cox 1981, p. 129).

Although critical theory's criticism of problem-solving approaches' methodology had a great potential to contribute to the development of the discipline, they have gone so far in keeping a distance from positivism that a significant portion of the literature lost track of empirical analysis. As Smith (1996) argues what shaped the discipline for forty years was not positivism but epistemological empiricism which advocates that knowledge rests upon observation. Critical theory stands for a non-positivist methodology and for critical theory one cannot claim to present a true empirical argument or statement. As an answer to the question posed in the previous section, one may argue that critical theory was established to be a meta/pre-theoretical stance rather than a theory of IR. Yet this claim does not represent critical theory's original claim since Cox (1981, p. 128) states "do not base theory on theory but rather on changing practice and empirical-historical study, which are proving ground for concepts and hypotheses." Thus, in its original form, critical theory is not ignorant of the problems and issues of the real world, and "its aims are as practical as those of problem-solving theory" (Cox 1981, p. 130). Thus, if critical theory has become irrelevant to the issues of world politics, current studies of critical theory are to blame looking at Cox's original promise.

Problem-solving theory's promise of being value-free is only partially accepted by critical theory. As Hobson (2007, p. 92) also points out, most of the critical approaches are 'self-reflexive' in the sense that they are aware of their biases as well as values in the process of theorizing. For Cox (1981), problem-solving theory may be methodologically value-free but its acceptance of the existing order as its framework makes it ideologically value-driven. Critical theory argues that what is problematic about problem-solving theory is not the latter's usefulness as action guides, but rather the conservative consequences of their ways of analyzing (Cox, 1981, p. 130). In other words, for Cox, critical theory does not have a problem with conventional theories' positivist methodology per se, but they argue that applying this certain type of methodology has ideological consequences. Ashley (1984, p. 228) also argues that it claims to side with the victors in both American revolutions, which refer to the scientific revolution that is against traditionalism, and the realist revolution that rejects idealism. He argues realism betrayed both of them and that it undermines the former by reducing political action to economic logic, and the latter by reducing methodological ways to a purely technical initiative.

While critical theory's main objection to problem-solving theory is the latter's approach to theorizing, Waltz answers these criticisms by stating that "to believe that listing the omissions of a theory constitutes a valid criticism is to misconstrue the theoretical enterprise" (Waltz, 1990, p. 31). Waltz argues that "critics of neorealist theory fail to understand that a theory is not a statement about everything that is important in international-political life, but rather a necessarily slender explanatory construct" (Waltz, 1990, p. 32). Cox's criticism of 'fragmented reality' which has its specific focus on state-society distinction in problem-solving theories as well as Ashley's criticism about neorealism methodology seems to be answered by one of the most prominent figures of conventional theories. However, with the rejection of any criticism of its understanding of theory, neorealism seems to be closing its door to open dialogue with other approaches and ideas.

According to critical approaches, what problem-solving theories do is to 'model the social scientist on the engineer' who tries to find an optimal solution to a practical problem of design (Bohman 2002). This is done to legitimize and maintain the existing social and political structures. Cox (1981, p. 128) suggests to "look at the problem of world order in the whole but beware of reifying a world system." Critical theory should not be taken as a radical idealist approach because it operates within philosophical realism, which means that it does not claim a world that is fully a creation of the mind. What critical theory aims to do is not to argue that there is not an existing operating order in the world. Rather, its aim is not to accept the existing order as it is and by questioning its (historical) roots it aims to allow for normative change (See Rupert, 2021). It follows what Marx once put forth, 'philosophers have only interpreted the world, but the point is to change it' (Marx 1977, in Devetak 2022). According to such a worldview, the study of world politics is unavoidably normative (Neufeld 1995, p. 108). For Cox (1981, p. 130) critical theory has a utopian side but it is limited by historical processes. However, conventional as well as post-structural critiques of critical theory claim that it is not feasible in terms of dealing with the problems of the world. Agreeing with Bilgin (2022, p. 70), I argue that "this is a misnomer" because critical theory does aim to solve the present problems of the world by not overlooking "the historical processes that have produced them." It aims to propose alternatives to the ways the existing world works by questioning the reification of things, ideas, and structures.

The example of how critical theory and realist theory differ in their perspectives of war can help make my point. The main question of realism, like other conventional approaches, is how to cope with the 'reality' of war as a natural feature of world politics. Because of the anarchical nature of world politics, states seek to maximize power in an environment of competition, which makes conflicts and wars inevitable (See Waltz 1979; Mearsheimer 2001; Lebow, 2021). Accordingly, realism aims to solve the problem of war by developing strategies to assist states in this struggle. Critical theory approaches war from a different perspective, regarding it as the construction of specific social, historical, and political processes. It aims to critically analyze the way the problem is set up in the first place, such as the taken-for-granted assumption that war is natural. Knowledge has an inherently political and social character (Cox 1981) which necessitates the researchers to denaturalize it for the ultimate aim of changing what we come to accept as reality. Critical theory's interest in denaturalizing and changing prevailing orders and structures is also dealing with, or trying to *solve a problem* that scholars identify. As such, it is misleading to argue that critical theory is not interested in solving the problems of the world, but it can be argued that it has a particular way to do it, which differs from conventional approaches. On a different note, some studies of critical theory tend to take the criticism of positivism for granted and accept that the positivist or empiricist way of acquiring knowledge would have political consequences. This process leads to the avoidance of conducting empirical research, which allows their critics to argue that they lost sight of the problems of world politics.

Critical theory's rejection of the positivist research program is what makes it a distinctive approach in the first place. However, this does not prevent conventional approaches from addressing this as a pitfall. In the 1980s, Keohane (1988) suggested that critical approaches' weakness lies in their lack of a clearly established reflective program. So, the problem, according to him, is not related to their critical arguments. Keohane (1988) also argued that critical approaches would remain invisible unlike empirical researchers and also they would remain on the margins of the discipline if they did not establish such research program and utilize it in their particular studies of world politics. As argued by Lüleci and Sula (2016), Keohane's criticisms of critical scholarship disregard their arguments on social science philosophy. Despite being an external critique that does not consider critical school of thought's own arguments, he still points to a pitfall in critical theory from the perspective of traditional

approaches, which is the lack of an established research program.

Kurki and Wight (2013) argue that rationalist theories do not seriously consider critical theory's arguments because of their rejection of the critical camp's assumptions on ontology, methodology, and epistemology. This makes engaging in dialogue even more difficult. As Neufeld (1993, p. 60) argues, critical theory (or reflective scholarship) does not seek to build a research program that is designed to produce cumulative knowledge about the empirical issues of world politics or about the theory of it. Furthermore, one cannot talk about critical scholarship as a monolithic entity that shares each other's all assumptions. There are multiple critical approaches and their ability to make sense of the values and facts of the world through a reflexive understanding of knowledge is one of the many reasons why critical scholarship needs to be taken seriously (Hamati-Ataya 2013, p. 20). The critical scholarship does not aim to establish a research program. It aims to understand, rethink and reflect on normative, social, and political issues in world politics and to produce an alternative knowledge of it. As Tickner (2005, pp. 1-3) puts forward, the methodological framework that is utilized by critical scholarship (specifically feminism) does not present a claim over one particular standard of correct methodology. She adds that feminist scholarship in IR has continued to develop and grow since the 1990s and only a limited portion of this scholarship has adopted the path Keohane offered. Most of that scholarship adopts a critical perspective on world politics and also claims about knowledge of it.

As put forward by Keohane (1988), rationalist scholarship adopts the idea that most of us are Enlightenment children due to our belief in the significance of knowledge as a guide for improvement in human action. This rationalist commitment to the necessity of progress is defined mostly in terms of liberty, welfare, and security. Keohane challenges the critical scholarship from this standpoint that relies on a strictly defined understanding of progress through the accumulation of knowledge. This criticism toward critical theories follows a strictly defined understanding of what science is and what it does. However, critical theories share one common assumption, which is their rejection of positivist ways of doing social science (Smith (1996, p. 12). Thus, Keohane's 'gold standard' is actually what critical scholarship has been attacking in the first place, in other words, 'the *raison d'être* of critical approaches to IR' (Lüleci and Sula, 2016).

Critical theory's another criticism of problem-solving theory addresses their reliance on Western concepts by which it is impossible to understand the problems of 'the rest.' According to Ashley (1987, p. 412) "modernist narrative -the multifaceted historical narrative rooted in the Enlightenment, is dominant in Western society, expressed in rationalist theory, and centering on the progressive unfolding of universalizing reason and social harmony via science, technology, law, and the state." This creates the perception that problem-solving theory aims to universalize Western understanding. Yet, reading Morgenthau's fourth and fifth principles about morality and ethics, is it still possible to accuse all the conventional approaches of making universality claims on behalf of the West? Furthermore, there are also criticisms of critical theory arguing that they are not successful in emancipating IR theory from Western domination.

Hobson while making an overview of critical theories explains important limitations over the application of those theories. He claims that Western explanations of world politics, be they conscious or subliminal, falls into Eurocentric racism. Especially by emphasizing the concept of subliminal Eurocentricism, Hobson points to an important inconsistency in the critical IR theory literature (Hobson, 2007, pp. 92-5). Critical theory, while criticizing the hegemonic relationship between the East and West, failed in accomplishing their aim of progress toward emancipation. For instance, in Marxist studies of hegemony, there is a certain historic bias that they mainly analyze the European hegemony over the East. Although they criticize this hegemonic relationship, there is an implicit role attributed to the Western powers to hegemonize the East. They have inevitably fallen into a fallacy by not giving agency to the exploited East. The very idea of emancipation stems from Enlightenment thought, which is a concept and an experience of the West. If current followers of critical theory fail to incorporate the experience of 'the rest' into their analyses, they become the very colonies of Western thinking by reproducing Western knowledge while trying to undermine it.

The lack of proper dialogue between conventional and critical camps of the discipline has led to a lot more than independent development of both approaches. Getting their positions too strictly, and focusing on criticizing each other rather than contributing to general knowledge production, positivist-non-positivist debate harmed their productivity and their capacity to solve the problems of the real world. IR theories have done a better job of understanding and (re)constructing the discipline,

rather than making feasible analyses of world politics. In other words, while they were busy trying to define themselves based on an external critique of the other side, they have become ignorant of the changing nature of the world. Theories of IR seem to be in a feasibility crisis. Although a pluralist and multidisciplinary understanding is becoming widely popular within the discipline, theories of IR still have not developed the tools to understand/explain the changing nature of conflicts and wars, transnational alliances, the problem of increasing mobility (migration), poverty, and so on as the current issues in world politics. Be it 'critical' or 'problem-solving,' what does an approach to IR serve if it is not interested in solving the problems of the world? Is there a way out of these rigid dichotomies, or has the time of IR theory passed irrevocably?

Is There a Way Out? Call for a Constructive Dialogue

Traditional theories' critique of critical approaches focuses on the latter's lack of systematic methodology, rather than their main assumptions, or ideological consequences of their world views and analyses. Scholars of critical approaches on the other hand argue that their critique is not to the application of any type of methodology, but rather the political consequences of using certain theories in certain ways while potentially silencing others. Understood as such, it is possible to argue that the two approaches do not necessarily and inherently clash with each other in terms of the main assumptions they have regarding world politics. This begs a few questions: Is the division of labor between criticizing and problem-solving inescapable? Is it possible to reconcile conventional/traditional and critical approaches? Can IR scholars seek answers to both 'how questions and why questions' within a single study or approach?

Smith (1996) and Kurki and Wight (2007) argue in their respective pieces that both positivism and non/post-positivism have their pitfalls and ask whether the dichotomies in the discipline can/should be overcome. Smith mentions how ill-defined positivism is in IR theory and argues that the weaknesses and limitations of positivism are so obvious that positivism cannot be rescued, yet post-positivism also suffers from a lack of clarity (no single post-positivist approach). But positivism has become so powerful in the discipline that its assumptions become commonsensical and not easy to go beyond. Kurki and Wight (2007) offer that there might be a way beyond paradigms without completely rejecting none of them. Scientific realism can be considered as an attempt to go beyond the above-discussed debates of IR

theories while assuming a reality existing independent of us, either social or natural while relying on relativism in terms of epistemology, and advocating pluralism in methodology. Critical realism takes scientific realist assumptions even further. Both approaches refuse dichotomies and the so-called debates in understanding and applying theories of IR as lenses to approach world issues.

I argue that the treatment for the above-mentioned crisis of IR theory does not lie in the establishment of a third camp, but rather it lies in the idea of bridging once seemed to be conflicting approaches or 'an eclectic approach' as advocated by Peter Katzenstein and Rudra Sil. As Katzenstein and Sil (2010) argue and this study observes while analyzing realist and critical approaches "research traditions give themselves permission to bypass aspects of a complex reality" that does not fit in their theoretical or meta-theoretical commitments. Eclecticism argues that despite their conflicting meta-theoretical stances, the two approaches can be integrated. An eclectic understanding is synonymous neither with triangulation nor multi- method research (Katzenstein and Sil, 2010, p. 415). It rather refers to a middle-range pragmatic attempt to utilize distinct theoretical constructions by pooling them together.

Analytical eclecticism as offered by Katzenstein and Sil is a pragmatic approach that refers not to a third way but to a middle way and which stands for an interrelated and integrated understanding. Its pragmatic aim is to come up with more comprehensive responses to the complex social questions of contemporary world politics. Although their approach stands mostly within the boundaries of causal inference and/or the explaining tradition, the idea is that the so-called incommensurable or mutually exclusive research paradigms can and should come together to not fall into the trap of "excessive reliance on a single analytical framework and the simplifying assumptions that come with it" (Katzenstein and Sil, 2010, p 414). This also prevents the marginalization of scholarship and research that 'belongs to' certain research traditions.

So, is it possible to build a bridge between these approaches so that observation and data can become meaningful with interpretation? This call differs from foundationalist arguments in the sense that it inherently assumes that all our knowledge claims can turn out to be mistaken (Smith 1996). Knowledge claims cannot be universal, but they are always situated in political and social contexts (Rupert, 2003). This implies that all our knowledge claims are open to questioning and

reconsideration. As Fierke (1998) argues, it implies the need to look again, in a fresh way, at the assumptions that we come to take for granted about the world. The added value or benefit of such an integrated approach lies in the ability to be aware of the weaknesses and strengths of the existing approaches and the freedom of utilizing both to make sense of a particular social phenomenon. This call does not make the incommensurability argument, as articulated by Feyerabend, automatically irrelevant though. The incommensurability thesis refers to the idea that terms and concepts that are applied in one research tradition or theoretical approach cannot be integrated or are not interchangeable because they are formulated based on different standards of research and assumptions about knowledge (Feyereband, 1962). According to this argument, an effort to bring distinct research traditions refers to an "artificial homogenization of incompatible perspectives along with a host of unrecognized conceptual problems that subvert the aims of the theory" (Katzenstein and Sil, 2010, p. 414).

This argument needs to be challenged based on at least three points. First, debates on theories and methods have become so central to the study of world politics in decades that they hamper curiosity about significant empirical questions that could otherwise be inquired. Still embracing the skepticism about empiricism, I argue that academic research that starts with an empirical question needs to be reconsidered and re-established. The focus on answering an empirical question also helps to make the imagined division of labor between 'critical' and 'problem-solving' theories. Second, the arguments of incommensurability and the division of labor between theories of IR have created distinct traditions in terms of research methods. While positivist approaches almost monopolized the use of statistics, questionnaires, quantitative content analysis, process tracing, etc, most scholars that identify with post-positivist tradition perceive these methods as evil or useless, while adopting methods such as discourse analysis, thick description, and conceptual analysis (See Şatana, 2015, pp. 25-26). Third, even if they are not integrated into a single research, an open mind about 'the other research tradition' has the potential to foster innovative questions and new areas of research. Questioning the division of labor between IR theories as argued by Cox can be a starting point to adopt such an open mind. World politics is complex and multilayered, which more often than not requires looking beyond one's research tradition, even academic discipline. Refusing and marginalizing others' arguments, standards of research, and ways of inquiry conflicts with a very central commitment of social

sciences, which is to adopt a critical perspective while engaging in academic research.

The literature on border security and practice theory (or International Political Sociology-IPS) can be an example of how such artificial distinction can be overcome. IPS does not aim to create a distinct school of thought but acts as a hub to bring scholars that only share a commitment to present a critique of how IR and security have been studied (Guillaume and Bilgin, 2017). Questioning the existing boundaries around disciplines and theories, it aims to foster innovative epistemological, methodological, analytic, and theoretical perspectives on the study of world politics (IPS Section Charter). This call for openness has come with a rich field of study on borders and migration to which scholars of IPS contributed with their respective theoretical approaches and empirical questions. Analyzing border practices, most IPS scholars focus on empirical questions and seek proof from the empirical world in their answers while applying multiple methods such as network analysis, content analysis, discourse analysis, ethnography, and process tracing in their respective studies. Doing so, these studies are also able to reflect their critical stance towards knowledge claims and how world politics have been studied for decades inside the boundaries that have been drawn by gatekeeping activities and discourses.

Thus, an eclectic approach has a high potential to bring these two research traditions together and utilize them in a complementary manner with a pragmatic approach. In this way, complex issues of the social world, which have multiple dimensions including political discourse and socio-political practices can be approached more comprehensively without imagined boundaries around approaches and theories.

CONCLUSION

The integration of critical theory into the discipline in the 1980s generated a discussion on science and IR theory. This so-called fourth debate in IR is presented with different denotations such as 'positivism vs post-positivism,' 'explaining vs understanding,' and 'rationalism vs reflectivism' (Kurki and Wight, 2007). In his 1981 article, Cox defines these two camps as critical and problem-solving theories. This paper analyzed the content and relevancy of this denotation and the dichotomous nature of the discipline as narrated by multiple scholars of IR. While focusing on this general subject, it limits itself to realism and critical theory to make better sense of their commitments and critiques of each to the other. For this aim, the paper first analyzed both schools of thought

by going through their own promises, then discussed the narrative that constantly re/constructs IR in terms of dichotomies. In the last part, the paper asked whether there was a way out of these dichotomies and to establish a constructive dialogue between 'critical' and 'problem-solving' theories.

The paper argued that both critical and problem-solving theories criticize each other from their own point of view. It argued that this type of criticism aims to justify one's own position while overlooking the other party's own promises. While critical theory criticizes conventional approaches for adopting a positivist epistemology and justifying and making possible the prevailing orders and structures by trying to fix its problems; conventional theories criticize critical theories for their lack of a 'proper' research program, and to ignore the 'real' problems of world politics. This paper challenged these arguments on two main bases. First, while critical theories never promised to develop a positivist research program, conventional theories aimed to adopt a 'scientific' approach in their analyses of world politics, especially following the 1960s. Thus, criticizing the other school of thought on one of its fundamental features constitutes a significant obstacle to establishing a constructive dialogue in itself. Second, both conventional and critical theories are interested in the problems of world politics, while the ways they choose to do that are different. Conventional approaches have a more direct approach in addressing the current issues in world politics with their commitment to positivism and empirical research. Critical approaches choose to question and denaturalize the orders and structures that make these problems possible in the first place. However, they both aim to address and solve the problems in the existing ways of how world politics work.

After identifying these arguments, this paper argued that the abovementioned points of divergence do not necessarily pose an obstacle to the establishment of a dialogue between once-divided research traditions of IR. By adopting a pragmatic approach that aims to address the issues of world politics, conventional and critical approaches may overcome their differences in terms of epistemological stances. Applying a pragmatic and eclectic approach to knowledge, conventional and critical schools of thought may start a dialogue with the aim of establishing a comprehensive approach to analyze world politics. Such dialogue will be possible by first questioning the imagined boundaries around problem-solving and critical theories.

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