

Bridges: Conversations in Global Politics and Public Policy

Bridging and Conversation in International Relations

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Bridges: Conversations in Politics and Public Policy (2012) 1(1)

Abstract

The community of scholars working in or around the field of international relations is increasingly splintered across multiple empirical, methodological and theoretical divides. Faced with increasing fracturing pressures, what steps can be taken to ensure that a genuine spirit of engagement is maintained? This paper explores the challenges of scholarly conversation in an increasingly complex academic environment in order to develop some strategies and techniques aimed at helping students and young scholars to engage productively with the multiple contestations which continue to shape the field. By encouraging the practice of working to build “bridging resources”, a diverse community of scholars can find ways to demystify terminological and conceptual barriers. Furthermore, a commitment to engaged forms of scholarly conversation can help to distil and re-articulate even the most ambiguous perspectival distinctions and points of contention in such a way that disagreements within the field can be more accurately understood and navigated, even if not overcome.

Keywords: Bridging; Conversation; Dialogue; Debate; Argument; Terminology; Stasis

Author Acknowledgements: The authors would like to thank Jean-Michel Montsion, Dan Bousfield, Jennifer Mustapha-Vanderkooy, Katie Winstanley, the editors of Bridges, and our three anonymous reviewers for their insight and inspiration.

To cite this Article: Busser, Mark and Wegner, Nicole (2012) "Bridging and Conversation in International Relations," *Bridges: Conversations in Global Politics and Public Policy*: Vol. 1: Iss. 1, Article 5.

BRIDGING AND CONVERSATION IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

INTRODUCTION

The development of International Relations (IR) as an ostensible discipline (or 'field') has continually been shaped and complicated by two key phenomena: first, by interdisciplinary borrowing from thinking in other fields; and second, by *intradisciplinary* contestation between sub-communities of scholars beholden to different theoretical approaches. Both of these mutually reinforcing factors have made International Relations a tricky discipline to define and delimit. Moreover, the resultant contestations about the proper subject and scope of IR have made it difficult to what one needs to know – and how it all fits together.

This paper proceeds in four parts. In the first section, we briefly survey some of the challenges to interdisciplinary and intradisciplinary exchange in contemporary IR scholarship. In the second section, we engage with the theme of conversation by examining the distinction between monologue and dialogue, and offer a brief consideration of the common trope of interlocutors "talking past one another." This helps to identify some sources of missed connection that can frustrate productive academic dialogue, including terminological ambiguity, theoretical misrecognition, and other challenges related to taking one's own presumptions and stipulations for granted. In the third section, we draw upon the idea of 'point of stasis' from the study of argumentation in order to offer a conceptual language through which to articulate the sorts of dialogic exercises we seek to highlight. We consider the promise of stasiastic inquiry, the practice of seeking the core issue (or issues) of contention between two positions in a practical or theoretical debate. After introducing some of the stasiastic categories – the 'types' of disputes that scholars of rhetoric tend to identify – we assess the relevance of such categories as a heuristic tool for understanding complex debates in global politics. In the fourth and final section, we attempt to identify what is particularly helpful about what we call 'bridging resources' – academic works that use something similar to stasiastic inquiry in order to help to put seemingly incongruous theories, approaches or positions in conversation with each other.

CHALLENGES TO CONVERSATION

International Relations (IR) has a checkered history with interdisciplinarity. Indeed, its place amongst or within the traditional academic disciplines has long been ambiguous and debated. IR developed as a point of contact between many disciplines, and did not find its connection to Political Science until the 1950s, when many voices began to push for IR to be considered a single, separate discipline of study (Ashworth 2009; Long 2005). Stanley Hoffmann, for example, noted the confusion caused by the "conglomeration of partial approaches" from other fields. "Most fields have something to offer," he wrote. "But a flea market is not a discipline (1959, 348)." Those sharing Hoffmann's concerns led a push to define a "core", a set of essential questions and priorities around which IR could organize more "systematic" investigations.

Many scholars have criticized the effects of disciplining practices within IR — effects shaping whose knowledge and knowledge production is counted as legitimate and whose gets ignored. Intellectual histories of the discipline not only report the outcome of debates over disciplinary boundaries, but also participate in reinforcing certain outcomes. Tickner (2010) argues that disciplinary history is rarely neutral or impartial but rather is the site of intellectual struggles to define the legitimate identity of the field. Smith (2011) echoes this sentiment by observing that the traditional framing of the interparadigm debate between realism, liberalism and Marxism gave priority to the problem of explaining military conflict and thus set the terms for realism's dominance. As Hoffmann argued in 1959, defining a central set of questions is a crucial step in defining the perimeters of any given discipline. Taking for granted which questions matter most, however, tilts the playing field in favour of certain approaches to scholarship, making others seem misguided or even foolish. The particular questions that are given priority will also naturally tend to make certain interdisciplinary connections more or less relevant.

Despite IR's apparent consolidation as an independent discipline, its internal debates have continued to be influenced by ideas and sensibilities from other fields -- from the social sciences as well as the humanities, from the natural sciences and more. Of course, it is not clear how even the interdisciplinary exchange really is. Buzan and Little (2001) note that while "all disciplines beg, borrow or steal from each other," international relations scholarship has had little to no effect on other research areas. They argue that despite the development of rich research areas within the field, the self-conceptualization of IR as multi- or inter-disciplinary is greatly overstated. Moreover, they suggest that the "normal process" by which academic research areas "insulate themselves from each other by cultivating distinctive vocabularies, journals and professional networks" hinders cross-disciplinary enterprises by "discouraging both outward bound and incoming traffic" (Buzan and Little 2001).

The same sorts of problems of insulation have posed problems for exchange and discussion between scholars in niche research clusters *within* the field. Promoting and managing intradisciplinary exchange amongst these sub-communities has become as much of a challenge as facilitating interdisciplinary discussion has. Brian Schmidt borrows an analogy from Gabriel Almond to compare the various schools of thought within IR to separate tables at a restaurant. "While conversation might be thriving at each of the separate tables, there is minimal conversation across tables and it would be impossible to derive any overall coherence to the separate and distinct conversations (2007, 108)." Complicating matters is the fact that the referents, vocabularies and networks within each of these intradisciplinary pockets tend to draw differently upon intradisciplinary and transdisciplinary influences.

Smith (2011) notes that the theoretical fracturing within International Relations leaves students in a difficult situation. In a discipline whose limits and boundaries are hotly contested, they must also make difficult choices about which theoretical perspectives to draw upon. This is especially difficult because it is difficult to find unbiased standards by which to evaluate theories. He notes that many treatments of International Relations theory simplify matters by focusing exclusively on those theories that share an epistemological grounding, making 'debate' relatively easy. Where meta-

theoretical, methodological or epistemological assumptions are not shared, students are likely to have a difficult time finding ways to compare and contrast different approaches.

In response to these challenges, one tendency to find one master theory to best explain/conceptualize IR. Schmidt notes that many of the various attempts to “build bridges” across rival theories can be “understood as an effort to discern a degree of coherence so that it is possible to determine whether or not any progress is being made in the field (2007: 109).” In this sense, bridge-building has been understood as the establishment of commonality, of creating links in order to resolve differences and work towards a unified theory of international relations that would allow the discipline to define itself and speak with one voice. Schmidt observes that constructivism has been seen as a promising via media between rationalism and relativism, offering the possibility of ending the debate. In this sense, the metaphor of ‘bridging’ isolated research communities suggests that connection will allow unification.

Instead, we are interested in a form of ‘bridging’ that treats the metaphor differently, emphasizing the idea that bridges can improve circulations, exchanges and flows even where differences are not so easily expunged. We see bridging as a practice that allows scholars to engage outside their niche specialties, whether in collaboration or debate with scholars who may or may not share their theoretical commitments. ‘Bridging’, as we understand it, is undertaken in multiple ways, and at multiple sites. It allows ideas to flow across boundaries and better allows for ideas to be understood and contested across communities and cultures. As Smith suggests, given the fractured and increasingly complex state of disciplinary IR, theoretical pluralism amplified by interdisciplinary influences is a practical reality for students of the field, even if – as Schmidt points out – there is no consensus over whether such pluralism is a good or bad thing (Schmidt 2007; Smith 2008; Smith 2011). As we shall argue, there is plenty of room to make our discussions and exchanges more intellectually rewarding and enlightening even if conversation does not lead to the resolution of our differences.

TOWARDS CONVERSATION: LOCATING SPACES FOR BRIDGING

Calls for improved ‘conversation’ and ‘bridging’ across intra- and inter-disciplinary divides often focus on the need to find ways for participants to avoid talking past one another. This hints that many exchanges fail less because of the intellectual content of the participant’s ideas than because of the mode of engagement through which scholarly debates tend to be conducted. In order to elaborate this point, it might be helpful to make a distinction between, on the one hand, dialogue in the mode of ‘exchange’ and a dialogue in the mode of ‘conversation’. Such a distinction might rest on Martin Buber’s point that “the most eager speaking at one another does not make a conversation (2002, 3).” To elaborate this point, Buber contrasts the ideas of dialogue and monologue. Buber defines *dialogue* in terms of a relationship, one that is “characterized in more or less degree by the element of inclusion (115).” This involves the recognition that one’s counterpart in dialogue is thinking and feeling subject whose ideas and values are worth taking seriously. A dialogical relation is therefore a relation between ‘I’ and ‘Thou’, to use Buber’s famous phrasing. Buber contrasts this to *monologue*, which is the mode assumed when a participant views his or her relationship

with the other person as a relationship between 'I' and 'it'. That is, one treats one's counterpart as little more than an object, as a target for speech. In practice, when dialogue between scholars takes the form of an 'exchange' it all too often seems to entail nothing more than the simple coinciding of two monologues in the same forum. But you cannot make a conversation by aiming monologues towards one other any more than you can create a bicycle by fusing two unicycles face-to-face. Both situations are likely to lead nowhere, with plenty of frustration along the way.

This is the model towards which scholars have tended to drift in many of their attempts at engagement across the field's multiple boundaries. All too often, the so-called "debates" that have divided scholars of global politics have been conducted in the form of exchanges between contending monologues that have failed to connect in a satisfying way, leading many scholars to note that the participants are merely "talking past" one another (Peterson 2004, 42; Kustermans 2011, 27). In order to find ways to ensure that participants engage in healthy dialogue by talking *with* each other rather than talking past (or simply *at*) each other, it is worth examining why exactly so many related monologues end up at cross-purposes.

What precisely does it mean for two participants to talk past one another? The phrase describes phenomenon that is recognizable better in practice than in theory. It draws upon the common metaphor of beliefs as locations and arguments as spatial maneuvering. In this sense, actors take "positions" and speak from "perspectives". Actors speak from a "standpoint" or a "point of view" and discussions begin at a "starting point". Presumptions are "foundations" and arguments are "built up" – indeed, socially important shared ideas are often seen as "constructed". Disagreements create "divides" and "gaps" that can hopefully be "bridged". Productive conversation often necessitates "opening up a space" where discussions have previously been "closed off" (Goodwin and Cortes 2011).¹ In this context, the metaphor of "talking past one another" carries the commonsense notion that participants engage in discussion but in fact fail to actually meet at the same "point" or "locus" of discussion.

The problem can be even more clearly understood by trying to set aside the metaphor and articulate the dynamics at play in failed connections. Joan Metge and Patricia Kinloch offer a more nuanced assessment of the problem of actors "talking past" one another:

"A good deal of mis-communication occurs between members of these groups because the parties interpret each others' words and action in terms of their own understandings, assuming that these are shared when in fact they are not – in other words, because of cultural differences that are not recognized because we all take our own culture very largely for granted and do not question its general applicability." (Metge and Kinloch 1978, 8).

Metge and Kinloch note that because this mutual misunderstanding often occurs at a non-conscious level, it can result in frustration and irritation unless the disconnect can be recognized and addressed. Although intended to capture the dynamics of that have complicated engagements in New Zealand between Maori, Samoan and Pakeha (non-

¹ See also the discussion of the metaphor "Argument is War" in Lakoff and Johnson (1980).

Maori New Zealanders of European descent) communities, their description of the problem aptly captures the problem of cross-cultural conversation in general. It certainly applies to the problems posed by the 'cultural' differences that have emerged between scholarly sub-communities.² A similar assessment is offered by Jack Donnelly. In the context of human rights debates, Donnelly suggests that "talking past each other" often results from participants "taking arguments that may be well formulated for a particular setting, be it local or international, and applying them directly in another discursive setting, without the adjustments required to give those arguments resonance and persuasive force in that context (Donnelly 2007, 300 n.53)."

Recognizing obfuscated differences of perspective and commitment, then, is an important step in preventing actors from talking past one another. If our goal is to foster a more satisfying intellectual conversation between scholars who hold vastly different conceptual, theoretical, methodological and ethico-political commitments, a key part of our challenge will be to find ways to begin to put these differences into conversation. As we have seen, a good first step is to identify a source of intellectual friction and to attempt to identify the actual locus of disagreement around which the underlying but unargued disconnect is centered. This identification of a precise point of contention or locus of disagreement is what argumentation theorists call finding the *point of stasis* of a disagreement. Drawing insights about stasis from scholarship on argumentation can help to identify starting places for improved conversations across conceptual and theoretical divides.

THE POINT OF STASIS AND DISAGREEMENT

The concept of 'stasis' (pluralized as 'stases'), which has its roots in the classical study of rhetoric, has had modest influence on the other branches of argumentation theory. Carter (1988) traces the concept back to the writings of Hermagoras, traces of which are cited by Cicero, Quintilian and Hermogenes. Hermagoras focused on the judge's attempt to isolate and articulate the common thread which linked the prosecutor's argument (the *kataphasis*) and the defendant's argument (the *apophasis*). By considering both positions, the judge is able to identify the crucial heart of the matter being contested once less important issues are sorted through. According to Hermagoras, this core matter could be classified as a matter of fact, a matter of definition, a matter of quality (value), or a matter of jurisdiction; these categories were known as the stases (Gross 2004). Engaging in what Carter calls "the stasiastic procedure", parties would attempt to discover which stasis their disagreement fit into. This would allow argumentation to continue in a more directed fashion by identifying the "point" of contact within the stasis, that is, the actual issue around which the dispute revolves. A key part of stasis theory focuses on the practice of identifying the *quaestio*, or key question, which serves to focus the contrary views of the arguers. Identifying a mutually satisfactory framing of the *quaestio* can help to identify the point of stasis, and vice versa.

² We understand 'culture' in a wide sense of the term, relating to systems of meaning shared (albeit contested) by localized communities in particular contexts.

The concept of the different types of stases has remained a useful idea in contemporary argumentation theory, although most of Hermagoras's terms have fallen out of favour. In contemporary parlance, the issue around which a disagreement revolves is usually described as the "point of stasis", while the four categories have been classified as categories of stasis by scholars of rhetoric (Braet 1987). First, the *conjectural stasis* centers on matters of fact, as in what is or is not the case, what did or did not take place, or what caused something to happen. Second, *definitional stasis* deals with words, categorizations and classifications in order to situate a particular phenomenon within a wider social context of terminological, technical or legal meaning. Third, *qualitative stasis* has to do with the value, goodness, justness or expediency of an action or phenomenon, in an evaluative sense. Fourth, the *translative stasis* focuses on whether or not the current argumentative context is the appropriate venue for the particular issue under question, whether because of matters of authority, legality or practicality. The last category is often noted to be different in kind from the other three, since by focusing on jurisdiction it involves considerations external to the ideas themselves (Gross 2004: 142).

Over the centuries, many scholars of rhetoric have adjusted and shaped the categorizations, such that many possible lists of the stases have been presented and debated (Fahnestock and Secor 1988). Oftentimes introductory textbooks on the study of argument will present these categorizations without explicit reference to stasis theory. Nancy V. Wood, for example, outlines five basic types of claim that can be at stake in argumentation:

1. Claims of fact: Did it happen? Does it exist?
2. Claims of definition: What is it? How should we define it?
3. Claims of cause: What caused it? Or, what are its effects?
4. Claims of value: Is it good or bad? What criteria will help us decide?
5. Claims of policy: What should we do about it? What should be our future course of action? (Wood 2007: 106).

This list corresponds closely to the categorization of varieties of stasis favoured by Fahnestock and Secor. They note, however, that many early writers would have likely subsumed discussion of causality under the category of definition, since in the legalistic tradition issues of motive were important to defining the nature of an offense (Fahnestock and Secor 1988, 428). Many contemporary thinkers might suggest that matters of causation can be examined as a variety of fact. We do not try to settle such disputes here. For present purposes, the foregoing discussion suffices to introduce some of the varieties of claims at stake in argumentation and how they might contribute to different points of stasis.

Traditionally, the idea of the stases has been linked to the monological composition argument, helping students of rhetoric decide exactly what they wanted to argue. Yet Carter (1988) argues that the dialogic or dialectical nature of the concept of stasis should not be ignored. The case an arguer is interested in making reflects his understanding of the essential point of disagreement at stake in the rhetorical situation. And the point (or points) of disagreement are dependent on the details of the arguments put forward by the two participants in an argument – or on unargued differences of

commitment waiting to be discovered. Gage (1983) therefore suggests that even in its classical form, stasis defined “what the rhetor needed to discover, not by his own choice but by virtue of a conflict between what he already knew and the knowledge of others (Cited in Carter 1988, 99).” The very concept of stasis requires a productive engagement between participants.

However, it is not always easy for stakeholders to identify the point (or points) at which their beliefs and commitments converge and contrast. Locating the point of stasis therefore requires a good deal of work. It can be especially challenging when trying to connect complex or sophisticated arguments which rely on many implicit premises or conclusions. Oftentimes, a stasiastic procedure begins where one stakeholder has taken for granted a point which his or her interlocutor seeks to contest. The interlocutor may try to shift the debate by calling attention to the presumption and suggesting that it deserves to be discussed and debated. The original participant – or others – may accept the provocation and agree to the new terms of discussion. Yet the challenge may also be rejected, ignored, or responded to with yet another proposal regarding what the key question is. Identifying the point of stasis, therefore, is itself a fundamentally contestable enterprise. That is why it is most rewarding when it can be performed in a responsive dialogue, such that the core questions end up being refined by all participants through a back-and-forth process until they have done their best to isolate the point(s) about which they agree that they disagree.

Having outlined the basics of stasis theory, it is now worth turning to a discussion of its relevance for the challenges of scholarly conversation in the study of global politics. We suggest two possible ways in which stasis theory can help to improve our scholarly conversations. First, we believe that the categorizations of stasis discussed above can be helpfully applied to recognize the different sorts of issues at stake in complex academic debates, and the often confusing relationships between them. Second, we argue that attempting to locate the point of stasis that underpins controversies in academic study has long been, and continues to be, a crucial step in fostering productive conversation about our intellectual differences. While scholars and practitioners have often shown that they are able to conduct debates that arrive at a key question without any explicit reference to the idea of stasis, we suspect that incorporating insights and conceptual tools from argumentation theory can help to facilitate our engagements by providing a heuristic conceptual language that recommends stasiastic inquiry a conscious strategy rather than an accidental outcome.

THE RELEVANCE OF THE STASIASTIC CATEGORIES

What sorts of questions underlie contemporary debates in the study of global politics? The foregoing discussion of stasis theory provided us with a number of possibilities. As we saw, debates might be understood as belonging to one (or perhaps more) of the following heuristic categories: matters of fact; matters of causality; matters of definition; matters of value; matters of policy; or matters of jurisdiction. In this section we explore the significance of these different sorts of claims and controversies in contemporary debates within the study of global politics. We then move on to suggest that such heuristic categorizations, rather than helping to identify one especially crucial

type of stasis, are in fact more helpful for recognizing the connections between them. In practice, conflicts around any given point of stasis frequently turn out to be related inextricably to issues from other categories.

Of the stasiastic categories set out above, a focus on facts and causes has long dominated the 'common sense' of proper inquiry in international relations, at least in the corridors of mainstream scholarship in the United States. This focus stemmed a strict materialist sensibility that privileged the collection of empirical data focused on tangible phenomena, while setting aside cultural, ideational, and evaluative questions (Adler 1997; Hamati-Ataya 2011). A concern for the objective truth has encouraged a *Dragnet*-style "just-the-facts" sensibility, suggesting that the proper subject of research is who does what, when, and how (Enloe 1996). For a time, even questions about 'why' were filtered through a lens of mechanistic causality, distilling reasons down to mechanistic drives, impulses and human laws. In these circles, international relations has been envisioned as a value-free social science searching for causal laws akin to those explored in the natural sciences (Hamati-Ataya 2011). A focus on material factors has also been reinforced by scholars influenced by positivism, with its emphasis on knowledge production through testing, falsification and hypothesis. This is especially appropriate for scholars adhering behaviouralist versions of positivism, with a particularly narrow view of what is truly testable (Hollis and Smith 1990: 12).

Yet while perhaps hegemonic in the middle-to-late twentieth century, IR scholarship beholden to rationalist and materialist inclinations has never completely eclipsed the advancement of other perspectives. The English School, for example, was partly defined by founding debates about ethics, justice and judgment, leading to the development of a 'middle-ground ethics' approach (Cochran 2009). Over time, the sensibilities of the mainstream have been challenged by the increasing vocalicity of Marxist, feminist, constructivist and postmodern scholars who have, in different ways, insisted on the importance of paying attention to ideational and cultural factors. Perhaps the most challenging idea put forward by these emergent approaches is the suggestion that facts, values, definitions, and social practices are mutually reflective and mutually reinforcing.

Matters of value tend to underpin and shape debates ostensibly belonging to other stasiastic categories because ideas about what is good and what is bad, what is better and what is worse ineliminably inform social argument. Academic research projects are necessarily underpinned by priorities and value-judgments, even if they are not reflexively identified. As Max Weber argued in *Politics as a Vocation* (1919), scientific inquiry rests on value-laden foundations but cannot itself provide these foundations. Hamati-Ataya (2011) observes that the role of values in the production of social knowledge has posed a challenge for scholars throughout the history of the social sciences, with IR posing no exception. She argues that this "problem of values" has been central to most of IR's disciplinary debates, even if the culture of Positivism has attempted to exclude values from consideration in the name of 'objectivity' and 'science'.

Furthermore, our disputes about values are not merely theoretical or philosophical, but have practical stakes. The stasiastic category of 'policy' encompasses not just policy-making in the governmental sense, but also matters of praxis, action and performance. It addresses the questions about "what is to be done?" in a broad sense

that includes instrumental and ethical versions of that question alike. This category therefore includes issues concerning good social science research methods, which are related in turn to ideas about the relative values of objectivity and positionality or parsimony and complexity (Hay 2002). As Robert Cox famously suggested, “theory is always for someone and for some purpose (1981: 128).” The implication is that even the supposedly default position of traditional Positivist IR which takes the world as it finds it and studies how states can and do solve their problems carries out a particular project in that it normalizes and reinforces the social structures, power relations and inequalities of the contemporary world. Hoffmann (1959) warned that if scholars of global politics were not self-conscious about the purpose of their investigations, the default would be what he called ‘policy scientism’, an unthinking deference to the interests and priorities of nation-state governments.

Debates within (and around) IR about the relationship between social research, political projects, ideology, and ethics have challenged the idea that our knowledge of ‘the facts’ can be separated from our value commitments and our practical projects. Accepting that these categories are necessarily interrelated and mutually constitutive does not detract from the utility of stasiastic inquiry. In fact, using the stasiastic categories as a heuristic tool for examining and teasing out the essential points of contention in contemporary IR debates promises to be helpful in remembering the ways in which certain claims and points of contention challenge categorization. For stasiastic inquiry to be useful does not necessarily require that the essential point of stasis be slotted into one category or the other. Instead the crucial part of the exercise is the attempt to uncover an understanding of the point of stasis that articulates a framing of the relevant question(s) under debate. If, through stasiastic dialogue, participants are able to discover that their disagreement revolves partly around differences of perspective on the relationship between facts and values, this discovery is no less productive for being taxonomically untidy.

These sorts of issues pose a challenge for stasiastic inquiry, however, since that not all parties to a debate are necessarily *interested* in travelling down the intellectual paths necessary to discover where differences lie. Finding the point of stasis of a scholarly disagreement often involves taking a ‘step back’, so to speak, to explore fundamental premises or assumptions. To borrow more terms from argumentation theory, finding the source of underlying disagreement often requires a form of questioning that examines not only the grounds behind knowledge claims, but also the ‘warrant’ that justifies the relationship between grounds and claims (Toulmin 1958). Identifying differences frequently require “going meta”, that is, delving into meta-theory, meta-ethics, and epistemology. Contestations therefore often have their stasis in scholarly terrain with which not all parties are necessarily familiar. A further challenge arises when these investigations require consideration of ideas and issues from wider conversations about the philosophy of social science, of science, and of ethics.

The intellectual history of debates in international relations theory shows that when the subject matter broaches issues that cross disciplinary boundaries, the discussion will shift away from the ideas at hand to a debate over to whether the discussion itself is appropriate subject matter for IR. This is where the category of translative stasis becomes most relevant. As outlined above, translative issues are those concerning the proper forum for discussion of a given topic, and also concerning

who counts as a legitimate participant and an authoritative voice. These issues are just as relevant in contemporary academia as they were in Hermagoras's ancient courtroom. Alan Gross suggests that the idea of translative stasis is "crucial when answering a class of interesting questions that can be properly addressed only by first addressing the question of intellectual jurisdiction (2004:142)." Ideas about what should and should not be debated at IR conferences and within IR journals have become – indeed, have always been – an intrinsic part of the discipline itself. Yet perhaps more than with other categories of debate, how disciplinarily translative issues are addressed imposes significant practical consequences for how (and whether) the discussion continues. Closing off discussion by jurisdictional fiat is a move available unequally to powerful participants in academia (such as editors, academic supervisors, and conference organizers). Yet it need not be a malicious, nor even an intentional move. Translative ideas about the sorts of subjects that 'count' as belonging to IR are often unarticulated, but rather inform the "common sense" of academic practice (Hamati-Ataya 2001). Even if rarely expressed explicitly, these inchoate disciplining sentiments nevertheless operate as hidden premises about which conversations are worthwhile and which arguments are not worth engaging.

The key utility of stasiastic inquiry is that it prompts us to ask questions about where disagreement lies in order to bring such hidden premises and common sense stipulations to the foreground of critical scrutiny, to make them explicit and show how they are open to contestation. As we have attempted to demonstrate, the debates and disagreements in the contemporary study of global politics do not center only on issues pertinent to any one of the stasiastic categories. Far more often, such disagreements center on multiple points of stasis, including constellations of issues classifiable as matters of fact, value, definition, policy and jurisdiction. Using the heuristic tools of stasis theory will not directly help to *resolve* these disputes, but they do give us a conceptual language with which to talk about our disputes meta-cognitively in the hopes of recognizing the conversation(s) we need to have in order to reach a productive understanding and to avoid talking past one another because of our reliance on unidentified, contested premises.

DEFINITION

Having examined most of the stasiastic categories, we now turn to briefly examine the category we have heretofore neglected, the stasis of definition. Definitions and categorizations can prove troublesome in academic debates when incompatible meanings are contested, but they can also create problems when differences go unrecognized. Our earlier discussion of scholars and practitioners "talking past" each other highlighted the difficulties that result from the tendency to presume that there is agreement on the terms of the discussion – the assumptions, values, concepts, symbols, priorities, et cetera – when there are in fact underlying differences or disagreements. These issues are particularly relevant in the context of contemporary interdisciplinary borrowing, where a diffusion of ideas across increasingly porous intellectual boundaries often results in names, references, concepts and terms being presented to new audiences who may not be familiar with the connotations they carry

for others. This calls our attention to the importance of the stasis of definition, which focuses on matters of categorization, naming and meaning.

Disagreements and differences often turn implicitly on words and terms that are vaguely defined. For example, as Ferguson and Mansbach suggest, debates over globalization have been complicated by the ambiguity of the concept of 'globalization' itself: "Part of the problem in securing agreement about such matters is the perennial one of theorists talking past one another because of conceptual confusion (1999, 87)." Yet the problem does not only apply to neologisms. False agreement about the meaning of key social science concepts has frequently been recognized as a barrier to productive academic exchange. Giovanni Sartori (1970) has famously argued that the globalization of politics and its study creates the need for concepts that can travel across geographical and academic contexts. New conditions, new states, and new contexts challenge the applicability of our old concepts. But rather than face this head-on, many political scientists have taken a path of least resistance. "By and large, so far we have followed (more or less unwittingly) the line of least resistance: broaden the meaning - and thereby the range of application - of the conceptualizations at hand (Sartori 1970, 14)." In other words, we have resorted to what Sartori calls conceptual stretching, or conceptual straining.

In the context of the study of global politics – or indeed, any discipline exposed to transdisciplinary influences -- the problem of conceptual stretching threatens to be intensified by frequent borrowing from other research disciplines traditions. We can recognize at least three places where conceptual borrowing can result in missed connections. First, ambiguity can result from the fact that the scholar doing the borrowing only has a half-hearted understanding of the particular meanings, values, and contexts that were held by the concept in its original context. Second, even where the scholar's grasp on these particularities is fairly firm, problems can result if she or he dedicates insufficient effort to explicate them to new audiences in a new context. Third, problems can arise from the failure to articulate precise distinctions between new theoretically-loaded conceptualizations of a word or term and other common conceptualizations with which the audience is likely already familiar. If the distinctions or innovative features of the new conceptualization are obfuscated by its simply being absorbed into existing understandings of the term, problems of missed connection are likely to result later on. Crucial meanings and differences are likely to be masked by superficial or false agreement.

Underpinning terminological differences there are often substantive differences in empirical and value commitments. Kenneth Waltz has described how three intense weeks of graduate-school reading on works discussing 'power' led him to the conclusion that most of the authors were "talking past one another", each seeming to be starting from different assumptions about causality. He realized that "[s]ome found the cause of international political outcomes in human nature, some found them within states, and still others found them in the international system (2009, 499)." The insight led Waltz to his dissertation proposal, and ultimately to the arguments he presented in *Man, The State, and War* (1959). By working to distil and name the underlying differences he identified, Waltz's work changed the discussion about power by pushing for a more explicit debate about ideas that had long been taken for granted as settled and agreed-upon.

Waltz's work pushed the conversation about power in IR forward, but by no means achieved a consensus. Like other ideas such as "democracy" and "security", "power" is often argued to be an "essentially contested concept" (Lukes 1979; Connolly 1993; Smith 2005). W.B. Gallie defined essentially contested concepts as "concepts the proper use of which inevitably involves endless disputes about their proper uses on the part of their users (Gallie 1956, 169)." For Gallie, essentially contested concepts tend to be appraisive concepts that denote some sort of valued achievement that is internally complex. The defining features of such concepts tend to be open, allowing differential applications in unpredictable situations. Thus, the term 'democracy' names something that most people agree is good, while its meaning is hotly contested. "Commonly accepted criteria of its application are weighted differently by opposing parties, and certain criteria viewed as central by one party are rejected as inappropriate or marginal by others (Connolly 1993, 10)." The contestability of these concepts is arguably essential because such concepts are "ineradicably value-dependent (Lukes 1974, 260)" and reflective of a particular worldview or way of life. Part of what makes a given concept essentially contestable is that disputes about its application indicate friction between whole constellations of meaning. These constellations are intimately connected to rival ways of life, the contention between which cannot be settled logically or empirically since the point of stasis between them tends to be located on the metaphysical or meta-ethical level (Gray 1977).

A wealth of literature exists regarding thorny and interesting questions about which concepts are "essentially contestable", which are "radically confused", and which are simply two different concepts sharing the same word. This is not the space to engage with those issues. At present, the foregoing discussion is sufficient point out the ways in which disagreements about matters of definitions might be linked in crucial ways to related disputes concerning facts, values, and policy. If, as our earlier discussion suggested, miscommunication often results from the illusion of shared meaning and terminology where underlying differences are profound, then it is a worthwhile endeavour to explore whether different scholarly communities' usages for key terms are reconcilable, confused or essentially contested. To repeat our earlier point, while such explorations may not help to settle the relevant debates, they will likely help to avoid confusion and to reach a more sophisticated understanding of where differences lie. We share some of the hopes William Connolly articulates at the end of his treatment of the idea of essentially contested concepts:

Since we cannot expect knockdown arguments to settle these matters, we must come to terms somehow with the political dimension of such contests. It is possible, and I believe likely, that the politics of these contests would become more enlightened if the contestants realized that in many contexts no single use can be advanced that must be accepted by all reasonable persons. The realization that opposing uses might not be exclusively self-serving but have defensible reasons in their support could introduce to these contests a measure of tolerance and a receptivity to reconsideration of received views. Politics would not be expunged, but its character would be enhanced. These conclusions are themselves disputable. They flow from the assumption that rationality, fragile as it

is, is helped, not hindered, by heightened awareness of the nature and import of our differences (Connolly 1974, 41).

BRIDGING RESOURCES

As we have been suggesting, all of the stasiastic categories co-mingle and interrelate in the thick of actual scholarly debates. It seems, therefore, that we would do well adopt a strategy for making sense of our conversations that is equipped to see the linkages between them. Our intention is to emphasize the role that ‘bridging resources’ can play in encouraging dialogue across differences of perspective. Bridging resources are articles, chapters, videos or speeches that help to foster productive conversation on contested topics by helping audiences to understand the stakes of complex conceptual, theoretical or methodological controversies. Rather than describing a unique ‘type’ of journal submission per se, we understand bridging as a practical/pedagogical role or function that given composition can play in improving scholarly conversations. Put more practically, resources that accomplish ‘bridging’ help students and scholars to notice otherwise inconspicuous points of friction between two or more contending sets of ideas, in order to find the place where they might be made to ‘speak to each other’. Bridging resources make complex debates accessible and intelligible by comparing and contrasting differing points of view on their own terms—terms that are interrogated and clearly articulated rather than simply assumed—insofar as it is possible, in order to demonstrate what is contestable and contested in the intersections between them. By acknowledging the advantage clarity, bridging as praxis takes as a starting point the contestability of concepts. Instead of focusing on tearing down one perspective or another, bridging resources raise up the level and tone of scholarly discourse by showing how and why serious and well-meaning thinkers might disagree on a given subject given different priorities and commitments. Such resources show, by way of an engaged exploration, that any particular theoretical perspective or methodological approach is defined by balancing many principles and ‘goods’, which must be traded off against each other.³

By presenting how facts, values, definitions, policy implications, and even jurisdictional (i.e. sub/disciplinary) matters are all mutually entwined in academic arguments, bridging resources thus tend to underscore the necessarily *political* nature of our intellectual debates. Like the postcolonial call to acknowledge the imperial influences in IR, we wish to acknowledge that numerous political influences and biases are present, and their recognition is necessary for charitable and respectful engagement. What distinguishes bridging resources, therefore, is the careful and fair-minded analysis of academic contestation with a view to identifying the underlying practical stakes, clashing value commitments, and competing priorities that help to illuminate why scholars care so passionately about convincing others about their viewpoint.

³ Using the metaphor of bridging might seem to connote the eradication of divides by crafting permanent and fixed points of connections to make two entities into one. In this situation, however, we mean instead to emphasize the flows and exchanges across difference that is allowed by sites of bridging, however momentary and dynamic.

Of course, this does not mean that the authors of bridging resources must adopt a pretense of neutrality and objectivity. Part of what makes such resources helpful is that they promote an understanding of contestability and subjectivity present in our own work. It also does not mean that authors must avoid situating themselves in a given controversy. In fact, helpful bridging resources often also contain good substantive arguments, made all the more persuasive by their reasoned and articulate presentation of the relevant issues. As opposed to using clear writing as a sophistic or rhetorical weapon, the authors of the best bridging resources use lucid writing to foster greater understanding in the reader about the ideas underpinning viable alternatives, in order to help the reader position herself or himself in the conversation. Thus, the author of a bridging resource typically makes not just his or her own case, but multiple cases, as charitably as possible, and lets the reader's sympathies fall where they may.

Admittedly, in light of the earlier discussion of 'monologues', there is something of a tension here. Individual authors cannot quite reproduce true dialogue in the sense of a dialectic of challenge and response between two positioned agents. But they can attempt to foster a conversation between two or more sets of ideas by doing hard intellectual work to carefully examine relevant controversies by juxtaposing divergent perspectives and identifying the stakes. Furthermore, skilled writers and thinkers can do so with a style that makes it easier – not harder – for others to compose responses. By demystifying debates, explicitly stipulating conceptualizations of contested concepts and attempting to identify one or more points of stasis in a relevant debate, authors who adopt this sort of technique make their work far easier to contend with, interrogate, and reply critically. Thus, while a 'bridging' approach cannot replace dialogue, it can certainly help to foster it.

It should be said that by propounding the advantages of bridging resources, we do not pretend to be plotting out the blueprint for a new type of work. Rather, we simply mean to call attention to the advantages of a certain *type* of scholarly work that is already practiced by skilled writers and thinkers in the discipline, and to employ the concept of stasis to try to articulate why this sort of work is so helpful and worth emulating. For example, take James Fearon and Alexander Wendt's contribution to *The Handbook of International Relations* (2002), which attempts to explore the relationship between constructivism and rationalism by questioning exactly what sort of 'debate' there is between them. While arguing that there are ontological, empirical and pragmatic levels to the debate, Fearon and Wendt suggest that a truly in-depth examination of these differences is likely to dissolve many of over-simplistic caricatures and dichotomies that so often complicate and obfuscate earnest discussion. While a full engagement with their findings is not possible in this space, it suffices to say that students of global theory are likely to find Wendt and Fearon's article helpful in developing a sophisticated understanding of the issues at play in the engagement between constructivism and rationalism.

To draw on a more famous example, the oft-cited dialogue on feminist International Relations in the pages of *International Studies Quarterly* in 1997-1998 offers a situation in which productive frictions resulted from a sustained engagement with contending approaches or ideas. J. Ann Tickner's initial article (1997) suggested that some of the breakdowns in communication between 'traditional' scholars of IR and feminist contributors might itself be influenced by cultural and philosophical differences

that are deeply gendered – even though these differences do not neatly divide male and female scholars. Her article recounts the all-too-common experience of feminist scholars who, after having conducted a nuanced presentation of their work, finds that the peers who engage with that work tend to ask very broad and belittling questions in a way that “does not engage with what, to her at least, are the main claims of her presentation (1993:612).” In other words, because of the questioner’s unfamiliarity with the context of scholarship in which the presenter’s work is situated, the question shifts the point of stasis of discussion away from her particular work and demands a justification of her approach writ large – a demand framed according to methodological criteria with which feminist theorists take issue. Tickner’s article represents an attempt to engage at this broader point of stasis, by explaining why many of the methodological theoretical presumptions against which feminist work is often judged by mainstream theorists are problematic for feminists.

Tickner’s article is a good example of a piece of work that attempts ‘bridging’ by examining the relevant points of stasis at which two sets of ideas connect and clash. Furthermore, the resultant debate demonstrates how individual (monological) ‘bridging’-type articles can promote unexpectedly productive dialogue between authors. Although she does not use the concept of the point of stasis explicitly (nor need she have), her identification of “three types of misunderstandings (613)” serves to identify some of the most significant sites of disagreement and confusion. First, she suggests, there are conceptual or *definitional* differences surrounding misunderstanding about the meaning of the term “gender.” Second, there are ontological divides: “different realities or ontologies that feminists and nonfeminists see when they write about international politics (613)[.]” Tickner argues that dominant theories of IR that focus their attention on unitary states in an asocial context offer very little help to feminist scholarship, which tends to take social relations as central. Third, she points to epistemological differences that set much of feminist scholarship apart from the sort of positivist/neo-positivist research sensibilities that dominate the mainstream of the field (619). The mainstream focus on prediction, generalization, hypothesis-testing, systemic analysis and other positivist or neo-positivist priorities is epistemologically unsatisfying for many feminist scholars beholden to post-positivist approaches. The latter, according to Tickner, tend to favour “hermeneutic, historically based, humanistic and philosophical traditions of knowledge cumulation, rather than those based on the natural sciences” (619).

Tickner’s attempt to think consciously about some of the most common points of missed connection between mainstream and feminist IR prompted responses from Robert Keohane (1998) and Marianne Marchand (1998), to which Tickner later replied (1998). Keohane’s response was notable for his suggestion that feminist scholars seeking to help develop engagements with the mainstream might helpfully frame their work in terms of the “basic method of social science (1998: 196)”, emphasizing causal hypotheses and empirical testing. Tickner suggests that this asks too much of feminists whose epistemological positions tend to be sceptical of the paradigm of prediction and testing, and whose preferred forms of evidence (testimony, ethnography, etc.) tend to be dismissed as irrelevant forms of knowledge. One might at first see this as a *failure* to bridge the differences between mainstream and feminist approaches, since Keohane’s attempt to find a meeting place along a theoretical continuum is rebuffed by Tickner, leaving the differences unresolved. Yet this sort of judgment would mistake the value

and purpose of bridging resources as we see them. The *resolution* of scholarly disagreements is not the key focus of what we call bridging resources; instead, the *clarification* of those arguments is key. For the reader, the full set of dialogic steps -- Tickner's articulation of the key intellectual differences, combined with Keohane's proposed compromise and Tickner's explanation of its unacceptability -- all of these combine to offer an enacted, practical *demonstration* of the differences of epistemological and methodological perspective that make resolution difficult (if not undesirable).

Indeed, this ostensible 'failure' to find common ground represents more than a scholarly dead end. Rather, by showing *why* attempts at an easy synthesis (or subsumption) is bound to be frustrated, her contribution shows *why* the conversation between scholars of different perspectives must continue. To facilitate this, she attempts to identify and name the deeper issues, background debates, and unspoken points of conflict relevant to the conversation between feminists and the mainstream, outlining some directions in which such a discussion might need to move. For example, she suggests that underlying disagreements about the purpose and role of theory may turn on issues related to Robert Cox's distinction between problem-solving and critical theory (1981) or Hollis and Smith's (1990) articulation of the difference between 'explaining' and 'understanding' approaches to the scholarly exploration of international politics. By situating the engagement between feminist scholarship and the mainstream in the context of these wider epistemological and methodological issues, Tickner attempts to shift the conversation to a more intellectually fruitful set of focal points. In this regard, she aims to move past the frustrating series of recurring misunderstandings and miscommunications that previously consumed most of the interactions between feminist and non-feminist scholars, laying the intellectual groundwork for an improved set of discussions by showing how the intellectual energy of the participants could be directed away from the same-old troubled engagements and towards a more satisfying, enlightening and enriching set of questions. In other words, Tickner shows *why* discussions that focus on particular points of stasis are likely to be unfulfilling and unproductive, and reorients the discussion around more sophisticated, and deeper, points of stasis instead.

As we suggested earlier, engaged dialogue is typically more rewarding than merely monological forms of scholarship. Yet the discussion in the pages of *International Studies Quarterly* gives a good example of the way in which a single article can serve as a "bridging resource" that helpfully identifies a point of connection between two or more sets of ideas in a way that facilitates further exploration, engagement and study. While Tickner's original intervention is useful as a standalone article, the *series* of articles is even more instructive. When taken together, they form a unique example of engaged conversation that contributes to academic "bridging" by demonstrating in practice how the relevant sets of ideas intersect, clash, and complicate each other.

TOWARDS CONVERSATION

This paper represents a call to scholars and students and IR to put their efforts into clarifying -- not necessarily settling -- the differences of opinion and distinctions of

meaning which have continued to undermine conversation in our field. It would do well for students and scholars of IR to spend some of their energy examining and talking about the way in which contested concepts and ideas have been used, misused and abused, resulting in complicated and obfuscated debates. We might also explore innovative and creative ways to make our conversations clearer. In order to help each other make informed interventions, it makes sense to continue cultivating the kinds of bridging resources which can best facilitate our conversations and engagements.

As we argued above, because of increasing disciplinary complexity and interdisciplinary scholars of global politics have tended to fall into the mode of contending monologues fraught with misrecognition and misunderstanding. Truly understanding the debates in our field, and competently positioning one's own commitments with reference to them, challenges students of global politics to meet these issues head on. This is a call, therefore, to revisit old debates in new ways, and new debates in clearer ways. If we were to take 'past' debates of International Relations as perennial conversations to be continued rather than as epic, settled battles to be remembered, we would be called to revisit some of the key questions relevant to the argumentation, both as it is remembered and as it is actually voiced. Paying better attention to the complexity of the questions will challenge us to articulate our own answers and responses and to base them on careful consideration of nuanced points.

The idea of the point of stasis offers a theoretical and analytical tool that can help to guide our examinations by focusing on the multiple points of friction that define the intersection between sets of ideas. Deploying the heuristic categories of stasis theory can similarly help to remind us that our ontological commitments, value judgments, definitional categorizations, and political projects are all 'up for grabs' and open to contestation in contemporary academic debates, even if we seek to ward off some of these conversations by drawing jurisdictional lines in the disciplinary sand. Authoring 'bridging' resources through stasiastic modes of inquiry is a worthwhile practice for those who want to participate in making the conversational practices of the discipline more thoughtful and reflective.

Being clear about our ideas, and trying hard to juxtapose them against others' ideas, is the first step towards bridging the multiple divides that have rendered conversation in International Relations fraught difficult. Conceptual clarity – and clarity about our is something that is sorely lacking in our field, and something that prevents the kind of cross-paradigm discussions that have so often been called for. It is easy to "preach to the choir", to speak to those who are already supportive of one's claims and ideas, referents and resources. The more challenging and rewarding enterprise is to clarify one's ideas, concepts and arguments in a way that makes it possible to speak and engage with those who are not already convinced – or those who are baffled in their attempts to understand unfamiliar scholarship but are looking for a place to start.

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