



CONSENSUS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS:
A CRITICAL INQUIRY

by

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, a number of scholars have suggested that the Discipline is not in very good shape. Relativism is being advocated as a legitimate theoretical position, intellectual standards have fallen dramatically, and the field lacks both cohesion and direction. As a result, International Relations is said to be in a state of disarray. On this view, the culprit is theoretical pluralism. The plethora of approaches, theories, and perspectives now makes it impossible to achieve a consensus "on the subjects of inquiry and theorizing." Without it, theoretical progress becomes impossible and the field stagnates. Theoretical pluralism, then, is regarded as a rather worrying trend, one which threatens the very existence of International Relations as an autonomous field of study.

This thesis takes issue with this interpretation. It argues that theoretical pluralism should be taken seriously and fostered. It is the only possible basis upon which the study of international politics can be undertaken. I argue that the "problem of the divided self" mitigates against the establishment of a permanent consensus on the subject.

Using this argument as a framework, I undertake an examination of the relationship between the idea of consensus and International Relations. I conclude that International Relations is a "dubious Discipline." At the same time, it is too simple to speak about the "End of International Relations." The Discipline continues to set the terms of theoretical debate. Unless this is recognized, attempts to move beyond International Relations will fail. This is precisely the fate of radical critics. I conclude by suggesting that one of the things which is wrong with the study of international politics is that there are too many scholars trying to legislate for the field as a whole.

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