ROBERT COX'UN "TEORİ DAİMA BAZILARI VE BAZI AMAÇLAR İÇİNDİR" ARGÜMANI ÜZERİNE BİR DEĞERLENDİRME: ULUSLARARASI İLİŞKİLER DİSİPLİNİ'NDE ETKİLERİ VE ÖNEMİ[1]

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Öz:

Robert Cox'un "teori daima birileri ve bazı amaçlar içindir" argümanı Uluslararası İlişkiler teorileri üzerine yapılan çalışmalar açısından büyük bir önem arz etmektedir. Zira bu argüman, tüm teorilerin değer yüklü olduklarını ve bazı amaçlara hizmet ettiklerini vurgulayarak esasında objektif teori olmadığını/olamayacağını iddia etmektedir. Cox'un bu argümanını sorun çözücü teori ve eleştirel teori ayrımıyla açıklamasından yola çıkarak bu çalışma da argüman üzerindeki analizlerini aynı ayrım üzerine inşa etmektedir. Çalışma toplam üç bölümden oluşmaktadır. Bu bölümler 'var olan düzen ile ilişkiler', 'metateorik bakış açısı' ve 'teori-pratik bağlantısı' olarak adlandırılmıştır. Bu bölümlerde yapılan analizler sorun çözücü teori ve eleştirel teori arasındaki farklar ve benzerlikler üzerine yapılan tartışmalardan oluşmaktadır. Bu farklar ve benzerliklerden yola çıkarak çalışma Cox'un argümanın manasını irdelemektedir. Bunu yaparken Cox'un sahip olduğu teorik bakış açısı ile Frankfurt Okulu yaklaşımının benzeştiği noktalar da vurgulanmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: sorun çözücü teori, eleştirel teori, Coxçu yaklaşım, Frankfurt Okulu, pozitivizm, post-pozitivizm.

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AN ANALYSIS ON ROBERT COX'S ARGUMENT "THEORY IS ALWAYS FOR SOMEONE AND FOR SOME PURPOSE": ITS IMPLICATIONS AND SIGNIFICANCE IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Abstract:

Robert Cox's argument, "theory is always for someone and for some purpose", constitutes a great significance for the study of International Relations. For, this argument asserts that all theories are value laden and serve to some specific purpose; thus, there is no and cannot be an objective theory. As Cox's explains his argument through problem-solving theory and critical theory dichotomy, this paper conducts its analysis through the same way. This study consists of three sections. These are 'relations with existing structure', 'meta-theoretical aspect' and 'theory and practice nexus'. Each section analyzes the differences and similarities of 'problem-solving theory' and 'critical theory'. Building upon the differences and similarities, this study examines the meaning of the Cox's argument. By doing so, this study, also, emphasizes the overlapping features of Frankfurt School approach and Coxian theoretical perspective.

Keywords: problem-solving theory, critical theory, Coxian approach, Frankfurt School, positivism, post-positivism

INTRODUCTION

Robert Cox argues in his article, 'Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory', that "theory is always for someone and for some purpose" (Cox, 198:128). This argument creates an awareness that all theories regardless of their being positivist or post- positivist are value- bound and have some purpose that serves to a particular social structure. Therefore, there is no and cannot be an objective theory in social sciences, in general, and in International Relations, in particular.

As Cox's explains his argument through problem-solving theory and critical theory dichotomy, this paper conducts its analysis through the same way. By doing so, this paper attempts not only to show the differences between problem-solving and critical theory but also to emphasize the similarities of them. The differences and similarities constitute the heart of Cox's argument that there can be no objective and value free theory. In this regard, the differences and similarities will be discussed in three sections. In each of these, the similarities between the Frankfurt School approach and neo-Gramscian approach will also be evaluated.

In the first section, this paper analyzes the relations of problem-solving and critical theories with the existing structures. The second section compares and contrasts the meta-theoretical aspects of problem-solving and critical theories. Finally, the third section examines the theory and practice nexus with regards to problem-solving and critical theories. In each section, this paper aims to demonstrate how problem-solving theory is value bound, constituted by practice (and vice versa), and, consciously or unconsciously, serves to the existing social and power relationships.

I) Relations with Existing Order

The problem-solving theory and critical theory dichotomy which was introduced to International Relations by Cox himself is useful to understand the meaning of Cox's argument. Accordingly, problem-solving theory is a categorical title that consists of all theories serving the purpose of solving problems that may arise in the prevailing social and power relationships, established based on a specific ideology or perspective. On the other hand, critical theory is reflexive on the theorizing process in order to be clearly aware of the ideology or perspective that gives rise to the theorizing process. This reflexivity of critical theory enables to an excavation of the ideology or perspective. Thus, critical theory is able to open up spaces for alternative perspectives on which alternative worlds can be built (Cox, 1981:128).

With this in mind, problem-solving theories conceive the world and prevailing social and power relationships within the world as given. Therefore,

they aim to make the world they find function efficiently and smoothly. In order to achieve this, problem-solving theories attempt to solve problems which may trigger dysfunctions in the prevailing order. In this regard, Cox argues that

> "the strength of the problem solving approach lies in its ability to fix limits or parameters to a problem area and to reduce the statement of a particular problem to a limited number of variables which are amenable to relatively close and precise examination..., (thus); problem solving theories can be represented... as serving particular national sectional, or class interests, which are comfortable within the given order" (Cox, 1981:129; Parenthesis added by author).

Accordingly, problem-solving theories fulfill their functions by making the prevailing social and power relationships (the current configuration of International Relations) appear given, natural and constant (Hobdon and Wyn Jones, 2006:237; the term used in parenthesis is used by Hobdon and Wyn Jones).

Opposed to problem-solving theories, critical theories have critical lenses that questions the prevailing order. They enable an inquiry on how this order came into existence. As a result, they attempt to demonstrate the un-uniqueness of the prevailing order which implies that the prevailing order is just one of the alternatives. In this regard, critical theories open up spaces for other alternatives through challenging the prevailing order and as well as digging the social ground for the discovery of social processes that can potentially lead to change (Hobdon and Wyn Jones, 2006:237). As Ashley stresses, "knowledge is always constituted in reflection of interests", critical theories are interested in bringing consciousness of this phenomena (Ashley, 1981:207). Critical theories fulfill this by historicizing the prevailing order. By historicizing, critical theory not only shows that the prevailing order is not given and reflection of particular interests but also investigate the ways that may lead to the change of it (Cox, 1981:129). As Fierke calls, this process is identified as 'denaturalizing' process (Fierke, 1998:13). Or, as Neufeld mentions, critical theories delegitimize the established (prevailing) order (Neufeld, 1995:14).

Looking at the details of critical theories in Coxian terms one can ask that is there any limitation to alternative social and political orders to the prevailing one? In other words, does everything go as the alternative in critical theories? For Cox, there is a limit to the range of choice of alternative orders. The comprehension of historical process in critical theory works out as a filter that constrains utopianism and limits the alternatives. In Cox's words, "it (critical theory) must reject improbable alternative order just as it rejects the

permanency of the existing order" (Cox, 1981:130; Parenthesis added by author).

Building on the analysis above, there are many similarities between Frankfurt School approach and neo-Gramscian approach proposed by Cox. According to Frankfurt School theorists, "all social theories and political philosophies reflect... the preoccupations of the historical epoch in which they were conceived and formulated" (Wyn Jones, 1999:9). Horkheimer's argument is contributive here that "conception of theory was absolutized, as though it were grounded in the inner nature of knowledge justified in some other ahistorical way, and thus... became a reified, ideological category" (Horkheimer, 2002:194). It is clear that Horkheimer sees theories and theorists as tools and important factors for the production and reproduction of the prevailing social and power relationships. He calls these theories that produce and reproduce the prevailing order as 'traditional theory' in his famous piece "Traditional and Critical Theory". The conceptualizations of problem-solving theory by Cox and traditional theory by Horkheimer can be used as synonyms in terms of the arguments expressed above. Moreover, there are additional similarities that will be discussed in further sections.

To sum up, the argument of Cox, "theory is always for someone and for some purpose" implies that both problem-solving theory and critical theory serves for someone and for some purpose. With regards to the relations with existing order, problem-solving theory is for (someone who are) the social forces, in general, and the ruling elite, in particular, in developed states , and for the purpose of making the prevailing social and power relationships endure; in other words, of the legitimizing the the status quo (Hobdon and Wyn Jones, 2006:237). On the other hand, critical theory is for someone who is disadvantaged by the prevailing order, and for the purpose of denaturalizing the prevailing social and power relationships and seeking for alternatives.

II) Meta-Theoretical Aspect

Cox's problem-solving theory and critical theory dichotomy has meta-theoretical aspects as well. While problem-solving theory can be represented as positivist, rationalist and explanatory, critical theory is post- positivist, reflectivist and constitutive. Accordingly, problem-solving theories establish their truth claims on the fact and value as well as subject and object separation. Therefore, knowledge is objective and timeless for the advocates of problem-solving theories. On the other hand, critical theories reject these assumptions.

It is obvious that problem-solving theories are heavily influenced by the methodologies of natural sciences and their applicability to social sciences. This influence leads to suppose that positivist way of science is the only

legitimate basis for knowledge (Devetak, 2005:141). Positivism in social sciences can be best regarded, in general terms, as the emulation of natural sciences by promoting scientific methods, which are, mainly, quantitative methods and tools to uncover regularities among social realm and predict future human behaviors (Linklater, 2007:49). According to Smith and Owens, there are four main assumptions can be identified on positivist way of science (Smith and Owens, 2006:274). First, science is a unified body that natural and social sciences can be drawn on same methodologies. Second, the facts are neutral; therefore, there is a strong emphasize on the distinction between fact and values. Third, there are regularities in social world as in natural one that can be discovered through theories. Fourth, empiricist epistemology is the only way to assess the validity of truth claims.

Apart from the distinction between fact and values, problem- solving theory assumes that there is also distinction between subject and object (Devetak, 2005:141). This distinction can be well illustrated by labels such as explaining and understanding by Hollis and Smith (1990) and mind-world monism and mind- dualism by Jackson (2010). Explaining and understanding label implies a distinction that is built upon the terms 'inside' and 'outside'. Accordingly, explaining emphasizes that observation is the only way of generating knowledge (Kurki and Wight, 2010:22). This leads to separation between observed and observer. In other words, researcher is at outside and not a part of what is happening in the world. On the other hand, understanding side focuses on interpretation and hermeneutic instead of pure observation. This feature of understanding stands on the belief that researcher is always a part of what is happening. In Hollis and Smith's words, "action must always be understood from within" (Hollis and Smith, 1990:72). Thus, there is an inseparable link between observer and observed as well as between subject and object.

At the same time, Jackson's mind-world dualism reflects the idea that there is a world existing out there and it is independent of our minds (Jackson, 2010:31). In contrast, mind-world monism pushes the idea that there is no such mind- independent world (Jackson, 2010:35-36). In this regard; in Jackson's words,

> "The former option maintains a separation between researcher and world such that research has to be directed toward properly crossing that gap, and valid knowledge must in the end be related to some sort of accurate correspondence between empirical and theoretical propositions on the one hand and the actual character of a mind- independent world... The latter ... maintains that the researcher is a part of the world in such a way that speaking of 'the world' as

divorced from the activities of making sense of the world is literally nonsensical: 'world' is endogenous to social practices of knowledge-production, including (but not limited to) scholarly practices, and hence scholarly knowledge-production is in no sense a simple description or recording of already-existing stable worldly objects" (Jackson, 2010:35-37).

Since problem-solving theories have their roots in positivist vision of science, they can be described as mind- world dualist and be put on explaining side. They refuse any kind of relationship between value and facts as well as observer and observed. They make us believe that there is a world out there independent from us. Thus, truth is only one and unique that only problem-solving theories can have knowledge from it through positivist vision of science as well as observation. This belief leads to reification of knowledge and delegitimization of alternative knowledge productions.

Contrary to problem-solving theories, critical theories are post-positivist as well as mind-world monist and can be put on understanding side. Accordingly, they are value-bound since they seek alternatives to prevailing order. According to Kurki and Wight, post- positivists unites on skepticism that facts can be objectively known and measured. In addition, all events are subject to interpretation that depends on the interpreter's own situation and context for them (Kurki and Wight, 2010:22-24). Therefore, there is no value- free knowledge.

Horkheimer's criticism towards 'traditional theory' touches upon the same issue. He argues that although traditional theory draws "a strict dividing line between thought-subject and reality-object", even the decision of scientist on what subject to study is under pressure of the social processes or societal elements in which he/she lives (Wyn Jones, 1999: 16-18). Therefore, problem-solving theories are value-bound as critical theories are. Cox stresses value-boundness of problem-solving theories either. Accordingly, problem-solving theory is "methodologically value-free insofar as it treats the variables it considers as objects; but it is value- bound by the virtue of the fact that it implicitly accepts the prevailing order as its own framework" (Cox, 1981:130).

Building upon Cox's argument, even though problem-solving theory is claimed as value- free, it is actually value bound. It serves to the endurance and legitimization of prevailing social and political orders. Moreover, since problem- solving theory is claimed as value-free and is based on observation, it reifies the social phenomena from which it derives its arguments. In other words, problem-solving theory reifies knowledge; thus, naturalize and normalize the prevailing social and power relationships from which it derives this knowledge. This brings us to the Cox' argument that since all theories,

regardless of being problem- solving or critical, are for someone and for some purpose, there is no value- free theory. In this regard, although problem-solving theory tends to ignore the ideologies, social processes or purposes behind it, it actually has an, consciously or unconsciously, implicit agenda which serves for legitimization and continuation of the prevailing order.

III) Theory and Practice Nexus

The nexus between theory and practice has been a controversial issue in the debates of International Relations theory. Although it is not explicit in Cox's argument, Cox seems to have an implications on the issue. In this respect, problem-solving theory and critical theory have different attitudes towards the relationship between theory and practice.

Advocates of problem-solving theory see "theory as a picture, mentally formed, of a bounded realm or domain of activity" (Waltz, 1994:913). This argument leads us to think that there is a domain of activity independent from theory. Therefore, theory and practice can be described as two different and separate realms. Moreover, the realm of theory does not have any potential to influence the realm of practice, in other word, the domain of activity. Since problem-solving theory is value-free for its advocates, as it was discussed in previous section, Bilgin critically stresses that the task of theory is to explain the social phenomena objectively in problem-solving theory tradition (Bilgin, 1999:36). In addition, Wallace (as an advocate of problem-solving theory) confirms the distinction between theory and practice in problem-solving theory by criticizing International Relations as a British discipline in terms of its being "too fond of theory and meta-theory" (Wallace, 1996:304). He suggests that scholars should co-opt into policymaking arena (Wallace, 1994:317). Otherwise, they would face with a danger of moving from scholarship to scholasticism and being "refuge in increasing abstractions, theories and meta-theories" (Wallace, 1996:311). Similarly, Walt (another advocate of problem-solving theory) recommends theorists to pay more attention to real-world relevance and solution of real world problems (Walt, 2005:42). He sees theory too abstract, too general and insufficient to fulfill this criterion (Walt, 2005:35-36).

Building upon these arguments, problem-solving theorists think that there is a distinction between theory and practice. An important part of their recommendations are about solution of real world problem that is the prevailing order with its social and power relationships in terms of Cox's terminology. In this regard, the advocates of problem-solving theory has "an objectivist conception of theory and the theory/practice relationship" (Bilgin, 1999:34).

Critical theory has a different attitude towards theory and practice relationship. It criticizes the belief, which perceives theory and practice as if they are two separate activities or realms. In contrast, as Smith argues that policy and theory are intertwined; accordingly, theory and practice are mutually constitutive relationship. In this regard, "theory is ... implicated in practice, and practice is ... theoretical" (Smith, 1997:514-515). Thus, critical theorists presume that theory is a form of practice (Kurki and Wight, 2010:32). For critical theorists, this is also valid for problem-solving theories as for critical theories since problem-solving theories seek to legitimize the prevailing order and critical theories seek to denaturalize it. Therefore, theory produces or reproduces the word we live in.

The ideas of Frankfurt School approach can be borrowed in order to understand theory and practice relationship. Accordingly, the task of critical theory is to overcome the narrowness and myopia created by traditional conception of science. By doing so, individual humans can be liberated from suffering, and happiness can be promoted (Wyn Jones, 1999:23). In this regard, the theorist creates awareness on the contradictions between the principles and realities of the prevailing order. Then he/she shows to society that there are alternatives and potentials that are already embedded in society (immanent critique). Individuals are said that you are not doomed with the existing structure.[2] As a result, theory seems to initiate a change potential in society to alter the prevailing order.

In a nutshell, while problem-solving theory rejects any fundamental change and has a static understanding on the prevailing order, critical theory seeks alternatives and emancipation. Although it is not clear in Coxian understanding, it is not wrong to infer that his critical theory points out contradictions within the prevailing order. Moreover, it historicizes the prevailing social and power relationships within; thus, discovers alternatives. Meanwhile, theorist is under pressure of societal processes. Therefore, there is mutually constitutive relationship between the realms of theory and practice.

In addition, the role of the theorist in Frankfurt School is very similar with the concept of 'organic intellectual' in neo-Gramscian approach. Briefly, organic intellectuals, that is 'theorists' in Frankfurt School approach, play a significant role for the production or reproduction of an historical bloc; hence, hegemony (Cox, 1993:57). Thus, theory and practice are dependent to each other. Accordingly, a belief that considers them as separate realms is problematic.

In short, theory constitutes the world or the structure in which we live and vice versa. Despite problem-solving theory is considered as an objective tool to explain the practice; as Wyn Jones expresses, it is very much related

with practice since "it acts as a support mechanism for the status quo" (Wyn Jones, 1999:21). As Cox says, it naturalizes the prevailing order and makes it function smoothly (Cox, 1981:129). From this aspect, there are effects of problem-solving theory to practice. This brings us to the Cox's argument "theory is always for someone and for some purpose". In this regard, all theories, regardless of their being problem-solving or critical, have implications in practice, and practice has roots in theories. The relationship between them is a mutually constitutive one.

CONCLUSION

Cox started an assault to the mainstream International Relations theories in terms of objectivity of social sciences with his 1981 article. He rejected the notion that there is and can be an objective theory in International Relations. He has demonstrated his rejection by labeling theories as problem-solving and critical. In this regard, although problem-solving theory is claimed to be objective and tend to explain social phenomena, it actually reifies knowledge by underrating alternative knowledge productions; thus, naturalize the existing order by solving problems within it and delegitimizes alternatives to it. Through this way, problem-solving theory serves to the continuation of existing structure.

Cox's argument implies that regardless of their being problem-solving or critical, all theories are, consciously or unconsciously, value bound and serve for someone and for some purpose. This is to say that, although a theory is said to be objective, one way or another it is actually subjective. Cox explicitly accepts that being value free is methodologically possible; but, all theories have a purpose of serving to prevailing order or seeking alternative of it. This paper has shown this case by using the terminology of Cox, 'problem-solving and critical theory', and by comparing them in terms of their relations with existing order. Moreover, meta-theoretical aspect has shown that problem-solving theory is essentially value bound since it takes the existing or prevailing order as its own framework. It seeks to derive knowledge from so-called objective reality or social phenomena. Moreover, there is mutually constitutive relationship between problem-solving theory and the so-called objective reality or prevailing social and power relationships. Therefore, there is no objective reality or social phenomena.

Overall, Cox's argument has a great significance for the study of International Relations. It shows International Relations students and scholars that there is no objective theory. It is no matter positivist or post-positivist, mind-world dualist or mind-world monist or explaining or understanding, all theories have some purpose. This purpose serves the interests of particular social groups. These groups are the inhabitants of developed states, and ruling

elites for problem-solving theory, and the oppressed and uncomfortable individuals or communities for critical theory. In this regard, Cox's argument "theory is always for someone and for some purpose" creates an awareness in the study of International Relations that theory is more than explaining in theories. They, consciously or unconsciously, constitute the world we live in it.

ENDNOTES

1. A preliminary version of this paper, within the title "The Significance of the Argument "Theory is always for Someone and for Some Purpose" for the Study of International Relations", was presented at the METU 2014 Conference- Multiple Paradigms Multiple Worlds in 27 June, 2014.

2. This leads to the issue of emancipation. However, since this is paper is on the nexus between problem- solving and critical theories, emancipation issue is out of scope and explained briefly. Emancipation is defined as "freeing people from those (prevailing order's) constraints that stop them carrying out what freely they would choose to do". See Ken Booth, "Security in Anarchy: Utopian Realism in Theory", *International Affairs,* Vol. 67, No. 3, 1991, p. 539.

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