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The Piecing Together of Humpty Dumpty [1978]

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The Piecing Together of Humpty Dumpty: Graduate Education in International Foreign Policy

[1978]

1. Premises, Givens and Banalities

We can take for granted that there is a substantial need, in American graduate education, for programs which emphasize the intertwining of the economic, political, and sociological factors that affect the global environment. We have entered (in 1965? 1973? 1450?) an era in international relations during which political conflicts are commonly understood to be centered in economic relationships and in domestic social life. These social and economic politics and the behavior of private institutions such as multinational corporations do not take place in a vacuum; they are increasingly affected by complex social calculations, which are determined in turn by the character of domestic society and the world system.

We recognize that the pursuit of certain social goals and values will lead to political innovation or failure, depending on the constraints and structures involved. The process of social change, modernization, or stability is affected by — or is a *part* of — the way the economic system operates, at the national as well as international level. As the role of the state has expanded, the once heralded autonomy of economics seems more and more an illusion. National "development" can be viewed as a seamless web, without clear lines of distinction among its social, economic, and political strands. As extensive international involvements have brought new vulnerabilities, economic and social issues have become politicized as well as internationalized. The inter-

national relations of countries are tied up with their domestic political choices and social structures, so that the distinction between domestic and foreign concerns (& problems) has become blurred — if not "erased," as in a fashionable characterization. The complacency of many in recent years and stability, consensus and control over the international environment has therefore proven to be something of a cruel hoax. Uncertainty and tension are pervasive. They are likely to remain so.

Environmental changes of this sort predictably generate new perspectives, new approaches, new syntheses — as well as a wrench being thrown into the domain of "normal science," an anarchic competition between alleged paradigms, confusion, immobility, denial, etc. A great deal of official and quasi-official thought is given to: what is needed to fully comprehend this newly perceived (or differently characterized) global environment? Certainly the traditional, compartmentalized approaches which have pervaded American universities since the Second Word War will not suffice. Policies and problems cannot be fully seen through the perspective of social science disciplines or forms of professional training which are hermetically sealed off from each other.

While the graduate curriculum of most American social science departments generally include a variety of internationally-oriented courses, these are often regarded by students as only marginally related to the rest of the curriculum. Programs in international studies have therefore developed somehow independently of the analytic mainstream of these disciplines, with frequently deleterious effects. At the same time, they have kept the distinctions of their origins: in a theoretically-inclined international economics or technically-oriented international business, on the one hand, and in international diplomacy on the other. Many have been interdisciplinary in name only, by making available an unassimilable "smorgasbord" of courses but without providing a sturdy underlying framework to unify them.

At this point in the scenario: the stage is active with the development, or planning, of multidisciplinary graduate programs in international political economy. In direct contrast to the highly specialized nature of usual graduate-level study, proposed programs will likely cut sharply across traditional dis-

ciplinary lines (to the extent that they can overcome all the administrative hassles involved and the obsessions with academic territoriality). They will combine study of the various subjects into a singly program, aiming at maximum coherence and the avoidance of needless duplication.

In recent years, there has of course been a profusion of interdisciplinary graduate programs aimed at candidates for the public sector, who are to be trained in the evaluation and planning of national policy. By stressing administrative process, organizational dynamics, and program management, many of these programs have provided their students with little more than a narrow job-oriented training for entry-level generalist positions. Graduate business schools have served much the same function for the private sector. In both cases, the larger social, economic and political *contexts* in which policies are carried out are neglected. Public and private managers often find that their junior staff lack perspective and understanding of the larger structure of international transactions or national development, of why government and private institutions behave the way they do. What is needed is a better grasp of the character of differing social structure and cultures, of the changing dynamics of the global political and economic order, of the behavior and transformations of economic institutions, of the nature of policy-formation processes and domestic politics. Without this, students often emerge with a narrow technocratic view of the relevant national and international settings. For many, this knowledge can be gained through years of working experience. Still, there may be a way of developing a graduate program which could give one the frameworks and materials needed for constructing that understanding.

Combining the advantages of a graduate liberal arts education with more career-oriented profession training, it might hope to avoid a narrow vocational and technical training and yet, through greater attention to contemporary political issues and development, to avoid at the same time any exclusive focus on the more abstract and theoretical concerns which characterize existing graduate programs in the separate disciplines.

2. THE PIECES DO NOT APPEAR TO FIT

Such a program involves a number of problems. Some of these are most sever at the Ph.D. level, where ht need for a more sophisticated (and also coherent) theoretical perspective is quite clear, and as yet unfulfilled. (It remains unfilled even as the theoretical approaches of mainstream economical and radical economics do battle, and as the theoretical pretensions of political science attempt to appropriate a new domain).

Other problems are political and normative. As Patrick McGowan has already noted: "I fear that teaching International Political Economy in the United States will overwhelmingly become defined as a vehicle for servicing the interests of the American state structure and the internationally oriented sector of the American business community." This problem seems especially likely to distort or undermine the value (into to mention the emancipatory potential) of Masters-level graduate program whose design is forced to parallel the existing needs of the Market-place. Narrow technocrats may not emerge, but uncritical "generalists" may. (And, here, the definition of "generalist" may simply blur into that of a graduate who has failed to gain sophisticated technical training — as Bruce Russett asks: "A nagging question: Is IPE attracting a disproportionate number of students who need some economics, but can't handle 'real' (quantitative) economics as taught at better places?")

The problem I want to devote some attention to here is somewhat different: it concerns the integration of faculty perspectives and intellectual emphasis.

We speak easily and fluidly of the need to combine the study of domestic political processes with the study of economic processes with the study of international politics. This will enable students to grasp the multi-faceted nature of the global & national problems which are arising, to grasp the intertwined strands of politics and economics, etc. And here the *variety* of faculty may appear to be an unambiguously positive feature: for, surely, the comparativist, the economist, and the internationalist may all contribute a piece of the puzzle. In true participatory fashion, the student then assembles the finished work: understanding.

Yet in dealing with different arrays of problems, each of these intellectual perspectives could also claim to provide an overview which is comprehensive enough to suggest that it might suffice. So that, rather than pieces of a puzzle, we have alternative and strongly-held ideas about the correct approach to puzzle-assembling. In other words, we face the old problem of incommensurability or competing paradigms, except this time it is *across* subfields in political sciences, or between political scientists and economists (and therefore putting across lines which have been subject to prior processes of professionalization, institutionalization, and bureaucratization). Not different approaches to different problems and different outcomes (for such a divergence could give rise to compromise of inattention or complementarity or territoriality); but occasionally hegemonic attempts to specify the contours of the same terrain. And, in the midst of this, one is asked to develop a coherent program for graduate study.

AN EXAMPLE: CONCEPTUALIZING THE SOURCES OF FOREIGN ECONOMIC POLICY

An extended example may bring out some of this (a portion of what follows derives from a paper I presented at the 1978 Annual Convention of the International Studies Association: "Surplus Security & National Security: State Policy as Domestic Social Action"). It concerns the ways we conceptualize the domestic sources of foreign policy. As well it categorizes those ways in a familiar fashion — showing their relationship to the more general emphases of *liberal*, *radical*, and *statist* (or *neo-mercantilist*) analysis.

The liberal analysis may be characterized, or caricatured, as that which bears the closest resemblance to the stress on the domestic political process as the source of policy; in so doing, it can serve as a stand-in for analysis originating in American politics or Comparative politics (as academic subfields). The radial analysis, in many of its varieties, is ground in the perspective of economics — or at least of a reconstructed economics, one that presently stands at the margin of American academic life (sometimes finding a safer berth among sociologies). The statist, or neo-mercantilist analysis can be located

more easily in the separate, and often separatist stress of traditional international relations theory, with its characteristic emphases and persistent themes. There is no easy way to assimilate these modes of attention. More important, each has limitations which are not always complementary.

The sources of foreign economic policy: a relatively new concern. The different emphases I've mentioned each stem in part from a similar unwillingness to grant the old assumption about a transcendent state apparatus whose managers look only to strategic or military necessities to chart the main lines of policy in an unambiguously rational way. Some domestic translation is needed. Ideally this would hope to reveal the more inclusive social purposes and definitions that were implicit in state aims. I would ask what domestic representations the aims excluded, and which ones they accredited. Yet this is not what the stress on domestic sources has usually asked: its concerns have been phrased differently. So, the analytic field seems divided in two: between a surface perspective on the factors involved in policy and a perspective which acknowledges the role of domestic factors but forces that into a causalist or mechanical model.

First, one can sight the liberal stress on the combined impact of the changes taking place in the low policy realm (its domestication, for example, and the internationalization of domestic issues areas which accompanied it). This is accompanied by a pluralist stress on the policymaking *process*, eventuating in the well-developed edifice of bureaucratic analysis. The bureaucratic theorists, for the most part, were dunned for their neglect of the factors emphasized in older traditions: the shared nature of policymakers' worldview, the agreement on fundamentals by competing bureaucratic players, the dominance of national, rather than organizational interest. Typically, these factors are thought to figure most prominently in the high policy realm. Foreign economic policy, on the other hand, might be set apart. Especially in the United States, it might well exhibit the disaggregation which bureaucratic theorists have claimed as well as a considerable porousness in the state apparatus (a sizable openness to the direct influence of domestic interests). Without the sheltering umbrella of American hegemony, and the "discipline" of a hierarchy of issues opposed by military concerns, these factors might appear all the more

insistently. To accommodate this setting, liberal perspectives display an instrumentality/causal focus on the direct relationship between policy outcomes and the interests of specific societal groups. Detailed analysis of or external pluralism predominate. Linear chronologies of the events which precede a decision are to be constructed. "*How* did the nation come to make this decision?" becomes the model question, as it as in the study of domestic policymaking.

One of the fruits of the fraternization with economics has been the awareness, on the part of many, of the relevance of the radical analysis of foreign policy. In both the scholarly and political worlds, and in regard to both domestic and foreign policy, many great tired of asking "who decides?" and "how?" They have asked instead: "who benefits?" from these decisions to protect a hegemonic order, for example, and how do these groups get what disproportionately benefits them. From these question came a stress on the direct influence of corporate interests on foreign policies like those of the Unites States. It derives sustenance, more generally, from the growing literature on the economic sources of imperialism and an appreciation of the interconnected nature of "social problems" in capitalist society.

For the radicals, the interests of capital often predominate over any identifiable nation interest. The state is not autonomous, nor does it marshal its power to serve interests of its own. Instead, it is part of the domestic and the world political economy, not something which transcends it in order to act, unsoiled, in accord with a set of universal dictates about international security. If not directly revealed in official statements, an economic logic could nevertheless account for the contours of policy.

Now, this second emphasis is in many ways an advance on the more surface readings prevalent in political science. It does accept the notion that state action and state power are not autonomous; they are *significations.* The meaning of content of a foreign policy is understandable only within a *motivational* context. Generalizations about the nature of the world system cannot supply this. But neither can crude, unmediated models of representation. Foreign policy behavior cannot always be reduced to a schematic relationship between, for example, specific economic actors and policy choices, or to

extrapolations based on "the objective needs of America's institutions." It is often just as unenlightening to see it as a precipitate of the world system and division labor. In high policy this is especially true, for an overall purposive perspective will generally encompass such politics (and we should remember that "foreign economic policy" often becomes "high policy"). This official perspective, what I have called the surface discourse of state action, must be interpreted and decoded. It cannot simply be banished from the field of attention by means of a virtuostic reduction To do so violates our common-sense assumptions about the nature of human action as well as the requirements of an explanation which is specific to it. Economic models here cut against the grain of any political analysis which has learned the lesson that a satisfactory *explanation* must be an *interpretation.* Some of the problem has been the instrumentalist emphasis of the political thinking which derives from radical economics: where, like liberal-=pluralist analysis, one attempts to show the direct relation between policy outcomes and the interests of specific classes or class fractions. Here, the stress on predicting outcomes will at times eclipse any concern with tracing the actual process involved in arriving at politics. The most sophisticated recent work on the importance of domestic structures in constraining the foreign economic policies of advanced capitalist states (and in accounting for the divergences between them) reflects a blending of the radical and liberal traditions. It also shows some blending of the insights of economics and the study of domestic politics from a comparativist perspective.

The third tendency, taking a "statist" or "neo-mercantilist" stance, will show the most obvious blindspot in the first two focii: their neglect of the overall policy frame of reference shared by the state actors, and their view of the state as an aggregation of private interests. Even in dealing with foreign economic policy, state actors often share a perspective that transcends any visible links between the nature of state action and particular domestic group of class interests. This overall and independent *state* perspective is thought to deserve more attention; policy makers often frame it in terms of "the national interest" or some other category overarching the more limited and particularistic interests of domestic non-state actors which are subordinated to it.

This is especially likely to be the case where a "state-centered," as distinct from a "society-centered" policy framework can be found: where the state apparatus can maintain considerable power in relation to important domestic interests. The state, by acting in the national interest, is thought to be capable of defining and protecting an autonomous perspective of its own.

This third analytic tendency presents itself in opposition to the first two. It either implicitly or explicitly downgrades the importance of direct domestic influences on policy. The emphasis on the state actors' frame of reference can substitute for any attention to the domestic sources of policy, beyond the obligatory discussions of "ideology." In place of those influences, it foregrounds the role of the government itself. In doing so, it comes much closer to the assumptions of the unitary actor model of foreign policy derived from traditional international relations theory — just as a view which emphasizes the porousness of the state (in regard to societal groups) may go hand in hand with a more disaggregated view of state power and the traditions of mainstream political science. It suggests the lineage this third neo-mercantilist tendency has found in Realist theorizing: about the nature of the world environment, the conditions of war and insecurity, the desire to maximize sate power, and the dominance of high policy within the hierarchy of state concerns.

To downgrade the importance of direct domestic inputs in this way seems especially striking given the nature of the issue are. For, after all, one would suppose foreign economic policy to remain the site of sharply conflicting domestic interests attempting to "capture" the policy process, and where it would prove difficult to generate any overall domestic consensus or ideological "hegemony" in regard to specific policy directions. It would therefore also be more likely to throw up obstacles in the path of any political regime as it attempted to assert its overall dominance or carve out a space for the articulation of a unitary national interest. At the level of domestic coalition-building, and at the level of state structure, one might expect low policy to be distinguished by greater degrees of fragmentation and incoherence. At the level of policy, coherence would be expected to give way *in the face* of a great intensity of domestic influences. This should cue us into the controversies which have surrounded the neo-mercantilist or statist arguments: they cut against

the grain of may expectations. They stand in especially sharp contrast to the more fashionable ("liberal") stress on the implications of interdependence and modernization.

Foreign policy is not merely a plane on which a series of instrumentalist pushes and pulls will produce a result, or where the direct intervention of members of a dominant class is determinative. In this policy realm, the power of *the state itself* (vis-a-vis constraining domestic groups) will often be quite substantial. In and of itself, this will make a purely behavioral reading seem much more problematical. In this area, even though the state may nevertheless be forced to act within a capitalist definition of economic reality, the level of state autonomy is quite large. And the greater the degree of state autonomy, the more we will need to pay attention to the articulated purposes and reasons of the state actors themselves. Even if we acknowledge the determinative importance of the historical development of the modern world system, this holds true. And, for this reason, the insights of traditional international relations theorists does not become mere outmoded baggage in the carting of the political economy.

But to acknowledge the importance of the state's autonomy does not mean we are stuck with the neo-mercantalist and Realist neglect of the domestic sources of policy. The state has independent political power, not necessarily independent *explanatory* power. It is still embedded, still a sign and a representation. If we are to get beyond the surface, and into the constitutive features of the social structure, something more is required. And it is not something which traditional international relations theory is capable of supplying. It is as if close attention to the surface actually *dissolves* depth. Such a theory (and theorist) is unequipped to specify the domestic content of those policies which are directed at the international arena but in turn reflect the particularities of the domestic context. That context illuminates that content.

A "stronger" state and a more "overall" state motivation may exist but not a less *particularized* domestic motivation.

The emphasis on the independent role of the state, in other words, may be as disabling as it is insightful. For how far does it take us, even in analyzing foreign policy, to note that the state "is an organic unit in its own

right," or that "national interest determines foreign policy"? In this policy realm, it may be true that power is not easily reducible to the interests of any single class, or class fraction, or even any permanent coalition. Such a critique of instrumentalist arguments may clear the air, bringing with it an acknowledgement of the relative autonomy and the independent objectives of the state — in the sense that the state is not coercively constrained by direct societal pressures or an uncontrollable bureaucracy. The study of domestic politics will not take us far enough But in the riposte by the neo-mercantilist *these state* objectives are left unexplained, just as they are in a Rational Actor Model of foreign policy. They are also left unrooted from any domestic ground.

Such a perspective provides as with its emphasis on overall state objectives, but the emphasis is opaque. The door opens, but there is only a wall behind it. The explanation leaves us precisely at the point where a stress on the domestic sources of policy began to seem necessary: where "the anarchic organization of the international system of states" or "the distribution of power among states" were no longer either compelling or persuasive points of reference for the analysis of policy. State autonomy, or the absence of constraint or direct outside determination, does not mean state policies are contentless. For if they are, they are socially unintelligible as well.

One can suggest other alternatives, and other approaches (I have made such an attempt in "Surplus Security & National Security: State Policy as Domestic Social Action"), but they diverge just as far from these components of a subfield: domestic politics, economics, the nature of international politics. Approaches based on theories of each of these three have been discussed. Beyond the lack of communication among disciplines (especially when they are housed in departmental fiefdoms), we have the problem of competition and mutual contradiction. If we are trying to explain foreign policies (and there are certainly other tasks involved in the study of IPE), a bland eclecticism made up of the present pieces is not an acceptable answer: As currently shaped, they do not fit. No less acceptable is a theory-less obsessions with the minutiae of current events, where the fetish of description is justified by reference to market-place relevance. This attempts to solve a problem by self-consciously ignoring its existence we can devote our attention to a mapping

of the historical record, or of the structural settijg as is implicit in much of the literature on the world system, inequality, underdevelopment, and dependence. Yet neither a chronology nor a setting can answer all of our interpretive questions about foreign policy. Here one can only suggest that such questions will be answered by reshaping the familiar pieces of the puzzle (the study of domestic politics, economics, and int'l relations) and *even* that process may give rise to just as many competing and self-righteous approaches. Meanwhile, graduate programs will be fashioned in a more helter-skelter way.