

Is a Perfectly Objective Study of International Relations Possible?

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I. INTRODUCTION Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear fellow Students,

In a moment or so, I shall explain why I address my future students as: "fellow students", but permit me, first of all, to tell you how pleased I am to be here at ICU and how honoured I felt to be invited to become a Visiting Professor of International Relations for the academic year 1969—70. I am coming from a country—Switzerland—which has many similarities with Japan: both are mountainous countries with beautiful landscapes, —"countless are the mountains in Yamato" say the Japanese, but so they are in *Helvetia* as Switzerland was called in former times— both countries are deficient in the possession of the essential raw materials which are necessary for a highly developed industrial economy but, notwithstanding this fact, both were able to build up an economy with a reputation of producing precision-products of the highest quality; only a small percentage of the land of both countries can be cultivated, both countries are inhabited by a rugged, hard-working population possessing a deep-seated love for the beauties of nature. Similarities yes, but also how many differences: Differences of geography/Switzerland does not possess sea-shores, has a population of only about 6 million/, differences of ethnography,

linguistics, religion, national character and many others. It will be a great experience for me to feel, to "sense", to "live" these differences and those similarities. But the main purpose of my coming here is to share with you the knowledge I may have acquired during an academic career of forty years standing at my university, the University of Geneva. And now let me explain why I addressed you a moment ago as: "fellow students". As a matter of fact, I consider that we are all engaged here in the same venture: the search for truth which is the chief purpose of university learning. Let me tell you also that among the some hundred writings which I produced during my university career, I consider as being the best, and certainly the most rewarding, those in the forward of which I was able to say: "This book would not have been published would I not have benefited by the active cooperation of my students during my lectures, discussion periods and seminars". You understand now why I addressed you as: "fellow students".

II. DEFINITION OF STUDY

But let me come now to the subject of this introductory lecture. I have to define first of all what I understand by "International Relations". Every author, every scientist who writes on the subject and nearly every professor who teaches it gives a different definition. Let me therefore tell you first of all what I do *not* understand by the study of International Relations or, at least, what I do not intend to include into the syllabus of this course. International Relations, as I understand it, will deal with the *sociology* of international relations, that is: with the basic phenomena, the main factors, the essential currents, the underlying forces working in it, the intellectual, cultural, ideological and doctrinal, but, of course, also material, economic, social and, above all, political motives which determine the relations of States, Nations, Peoples, Individuals and groups of

Individuals living in those some onehundred-and thirty Nation-States which constitute the texture, the web and the very pattern of present-day International Organization. I shall come back later in my course to a more detailed description of the syllabus of my course, which I will distribute to the students who wish to follow my lectures, discussion groups and seminars. Let me now tell you what my course will *not* be and what I do *not* believe to be the main object of the Science which I will have the honour of teaching here. This course will not be a simple commentary, explanation and discussion of *current, present-day* international politics. Having said this, I very well realize that this will take away much of the dramatic momentum of my course because evidently: to record, to comment on, and to discuss current events of international politics—like it is done, I must admit, in a very interesting way, by newspapermen, editorialists, radio—and television—commentators and lecturers on contemporary international politics—permits the speaker to deal with stories filled with dramatic events and personalities. However, I believe that this is not the aim of scientific research into international relations, of objective, “detached”, scientific, sociological research into the basic problems of International Politics. What I have said now does not mean of course that mentally, intellectually, and above all emotionally, we shall not make comparisons, draw parallels with current events of international politics, reconstitute, insert them into a scheme of basic, long-term currents, evidencing the main forces and deep-rooted trends acting in international relations in general: on the contrary, such an intellectual exercise of permanent parallels, working, so to say, instinctively, emotionally in our minds—preoccupied as we all are with current events of international politics—will give an added *pimento* to the theoretical, conceptual research—work the student of the scientific study of International Relations will have to

undertake. But let me repeat: comments, explanations, discussions of *current* events of international politics will not be within the framework and certainly not the main objective of this course. *Why not?* For a very simple reason. Let me give you an example. We know far too little what happens *now* in Vietnam, in the Middle-East, Kashmir, in Singkiang and elsewhere where there are at present danger-spots of international politics. We do not have the "perspective", the inside view, the "aloofness", the real knowledge of what goes on *behind the scene* for instance in the Okinawa question, in the questions of the renewal of the Japan-USA Security Pact (all in the year of Osaka EXPO), in order to judge, nay: to know what the real motives, trends, background features and factors of these events are: in one word, we are not *as yet* able to judge the main features, chief currents of the events, we can not put them into an objective, "detached", "disengaged" whole, disengaged of the emotional drama which is always attached to day-to-day happenings, to currently occurring events: we are unable to undertake a sociological, scientifically valid analysis of such current events. However, what this course of lectures will miss perhaps thereby in "drama", it will—it will have to—regain, to replace by a more systematic, systemic, scientifically sound treatment of the main currents, basic, deep-seated forces which work within, agitate the, international relations *in the long run*, it will therefore try to be a scientific, treatment of the vast subject-matter which is constituted by international relations and—hopefully—permit us also to have a more stable objective basis on which to stand when taking positions concerning the burning present-day-issues I mentioned a moment ago. Refusal to permit to let me—to let us—induced-dragged-into discussing present-day problems of international politics, will relieve us also of the stress to be influenced, even unconsciously, unwillingly, by political propaganda—always tinted by

partiality, be it national or doctrinal—and will prevent us to succumb to the attraction of cross-propaganda and contradictory, competing expressions of mass-media.

I tried to give you a first feeling of “what” this course will be and “what” it will not be and I mentioned thereby several times the words: “objectivity”, “disengaged”, “scientific” research and the like. It is now high time that I try to explain the very title of this introductory lecture and the relation it has to the whole course of International Relations which I intend to give here.

III. “Is a perfectly objective, “disengaged” study of International Relations possible?”

We are coming here to the very core of this course and will try to characterize the spirit which I wish should animate it. First, let me explain the semantical meaning I am giving to the word: *objectivity*. I will try to show that men—human beings in general, scientists and professors included—can not be considered as *perfectly* objective—I underline purposely the adjective: objective. A robot, an electronic computer could perhaps be considered in that way—but only insofar as they are not acted upon, animated by men, by human beings. As a matter of fact, human beings are not *born* objective, in the way I understand that word, and at the age when they become students and then, let us assume: professors or scientists, they simply cannot be considered as perfectly objective. Why not? Because they are submitted, first of all, to hereditary, physical and biological distinctions, or if you so like: discriminations or let us say at least: “pressures”, first in their infancy. Thereafter, they are submitted to influences originating from their families, family background, family circles—I do not need to expatiate on this subject in Japan, nor for that matter, in Switzerland. When they become then adults, they will in

most cases espouse, or at least, be influenced by the conceptions, preferences, "priorities" and, possibly, the preventions and prejudices of their local, regional and national "milieu"s, environment, surroundings, sociological "settings", by their intellectual and spiritual, their social, economic, professional settings and, finally, they may build up their own doctrines, ideologies and thus become subjected to inner, psychological "pressures", "influences" / I don't have here another, better word to express that kind of "subjection" which, let us note immediately, may be perfectly unvoluntary, spontaneous, unwilling, unconscious and uncontrolled and uncontrollable,—and therefore only the *stronger*.

This all would explain —I believe at least— why a perfectly objective, "disengaged", disengaged from all the pressures, natural and acquired ones which I mentioned, study is, in my belief, impossible or, at least, improbable. And this especially in the realm of knowledge I am interested in and to which I wish to interest my students. As a matter of fact, International Relations, being intimately interwoven by, nay: subjected to— human factors, and acted upon mostly by human "actors", human beings, those humans whom the great French philosopher and moralist Montaigne called: "these multiform, ever varying, ever changing, irrational creatures", International Relations being part of the Social Sciences, cannot be handled in the same way as the Natural, exact Sciences (whereby it may be noted that even these latter sciences can be subjected to changes of theories, produced by new discoveries and inventions.)

It follows of what I said that my answer to the question implied in the title of this lecture will be: No—but a no with qualifications and it is to these that I am turning now.

IV. OBJECTIVITY: a *sine qua non* condition of the university study of International Relations

If, by its very nature, and by the nature of the students and scientists who devote themselves to its study, the Science of International Relations is not apt to be studied in a "perfectly" objective and "disengaged" way, it is nevertheless true that its study requires, necessitates, the *maximum* of objectivity, dispassionateness, "disengagement" of which human nature is capable (we shall see as we go on in the study of international relations, that contrasting, contradictory and even paradoxical features are very common in the field of international relations). Let us be sure of this: students, research workers, scientists, professors who devote themselves to the study of International Relations have to overcome, to the utmost of their capabilities—I would say: they have to evade, to escape from a mental prison which is surrounded by at least three consecutive panels of walls. They have, first, to overcome their own preventions, preconceptions and prejudices: the ones caused, as we have seen, by physical and biological or, if you so like, hereditary reasons, due to their birth, inherited qualities, to the very nature of humans. Then they have to overcome other hindrances "pressures", influences, originating from their early or later environment in infancy and adulthood, others again due to their education, others again which result from the concepts, preferences, preventions of their local, regional and national "milieu", of their social, professional and economic surroundings, circumstances and conditions. The third panel of this imaginary, but nonetheless active mental prison to which I made reference is constituted by their own doctrines, preferential ideologies, philosophies, currents of thought to which they adhere, by their mental, intellectual, moral and spiritual formation. All this means that if perfect objectivity is, alas, impossible or at least improbable in this realm of knowledge, those who devote themselves to its study, research and teaching, have to acquire—nay: to conquer, sometimes by a real struggle,

a real fight with themselves, with their very own *ego*, the highest degree of objectivity which human beings are able to attain. As a matter of fact I believe—nay: I confess that this is a prerequisite, a condition *sine qua non*, as the Latins said, which is required by all those who devote themselves to the sociological study of International Relations. In one word: they have to make —and have to re-make over and over again —what the Greek philosopher called their: “Gnoti sei auton”, their psychological introspection in order to discover, and to register, the corrections which they have to make to their value-judgments in order that these should be as objective, as “disengaged” as this is humanly possible. For instance, the students, the research-workers, scientists and professors in this field, if they are Japanese, or Swiss, or British or of any other nationality, if they are by their confessional liens of Christian, Shintoist, Buddhist, Confucian or of any other religion, belief and faith, or if they are atheists; if by their political opinions they are, let us say: democrats, liberals, socialists or of any other political philosophy: as soon as they enter the “torii” of knowledge in the special field of the Science of International Relations, they have to make their introspection in order to discover: how far their nationality, their religious convictions, their philosophical, moral and political preferences may alter their value-judgment; they have to attain, by the means of the constant exercise of their sense of criticism—which they have to cultivate to the highest degree—that maximum of objectivity of which human beings are capable in order to attain to that *objective knowledge* which is the pre-condition of the study of International Relations. As a matter of fact—and this I will point out several times in this course—the study of International Relations is a good school to strengthen, to sharpen the sense of criticism which, as a matter of fact, is the very condition of any objective knowledge.

V. *Objective knowledge: "creative force of the modern world"*.

A few years ago, the well-known French biologist, Professor Jacques Monod, Nobel Prize of Medicine, said the following in his inaugural lecture at the highest institution of university learning in France, the College de France in Paris: (translation) "The only real objective, the highest of human values within the realm of human knowledge is not, we must confess, the happiness of humanity, it is even less earthly power of humans, their comfort and not even the one contained in Socrates' teaching: "Learn to know yourself", but it is: *knowledge itself, objective knowledge*. This ethics, the ethics of knowledge—so continues Professor Monod—has to be diffused and taught, its moral, social and political implications and consequences have to be systematically investigated, because knowledge, objective knowledge is the creative force of the modern world, it is the only one which is compatible with our modern world". These, of course, are the words of a scientist, and by that, of a scientist in the realm of the natural sciences. I, for myself, would not accept them in their totality, because they do—or, at least, seem to—undervalue the moral connotations which I, for one, cherish. But I firmly accept the idea expressed by Professor Monod that *objective knowledge* is the best basis as well as the best ferment of our modern world, and of this objective knowledge the Science of International Relations and its university study is a part.

V. *Concluding remarks*

Before concluding this introductory lecture and in order to avoid as far as possible that my words should be misunderstood, misinterpreted or misconstrued, I would like to add the following. I certainly did not mean that the student who studies

International Relations, the professor who teaches it, the research-worker who does scientific research work in this realm of study should be a "science-robot", bare of personal convictions, possessing no "particular signs" as it is said in the passports issued by several States, that he shall have no moral, ethical "postulate", beliefs, conceive of no "ideal" in life, thus be a "robot of objective knowledge"—although my professional conscience prompts me to add immediately that a passionate, emotional, thoroughly "engaged" person will probably not be fit for scientific research and especially not in the field of International Relations. However, being human creatures, citizen of their country, everyone is, of course, entitled to his convictions, moral, social, philosophical, religious convictions. What I wanted simply to stress is that insofar as he or she is engaged in the scientific study of International Relations, he and she has to get rid, and as quickly and as thoroughly as possible, of all the hindrances, preventions, psychological pressures, influences and prejudices which I have mentioned.

To conclude: I do not know whether you are accustomed to a type of professor who, by force of his real, or pretended, knowledge in the realm of the science which he teaches, tries to, so to speak, "persuade" his students, undertakes to "transfuse" into them the knowledge he possesses—which in itself could be considered a honourable enterprise. May I promise you hereby that in the place of such an enterprise—or, rather, topping it—my special endeavour will be to activate in you that sense of criticism which is the real basis of any constructive knowledge; but, of course, such a criticism must first be based on a solid knowledge, on a serious study of *facts*. It is to this study, to this study of facts and theories in the realm of the Science of International Relations that, my dear fellow students, I invite you now.