

Being at Home in the World: Antitheory and IR; What
Ought to be Done?

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‘Being at Home in the World: Antitheory and IR; What Ought to be Done?’

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‘The antitheorists argue that there are no systems of principles more fundamental than those we happen to live by. Thus, if we understand moral prescriptions to be worth endorsing only if they conform to a theory, our moral judgements are undecidable’¹

The discussion here concerns the challenges to International Relations (IR) theory that arise from debates in moral philosophy, and in particular the view that a moral theory is not possible. The reference to the latter view is the discussion in Dwight Furrow’s book ‘Against Theory’, but the arguments quickly disperse across a range of connected issues in the IR literature, as a particular question unfolds into more general concerns. The notion of ‘antitheory’ differs from non-foundationalism (which supports a theory, potentially) in not permitting exclusion of moral agents as determinants, in part through the abstractions of formalism, or as Taylor puts it: ‘Formal theories of ethics, which derive the right from some procedure, by this very act detach it from any substantive notion of the good’.² Anti-theory views do, of course, raise questions about how to deal with contingency. The argument of the essay is, in a nutshell, that politics should be understood as coping with contingency. The particular question engaged (but not answered) here is

¹ Dwight Furrow, *Against Theory: Continental and Analytical Challenges in Moral Philosophy* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), p. xiii.

² Charles Taylor, ‘What’s Wrong with Foundationalism? Knowledge, Agency, and World’, in Wrathall, Mark A. and Jeff Malpas, eds (2000) *Heidegger, Coping, and Cognitive Science: Essays in Honor of Hubert L. Dreyfus Volume 2*, (London: MIT Press, 2000), p. 133.

whether transcendence is necessary for ethics, the opposing positions being ('No') that it is not possible to transcend the contingency of our lives and so we must seek a contingent, if reflexive, account of ethics rather than an illusory universal foundation to underwrite theory (cf. antitheorists – concrete ethics/sittlichkeit), and ('Yes') that we are bound to adopt an ethic of responsibility to the 'Other' which necessarily transcends our own subjective contingent situation by reference to a pre-original position (cf. Levinas, et al), if not necessarily resting on an illusive universal foundation or theory. It should be apparent that we are not discussing the existence of Platonic transcendentals, but rather the prospect of transcending radically contingent experience. Since, as Taylor says, '[a]ntifoundationalism seems the received wisdom of our time'³, we might reasonably assume that position epistemologically, but it leaves room for discomfort in the ethical context (and would anyway meet resistance in 'mainstream' IR). Thus the antitheory position raises a profound challenge to universalist aspirations which inform much IR theory, as well as to more nuanced non-foundationalist or constructivist accounts of how comparable aspirations might be met without resort to universalism.

The questions this set of concerns poses for IR theory are various, but all fundamental:

Can we have morality (normative ethics) at all, if universalisation is unacceptable or impossible? Or is it correct, as Hare says, that we'd have to invent morality if we didn't already have it? For example, in distinguishing between the positions of Ricoeur and Levinas, Cohen notes that though they agree 'that norms are not the ground zero of morality', the former (Ricoeur) 'gives precedence to moral character over moral sociality' while it is the reverse for the latter:

Normativity, for Levinas, is a conditional development which appears later or consequently at the level of justice. The initial morality Levinas discerns emerging with sociality is "purer" or

³ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

more stringent than normativity, if one can say this, commanding prior to and without commandments. To be sure, laws are part of a developed morality, but they are not its initial moment.⁴

Morality, in this context, is thus not the key issue: the issue is whether morality can rest on something less than a universal point of reference which transcends contingent circumstances, and somehow secures our understanding of that 'initial moment'.

Is it possible to determine a basis of adjudication between ethical claims or statements (even a non-foundational foundation) without transcendence? And does transcendence require departing from the theoretical realm and entering the theological realm? In a way, this 'begs the questions that transcendental arguments are meant to resolve, such as: is there a reality of which we are aware?'⁵, but if we ask instead what our communal concerns are, we can then deal with the issues of goals and instruments which are better within our grasp, so that '[w]e perceive the world through our activity' in it... and '[o]ur perception of the world as that of an embodied agent is not a contingent fact we might discover empirically; rather our sense of ourselves as embodied agents is constitutive of our experience'⁶. Kirkegaard's 'leap of faith', or Levinas' notion of a prior responsibility to the Other, or more generally the existentialist notion of responsibility, would all suggest something that escapes the bounds of rational theorising in the anglo-american tradition of IR, but the question is whether this amounts to theology or can stand its ground as political theory. It may be that pure freedom and necessity are abstractions, that 'being-for-the-other is deeper, more truly oneself, than being-for-oneself'⁷, but it leaves open the question of how Being justifies itself. To a large degree, even raising such questions depends on maintaining established dualisms, such as that between

⁴ Richard A. Cohen, *Ethics, Exegesis and Philosophy: Interpretation after Levinas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 287.

⁵ Charles Taylor, 'The Validity of Transcendental Arguments', in *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 30.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 25, 26.

⁷ Richard A. Cohen, *Ethics, Exegesis and Philosophy: Interpretation after Levinas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 7.

knowledge and ethics, and on maintaining a focus on knowledge rather than ethics. In seeking a solution to an ethical problem by reference to a distinct realm of knowledge, one moves from the frying pan of ethical dilemmas into the fire of unstable knowledge. Cohen cites Merleau-Ponty as saying, in *Phenomenology of Perception*, that '[e]very focus is always a focus on something which presents itself as to be focused upon' and goes on to suggest the instability of knowledge by pointing to the 'creative character of reality, its unpredictable futurity...' in arguing for a Bergsonian ecological (as opposed to theological or ontological) view which addresses the concern with traditional divisive categories.⁸

Does the modernist project of rational structured knowledge (including traditional IR theorising, of course) give priority to epistemology over ethics (over a prior ontology)? Is any attempt at theory understood in that way undermined by the radical contingency of human experience (or simply by human history)? Perhaps the established dualisms that inhabit our political and ethical thinking (such as Walker's inside/outside and the cosmopolitan/communitarian debate, for example) are simply generating intellectual and cultural 'red herrings', like relativism, which proscribe a broader range of political possibilities and alternatives in our deliberations. For example, David Campbell explores such alternatives in proposing a Derridean supplement to Levinas, whereby the deconstruction of the given state, or political form allows avoidance of totalizing politics and hence a totalizing ethic.⁹ To a similar end, cosmopolitan arguments can take on a nuanced perspective, as in Andrew Linklater's argument that ethical universalism and respect for difference are not mutually exclusive and indeed are encapsulated in the notion of 'widening the boundaries of dialogic communities'¹⁰, or in Richard Shapcott's 'thin cosmopolitanism'.¹¹ The more

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

⁹ David Campbell, *National Deconstruction: Violence, Identity and Justice in Bosnia*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), pp. 183, 186.

¹⁰ Andrew Linklater, *Transformation of Political Community* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), p. 5.

¹¹ Richard Shapcott, *Justice, Community and Dialogue in International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 209ff.

fundamental dualism, Cartesian dualism, is a subject of concern and debate for Charles Taylor and Richard Rorty, from a pragmatist perspective¹²:

Almost everyone seems to agree that the great enterprise of Descartes, to build up certain knowledge from undeniable building blocks, is misconceived. ... a reflection on our whole multimedia grasp of things ought to put paid to this [Cartesian] dualism once and for all. ... This ought to ruin altogether the representational construal. Our grasp of things is not something which is in us, over against the world;... it lies in the way we are in contact with the world, in our being-in-the-world (Heidegger), or being-to-the-world (Merleau-Ponty).¹³

What does this mean for the possibility of a disciplinary theoretical base for IR? Can this role be taken up by non-empirical, non-normative theory, such as discursive practice or reflexivity? Isn't any theory necessarily constrained by universal 'rational argumentation' styles of discourse and reflection (or simply by the need for intelligible language)? Is a theory of political or social order (as 'orderliness', rather than an imposed order) possible without reference to specific models of order (e.g. states systems/capitalism/society) or concepts of order (e.g. sovereignty/autonomy/class/culture)? Can these concerns be met by, for example, constructivist theory or interpretive social science (by acknowledging intersubjective constructions, or allowing contingent 'selves' to speak)? IR in some respects displays anti-theory or at least non-foundationalist characteristics simply in the plethora of IR theory itself, in the sense that there is no (uncontroversial) overarching disciplinary foundation, only at most a variety of traditions. However, while the distinction between the antitheory and non-foundationalist positions in ethics is that the latter admits the possibility of theory, this distinction refers in the first instance to ethical

¹² Charles Taylor, 'Overcoming Epistemology', in *Philosophical Arguments*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

¹³ Charles Taylor, 'What's Wrong with Foundationalism? Knowledge, Agency, and World', in Wrathall, Mark A. and Jeff Malpas, eds (2000) *Heidegger, Coping, and Cognitive Science: Essays in Honor of Hubert L. Dreyfus Volume 2*, (London: MIT Press, 2000), pp. 114-120.

perspectives and the real tension in IR is between the priorities of ethics and epistemology, and it is only the postmodern literature that really overcomes this. Since the postmodern literature is itself marginal in respect of 'mainstream IR', the antitheory position really only presents itself as a serious challenge there.

Beyond asking whether the constraints of logic (or perhaps 'reason') demand that there is, can we also ask whether there ought to be some semblance of a foundation, criteria of judgement between principles, or 'universals' to underwrite theory? Did theory, per se, ever close off alternatives? Is it insufficient to declare (or expose) foundational assumptions? While the search for authoritative disciplinary foundations, and/or a reliable guide to world affairs, has typically focused on systematic explanations or paths to understanding which can be encapsulated in an elegant (and explanatory, and parsimonious) theory, it seems increasingly likely that the way forward in the study of international relations will be characterised by somewhat less than systematic and perhaps even distinctly untheoretical approaches. Naturally, this view would be vigorously contested by mainstream defences of IR as social science, in the traditional sense of that latter term. In normal circumstances it would be expected that scholars and students take theoretical issues seriously, if only to justify their assumptions about empirical and practical concerns, and indeed the necessity of questioning assumptions remains fundamental to the search for true knowledge. However, when the entire knowledge project is brought into question, the argument for theoretical constructions needs something more than the belaboured enthusiasm usually deployed by theorists to convince reluctant (and often bored) students and policy makers. The case made here is that we may have missed the mark in insisting on a minimum familiarity with the theoretical foundations of the discipline, and not because theoretical inquiry is not essential (it is), but because theorising has been constrained by the particular characteristics of the knowledge project, as distinct from the ethics project. In IR, the minimum familiarity required is generally that of neo-realist and liberal approaches (a rather limited engagement with alternatives), or a broader inter-paradigm debate (still

limiting in its typologies, and its positivism), typically resulting in a jumble of incommensurable theories all ostensibly contributing to aggregate knowledge. In one respect all this is addressed by the ‘postmodern’ literature, encouraging critical engagement with politics and challenging modernist accounts of political understanding and clarifying ethical relations, both within the IR community (for example, see Campbell and Warner, op cit., and also Der Derian, George, Walker, Shapiro and many others) but also, importantly, without IR – such as the debate surrounding Zygmunt Bauman’s *Postmodern Ethics*, for example. Here Bauman’s critique of liberal and communitarian views from the Levinasian perspective of difference meets Scott Lash’s critique of postmodern ethics in respect of its abstract other and abstract intersubjectivity: Lash argues for a groundedness in ethical life in contrast to the groundlessness of postmodern aesthetic ethics – or rather a mix of the two: ‘Postmodern ethics must then be the ethics of mobile roots, the groundless ground’.¹⁴ But this sort of argument, from without the discipline of IR, and even its corollaries within, are bound to seem marginal for as long as the margins are policed by the ‘mainstream’. Steve Smith has noted, in respect of postmodern or reflectivist IR scholarship, this ‘threat of the marginalisation of work that stands outside the social science canon...’.¹⁵

So, the particular concern for IR theory is that the ethical roots of international relations (both discipline and historical practice) have been marginalised by the formation of such ghettos as ‘international ethics’ and ‘normative theory’, even if these issues have taken a more dominant position in the literature over the last decade or so (and even in policy circles, to the extent that initiatives like an ‘ethical foreign policy’ can be taken seriously). Allowing the ethical basis of human, and hence political, relationships to be sidelined into abstract (and possibly even moribund) philosophical debates too easily allows the concrete nature of our ethical relationships to one another, as human beings and as political groups, to be lost in a sea of justifications for the rather

¹⁴ Scott Lash, ‘Postmodern Ethics: The Missing Ground’, *Theory, Culture and Society*, Vol 13, No 2, 1996), p. 103.

¹⁵ Steve Smith, ‘Historical sociology and international relations theory’ in Stephen Hobden and John M. Hobson (eds), *Historical Sociology of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) p. 229.

poor state of those relationships and the consequent atmosphere of unfamiliarity, fear and misunderstanding that can sometimes characterise them. Conversely, acknowledging these ethical (anti-)foundations offers some prospect of learning how to live out constructive relationships, or put another way how to be at home (or ‘make oneself at home’, through hospitality) in a shared world.

In the IR context, the alternative is what Louiza Odysseos has called the ‘ethos of survival’ which displaces responsibility to the other with a very different responsibility to oneself/ourselves and allows the marginalisation of ethics as a secondary concern in IR.¹⁶ Certainly, concern with poor relationships has always been at the heart of IR, even if instrumental. However, attempts to establish more constructive relationships have tended to rest on universalist assumptions as opposed to contingent experience. For example, it might be argued that the extreme cases of poor relations (one’s thoughts are drawn to the killing of innocents in Central Africa, the Balkans or the Middle East, and indeed the World Trade Center) result from political machinations exploiting abstract notions of moral community and collective interest, and contrast sharply with what can then be presented as rare cases of constructive individual relations running across notional boundaries (contented neighbours of differing ethnicity, or the efforts of individuals and small groups to acknowledge mutual suffering and seek peaceful coexistence).

Here, the phrase ‘being at home in the world’ (or perhaps ‘being-at-home-in-the-world’) can be understood as an aspect of Heidegger’s ‘Dasein’: Being-in-the-world and concern with Being (ontically distinguished by an ontological disposition) implies a world of possibilities within which evaluation and commitment may rest on the meaning and goals of Being, and of course may thus be a source of cultural tension or political conflict. A redirection to such concern will not in itself resolve conflict. However, note this is *concern* rather than *knowing* – as Cohen says in opening his treatment of Levinas, the importance of his philosophy ‘is its “argument” about *what is most*

¹⁶ Louiza Odysseos, ‘Dangerous ontologies: the ethos of survival and ethical theorizing in International Relations’, *Review of International Studies*, (Vol 28, No 2, 2002), p. 418.

important: not knowledge, but ethics.¹⁷ In the antitheory perspective ethics can not rest on an abstract construct, but must find a reference in the contingent experience of moral agents who then find themselves face-to-face with each other.

However, once ‘face-to-face’ relationships (as in Levinas, or perhaps the ‘interhuman’ as in Buber) are brought centre-stage, the problem remaining for IR and for social science in general is how to characterise aggregates of such relationships. These are the characterisations for which theory normally provides guidance, and which epistemology requires in moves from the particular to the general. The difficulty is that accounts of concrete human relationships may be presented as merely anecdotal, and not amenable to generalisation. This is evident in the objection that ‘face-to-face’ relationships do not take account of third parties, or collectivities, and so would leave open the central political questions of governance, representation, collective action, etc (for IR, the sovereignty problematic, diplomacy, international cooperation, intervention, etc). Furthermore, cultural factors only enter in to face-to-face relationships through the self-identification of individuals, and the traditional and creative aspects of culture remain distant. It is not that political and cultural questions can not be suitably informed by the lived-out principles of individuals, but that these questions remain undecidable if that is the only acceptable source of information. The role for morality (normative ethics) is reduced to an individual/subjective ethic, and the basis for political and cultural safeguards at a structural level (constitutions, customs) is eroded to the minimum of shared historical contingencies.

The problem thus presented may be addressed by the transcendence of the contingent individual/subjective ethic via an intersubjective ethic of responsibility to the ‘Other’, based on a claim for a pre-original transcendental condition that underwrites that responsibility (as in Levinas). While this approach may allow a finesse of the problem of universals, by ascribing a singular ethic

¹⁷ Richard A. Cohen, *Ethics, Exegesis and Philosophy: Interpretation after Levinas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 4.

of responsibility, it is not clear how multiple iterations of that responsibility could be construed as other than a universal ethic. Conversely, the anti-theory position insists on contingency, but does allow reflexivity which in turn introduces room for intersubjective influences, though not in the guise of a universal foundation for theory. In the absence of a universal transcendental foundation, contingency is the only referent, and so the problem devolving upon such a view is how contingent experience can inform social and political relationships, and the practicalities of collective choice.

The argument presented here is that the contingency of moral agents is indeed the only tenable (anti-)foundation, and that social and political relationships (including the large aggregates of these that typically concern IR) should be characterised as coping mechanisms for dealing with just that circumstance. Accordingly, to pretend that social and political arrangements provide static solutions to the problem of collective choice and action is simply folly. Equally, it is folly to pretend that morality (even as normative ethics, leaving aside absolutist universal ethics) is a kind of benchmark for human behaviour perhaps entailing (at worst) the reification of a dominant discourse, rather than something like an aggregate process of the reflexive consideration of subjective ethics – a collection of idiosyncratic ‘strategies for coping’¹⁸ – perhaps (at best) offering a *modus vivendi*. So rather than seeking to resolve the problem of universal moral agency in the face of the radical Other (cf. the radical incommensurability of Lyotard’s ‘differend’), or to justify respect for difference and heterogeneity via some structural metanarrative, or even to build Levinas’s ‘bridge between the known and the unknown’ through recognition of suffering, via the technique of transcendence¹⁹, the appropriate project for IR is to attend assiduously to the most promising strategies and mechanisms for coping.

¹⁸ Dwight Furrow, *Against Theory: Continental and Analytical Challenges in Moral Philosophy* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), p. 28.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

What, then, does this imply for the role of transcendence as a potential coping strategy itself? The Bergsonian ecological epoch that Cohen describes²⁰ does offer a way of perceiving the world without inscribing dualisms, but it doesn't offer a justification of concern with the Other, or even a specific concern with Being since it is distinguished from the ontological. This leaves us to ponder the origins of meaning, the starting point of philosophy, or as Cohen says 'the origin of signification'; the transcendental ego for Husserl, Being for Heidegger, and responsibility for Levinas²¹ – but with the concrete/theoretical and ontological orientations of the former two missing the point emphasised by the latter: the ethical significance of intersubjectivity, its transcendence.²² This transcendence, the argument goes, allows not only intuition, even common sense, through consciousness but also allows Levinas to propose that the ethical break of the subject from its sphere of immanence, from naïve realism, is permitted by responsibility for the Other, by social life, and to argue as Cohen says that ethical alterity 'is the most radical sense (or "non-sense") of transcendence'. We must still consider, however, the realistic possibility of transcending 'oneself', one's concrete situation, and what the nature of this transcendence is – what exactly is being transcended, and can IR theory go there too?

The demise of the transcendental subject in an anti-foundational perspective is at the heart of the tension between universal moral agency and concrete situational ethics, but (as Linklater notes in citing Rorty) we needn't accept the stark choice that this implies²³, and there is still room for moral theory in the absence of objectivity as long as it fits with experience and practice, even if a 'conception of how to live' cannot be fully articulated or codified.²⁴ The alternative is the anti-theory position that there are no moral facts independent of moral agents, which undermines any

²⁰ Richard A. Cohen, *Ethics, Exegesis and Philosophy: Interpretation after Levinas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 27, 42.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 85.

²³ Andrew Linklater, *Transformation of Political Community* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), p. 77.

²⁴ Dwight Furrow, *Against Theory: Continental and Analytical Challenges in Moral Philosophy* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), p. 11.

project to establish a theory concerning the underlying unity of diverse phenomena, even if there is some need for criteria simply because it is difficult to put one's entire perspective in question at once.²⁵ The antitheory position rests on doubts about the 'degree and durability of regularities social reality exhibits', where the complexity and unpredictability of contingent circumstances and the impenetrability of moral agents' motivations make it difficult to systematise moral judgements in a theory.²⁶ Contingency implies that we must view 'morality as a collection of strategies for coping'²⁷, while on the other hand this leaves little for morality to rest on but tradition and so an anti-theory position doesn't thereby allow for the radical Other.²⁸

Furrow, having examined some anti-theory views and proposed solutions from MacIntyre (no philosophical account of universal moral agency), Nussbaum (moral blindness, the reality of evil) and Rorty ('solidarity' as a source of obligation), moves on to the post-modern alternative which, perhaps counterintuitively, points to transcendence. It is partly counterintuitive because Levinas' position about responsibility to the Other is, as Furrow says, 'an exceedingly strange argument' since 'nothing here entails this burden of responsibility'²⁹, though he is later able to say: 'Postmodern justice is the political domain struggling to become ethical'.³⁰ So perhaps we can conclude that the political domain is where (and how) we come face-to-face with each other and feel this burden. Furrow goes on to cite Levinas as saying that '...a moral appeal is gratuitous. It asks one to respond without reason'.³¹ Furrow concludes that 'a postmodern ethic provides... an account of universal moral agency compatible with the antitheorists' position', and that since situational concrete ethics necessarily always leave someone out and diminish the Other: 'If we seek a moral world, then ethics must be about transcendence'.³²

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 6,7.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 35, 36.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 192.

As Campbell has argued, a consequence of what he has 'termed *radical interdependence* at the heart of Levinas' argument', which encompasses both applied cases of IR and abstract commitments of ethics³³, is that we are driven towards political negotiation through critical intervention. Here Campbell is responding to Warner's concern that concrete politics and philosophical ethics might become separated. Such a separation could come about since an ethically motivated offer (Derrida's 'Bois') might not actually be taken up in practice, as a consequence of Buber's notion of movement between the two alternatives of the passive I-It of non-concern and the active I-Thou of specific responsible relations³⁴ – the distinction in Buber's view which permits an 'art of the possible' as opposed to Levinas' 'easy answer'.³⁵ Can we conclude from this that politics – this art of the possible – is where transcendence occurs, if it does at all? Perhaps, then, we can step away from the Platonic notion of transcendentals (forms) and content ourselves with a more limited notion of transcendence through the act of political engagement itself, though not a limited notion of politics, since transcendence would require a genuine political engagement. The present context of world affairs seems to set itself against a thorough-going transcendence, as even the good intentions behind efforts to cooperate in the general interest of peaceful coexistence are confounded not only by those for whom the other remains politically alien, but also by the misconceptions which appear to be embedded in such good intentions. This essay concludes with observations from Levinas and Baudrillard, the first pre-dating and the second post-dating the 'war on terror':

³³ David Campbell, 'The Politics of Radical Interdependence: A rejoinder to Daniel Warner', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* (Vol. 25, No. 1, Spring 1996), p. 131.

³⁴ Daniel Warner, 'Levinas, Buber and the Concept of Otherness in International Relations: A Reply to David Campbell', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* (Vol. 25, No. 1, Spring 1996), pp. 115, 122.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

The true problem for us Westerners is not so much to refuse violence as to question ourselves about a struggle against violence which without blanching in non-resistance to evil, could avoid the institution of violence out of this very struggle. Does not the war against war perpetuate that which it is called to make disappear, and consecrate war and its virile virtues in good consciousness?³⁶

If terrorism is really the result of a state of profusion without any hope of payback or obligation to sacrifice, of the forced settlement of conflicts, then eradicating it as if it were an affliction imposed from the outside could only be illusory. Terrorism, in its absurdity and meaninglessness, is society's verdict on – and condemnation of – itself.³⁷

In surveying the concerns raised above, the suggestion that emerges is that IR should contemplate what it would mean to adopt an 'anti-theory' position with respect to its field of study: to ask what 'an anti-theory of IR' would look like, or indeed whether it is appropriate to ask if there is such a thing to point *to*, to focus *on*, to aim *for*, or look *at*, as opposed to an attitude or possibly an intellectual project to participate *in*. Of course, this would also invoke consideration of how the resulting indeterminacy might be dealt with. In doing so, one must give particular attention to the dangers of becoming disconnected from political practice, or what Jim George calls a 'simplistic dismissal' of modernist approaches.³⁸ This reflects Warner's concern with the separation of politics and ethics noted above, and Taylor's related observations on the abstractions of formalism, though none of these positions implies a reversion to the modernist knowledge project in order to deal with ethical questions.

³⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981), p. 177.

³⁷ Jean Baudrillard, 'The despair of having everything', trans. Luke Sandford, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, November 2002 (English Edition), p. 15.

³⁸ Jim George, *Discourse of Global Politics: A Critical (Re)Introduction to International Relations* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1994), p. 161.

It remains that transcending our respective embeddedness in our worlds is a tall order, and even acknowledging embeddedness invites re-inscription of foundations just when non-foundational (and anti-theory) perspectives offer escape from such constraints.

One simple conclusion is that it might be useful to reflect on how the notion of ‘coping’ can illuminate the field of study, just because coping may be as good as it gets, and whether a positive interpretation of coping would allow us to feel more at home in a world of others.

Our ability to cope can be seen as incorporating an overall sense of ourselves and our world; which sense includes and is carried by a spectrum of rather different abilities: at one end, beliefs which we hold, which may or may not be “in our minds” at the moment; at the other, abilities to get around and deal intelligently with things. Intellectualism has made us see these things as very different sites; but philosophy in our day has shown how closely akin they are, and how interlinked.³⁹

³⁹ Charles Taylor, ‘What’s Wrong with Foundationalism? Knowledge, Agency, and World’, in Wrathall, Mark A. and Jeff Malpas, eds (2000) *Heidegger, Coping, and Cognitive Science: Essays in Honor of Hubert L. Dreyfus Volume 2*, (London: MIT Press, 2000), p. 117.