

ST 60 : Les usages de l'histoire des idées politiques en Relations internationales

Elie Baranets (Université de Bordeaux). Elie.baranets@gmail.com

Labeled « Great Thinker »: The Marketing of IR

In various circumstances, referring to classical thinkers can be very useful. They are able to provide a powerful and innovative account of the world, showing great discernment in their thought and logical coherence in their analysis. Therefore, it does not seem to make much sense to mention their work by separating an idea they have developed from the broader reflection comes from. These added-on elements are most of the time nothing but a step in the reflection of these great thinkers. And what is illuminating is the reflection produced, not the step as such. Whoever resorts to this practice becomes unable to benefit from the insight these great authors are likely to provide. Yet, many mainstream IR scholars proceed this way.

Let's note that this behavior is not specific to mainstream IR scholars. Many critical authors would quote Pierre Bourdieu, for example, for the label more than for the essence of his work. But the logic of this practice may be different than the one which characterizes mainstream IR scholars. More specifically, we can observe at least two different kinds of practices in this regard.

The first one consists in mentioning the work – or to be more accurate, the name – of a great thinker in order to illustrate a brief statement or idea that a scholar offers. This is the case when, for example, Robert Jervis quotes Carl von Clausewitz to say that emotions can affect perceptions¹, or when Andrew Moravcsik relies on Immanuel Kant when assuming that “[i]ndividuals and groups [...] act rationally in pursuit of material and ideal welfare”.² Neither Clausewitz nor Kant are of use to Jervis and Moravcsik respectively. Mentioning prestigious names this way does not add any significant insight, does not help the reader understand the issue, does not appear as a necessary step for a further development, or help the authors elaborate a specific argument.

It is not an easy task to know why great thinkers are used this way. Is it in order not to be criticized for not having quoted a classical thinker? Or is it maybe more in order to impress the reader, with a similar logic to the one often inherent in the technique of “name-dropping”? Whatever the reason, Jervis and Moravcsik are not to blame. This technique is very common, be it in IR or in social science in general. Moreover, here, the names of classical thinkers are just quickly mentioned and very soon left aside, which means that there is probably not much harm done. The implications of such a practice being, apparently, very limited, this papers focuses on another practice.

The second practice also relies on superficially resorting to classical thinkers. But contrary to the first practice, this one has major implications. It consists in isolating only a few elements of one great thinker's work, then associating these confined elements to a given position, and, finally, attributing the name of this great thinker to this position, as if this position was

¹ Robert JERVIS. *Perceptions and Misperceptions in International Politics*. Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1976, p. 356.

² Andrew MORAVCSIK. “Taking Preferences Seriously”, *International Organization*, 51 (4), 1997, p. 517.

representative of the thought produced by the latter. Most of the time, it is not. But here, the great thinker's name is not left aside. Quite on the contrary, it is highlighted for marketing purpose as it helps scholars make their work look good. With time, this practice has been replicated, and these great authors' names have now become closely associated with the simplistic description that has been made of their work. For example, this is how the adjective "Hobbesian" automatically refers to the state of war, or the adjective "Kantian" evokes friendly relations. These terms are now an integral part of the codes of the discipline and, as such, cannot be ignored.

1. Looking for labels

Isolating an element from a coherent work, and mentioning it for a completely different purpose from what the given classic thinker had in mind when he originally made use of this element, can be misleading regarding the meaning of this thinker's work. It is even more the case when the author's name is closely, and on a recurrent basis, associated with this element. We can observe it by having a closer look on how IR scholars handle the analogy between the state of nature and international anarchy.

In *Leviathan*, Thomas Hobbes depicts the state of nature - which is the situation in which individuals find themselves when there is no higher political authority above them - as a state of war. From here, it has become common in IR to qualify highly conflictual relations between two or several states as "Hobbesian".

Yet, what makes Hobbes a remarkable author is less aspect of his thought than how it is integrated into a coherent whole. One of the things that are worth noting is that Hobbes innovatively takes the individual as a basis. As for the properties of the state of nature, they have implications such as the absolutist nature of the state individuals eventually agree to implement due to the hostile environment surrounding them. But these aspects are sidestepped by many IR scholars. They focus neither on the amount of prerogatives granted to the authority exercising political power, nor on the non-transcendental origins of its legitimacy, nor on what it meant to have such a position in the historical context in which Hobbes lived. They would rather reduce Hobbes' thought to the state of war, and use the Englishman's name as a label for this position.

Intellectually speaking, mentioning classical authors in such a simplistic way is not very valuable since what made them distinguished is precisely what is lost in that process. But this is nevertheless commonly done. More specifically, the analogy between the state of nature and international anarchy is widely used in IR, and not only with a reference to Hobbes.

But is this necessarily a fallacious reading of the work of these thinkers? One could argue that the state of nature and international anarchy are conceptual equivalents, since both situations are characterized by the absence of a supreme political authority. The analogy would then make sense. Moreover, how could this practice entail a betrayal of classical thinkers if these very classical thinkers proceed this way explicitly themselves?

Hobbes indeed states that "Kings, and Persons of Sovereign authority, because of their Independency, are in continuall jealousies, and in the state and posture of Gladiators; having their weapons pointing, and their eyes fixed on another; that is their Forts, Garrisons, and Guns

upon the Frontiers of their Kingdoms; and continuall Spyes upon their neighbours ; which is a posture of War.”³

This is also true for Locke, who writes that “all Princes and Rulers of Independent Governments all through the World, are in a State of Nature”⁴

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, according to whom « each one of us being in the civil state as regards our fellow citizens, but in the state of nature as regards the rest of the world”, makes no exception.⁵

Finally, Immanuel Kant writes: “Peoples, as states, can be judged as individual human beings who, in the state of nature (that is, when they are independent from external laws), bring harm to each other”⁶

However, it is not sure that these analogies faithfully reflect the essence of these thinkers work. Right after having resorted to it, Hobbes adds a nuance, saying that states have nevertheless a less precarious life than individuals in the state of nature. More generally, when all these classical thinkers resort to this analogy, they don’t usually do it to develop their thought. The point they seem to make is to offer a comparison, which is limited in scope.

IR scholars refer to the state of nature to describe the empirical reality, whereas theorist of the social contract don’t. But apart from the fact that many IR scholars use this concept for a different purpose than the one classical thinkers elaborated it for – which is not necessarily problematic – they also distort the concept itself. What makes the state of nature a broad-based state of war, to go on with Hobbes’ theory, is to be located in human peculiarities. The human body needs to sleep, and can suffer from illness (so is true for the human mind). It exposes men to great danger, and doesn’t spare the most powerful ones. Given that death can be given at one blow, the strongest man can never be ensured that he won’t be killed by the weakest, who can attack by surprise, or ally with others. Therefore, men constantly live with the fear of suffering a brutal and sudden death. The state of war of all men against one another is a consequence of this feeling of physical insecurity.

³ Thomas HOBBS. *Leviathan*. Penguin Books, 1968, chap II, § 14, p. 187-188.

⁴ John LOCKE. *Two Treatises of Government*, Second ed. Cambridge University Press, 1967, Chapitre II, § 14, p. 294.

⁵ Jean-Jacques ROUSSEAU. *A Lasting Peace through the Federation of Europe*, 1782, http://kms1.isn.ethz.ch/serviceengine/Files/ISN/46089/ipriadoc_doc/A47EC448-BD7D-48AA-9CE4-BC0C64C7E062/en/5014_Rousseau_A_Lasting_Peace.pdf, p. 1.

⁶ *Toward Perpetual Peace and Other Writings on Politics, Peace, and History*, Yale university Press, New Haven, 2006 , p. 78. We can find similar allusions in the work of non-contractualist authors such as Alexis de Tocqueville who writes : « Les peuples entre eux ne sont que des individus » *De la démocratie en Amérique*, Paris : Gallimard, t 1, p. 186 (the English translation at our disposal is less explicit : « Among nations, each nation is but a single unit », Harper & Row Publishers, New York, 1966, p. 104), or also “In war a nation acts like a single individual toward foreign nation. », Ibid., p. 153. We will keep in mind that the analogy is very limited in scope for Tocqueville too, whose intention is less to compare the state of nature with international anarchy than to assume that the state is unitary when it deals with foreign affairs. As for Raymond Aron, even though he makes an explicit distinction in his overall work between both situations, he implicitly validates the analogy at one point, stating : “What then is the first objective which the political unit may logically seek? The reason is furnished by Hobbes in his analysis of the *state of nature*. Each political unit aspires to survive.” Raymond ARON. *Peace and War: A Theory of International Relations*, New Brunswick, Transaction Publishers, 2003, p. 72.

Equality is less pronounced between nations than it is between men, who are more vulnerable if attacked in the state of nature than are states within international anarchy. The latter don't need to sleep. Nor do they think that they can disappear in an instant. In other words, what makes the Hobbesian state of nature a state of war is not only the absence of a supreme authority, but how it has an effect on human beings, given their special features. States have different characters than humans, and may be less prone to see international anarchy as an unbearable environment. This can also explain why men eventually consent to partially abandon their liberty through a social contract, and that states do not.

The Hobbesian state of nature is one of men. Intellectually speaking, using the Englishman's name as a label to qualify relations between states makes little sense. A similar conclusion could be drawn regarding the practice of mentioning John Locke or Jean-Jacques Rousseau to depict other aspects of international anarchy. But when scholars resort to this practice, they can benefit from it in terms of marketing.

Pointing out the fact that the legacy of classical thinkers is not taken seriously is nothing new. Richard Lebow, an IR scholar himself, once wrote about realists that "[t]hey cherry-picked quotes from Thucydides, Rousseau and Hobbes, seriously misreading all three, to lend authority to their claim that the international arena was fundamentally distinct from the domestic one and that anarchy and warfare were its norm."⁷ Therefore, instead of trying to demonstrate something that has already been shown, I will try to identify the inherent logic to such a practice, and then to determine its consequences.

It is hard to know about people's precise motivation, and even harder to generalize about it. Nevertheless, it seems that resorting to classical thinkers allows scholars to enhance their work. Here, their point is not to improve the intrinsic quality of their scientific production, but rather to make it look good.

As a label, a great thinker's name gives an impression of consistency. One thought looks all the more profound as it comes along with a philosopher. As for the scholars resorting to this practice, they look both humble and knowledgeable, for they admit - or pretend to admit - to feed their reflection with another person's work, while also showing that they are familiar with it.

Moreover, it is certainly easier to defend a point of view when a great thinker seems to be on your side. It is even more so the case if you challenge an existing position that also uses a classical thinker as a label. Therefore, when classical realists depict international anarchy as a state of war, for example, it can be useful to refer to Hobbes to back them up as they locate the origins of these conflictual relations in human nature. As for neorealists, they don't necessarily depict world politics as being any less conflictual than what classical realists argue, but they disagree on the reason why it is so, as they identify the anarchical structure of the international system as the relevant level of analysis. Now, how to impose your position and overtake somebody else's if the latter seems to have Thomas Hobbes backing him up? To be able to compete with them, and then to compete with Hobbes, it may be easier to have another great thinker on your side too. To some extent, Jean-Jacques Rousseau was such an author for

⁷ Richard Ned LEBOW. *A Cultural Theory of International Relations*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 12.

neorealism. So is Hugo Grotius for the English school, or Immanuel Kant within the literature on democratic peace.

Here, the potential of these classical thinkers' is being severely underexplored. However brilliant they might be, they don't help most IR scholars find their way. But it is also true that this is not what IR scholars look at. What they seek is not to grasp the world with discernment in light of classical thinkers' legacy. When they mention these names, they don't do it to be enlightened, but to make sure that others see that they have torches. These classical thinkers are bright, and usually described as such by IR scholars. But by referring to their names rather than to their thought, the latter tend to use the former as torches pointing at themselves in broad daylight rather than as a beacon enlightening their path in the dark.

Having said that, the work of these scholars is not necessarily poor. Authors such as Kenneth Waltz or Alexander Wendt, who, as will be shown, resort to this practice, have provided work of great quality. And if they operate in daylight, as previously considered, it also means that they have eventually managed to have a good visibility of the world. But most of them did so without basing their reflection on classical thinkers.⁸

Now, some of these works have become so influential in IR that the name of a classical thinker has remained associated with what it has been used for: a label stuck on a product that only superficially reflects these authors' thinking.

Referring to many classical thinkers, especially in his first seminal book, *Man, the State and War*,⁹ Kenneth Waltz is one of these prominent authors.

Waltz borrows Rousseau's "stag hunt" metaphor, through which he tries to show that if hunters fail to efficiently cooperate in a situation of anarchy, it is not due to human nature, as Hobbes would consider, but rather to the fact that no one can be sure that the others would meet their commitments if there is no higher authority to punish those who don't.

Does this brief passage located in *A Discourse on Inequality* faithfully reflect Rousseau's thought? Admittedly, and contrary to many other scholars, Waltz does not rapidly mention a classical thinker to directly and brutally use his name as a label for his own work. He devotes some time to the task of convincing the reader that the metaphor is representative of Rousseau's vision. However, Waltz uses here the analogy between states and individuals, which is a debatable practice, as previously shown. Rousseau himself argues that there is less equality among states than there is among individuals, and that states show less unity and cohesion than individuals.¹⁰ Moreover, in Waltz's depiction of world politics, the relevant entity is the *de facto* sovereign state, which is both unified and legitimate as such. No account is made of Rousseau's reflection on how the state can embody the general will, and become legitimate in doing so. Instead the general will is equated with the national interest. It allows Waltz to consider that Rousseau develops a theory of international relations,¹¹ which is said to inspire him. Such a reading of the Genevan has lead Thom Kuels to consider that "Waltz has left Rousseau

⁸ Or, to be more accurate, without exploiting the work of the classical authors put forward. This means that they work can be shaped, at one degree or another, by classic thinkers, but that it does not appear explicitly.

⁹ Kenneth N. WALTZ. *Man, the State, and War*. New York : Columbia University press, 2001 [1959].

¹⁰ See David BOUCHER. *Political Theories of International Relations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 299, relying on Jean-Jacques ROUSSEAU. « The State of War », in Stanley HOFFMANN and David P. FIDLER. *Rousseau on International Relations*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 101-138.

¹¹ Kenneth N. WALTZ. *Man, the State, and War*, op. cit., p. 174-175.

Behind”.¹² As to Lebow, he considers that “Waltz takes serious liberties with their [Hobbes and Rousseau] texts to draw an analogy between states and individuals.”¹³

Alexander Wendt, also one of the most influential IR scholars, criticizes Waltz, and realists in general, for their use of Rousseau and, more specifically, their reference to the stag hunt metaphor.¹⁴ For Wendt, this situation is not representative of Rousseau’s state of nature, but rather marks the end of it.¹⁵

But, ironically, if Waltz’s appropriation of Rousseau is debatable, the way in which Wendt refers to classical thinkers is even more superficial. Wendt thinks that depicting anarchy as a state of war or a state of peace in general is not relevant. The degree of violence depends on states’ shared beliefs regarding it. One of the key steps of his work is to distinguish between three kinds of anarchical cultures: 1) “Hobbesian” where states perceive each other as enemies, 2) “Lockean” where states perceive each other as rivals, 3) and “Kantian” where states perceive each other as friends. As for what this means on a more precise level, Wendt explains that “[t]he posture of enemies is one of threatening adversaries who observe no limits in their violence toward each other; that of rivals is one of competitors who will use violence to advance their interest but refrain from killing each other; and that of friends is one of allies who do not use violence to settle their disputes and work as a team against security threats.”¹⁶

Why would these three relations be named after political philosophers? As previously shown, such a qualification is irrelevant for Hobbes and the state of war. The same could be said for John Locke. Wendt does not mention the main characteristics of Locke’s state of nature. He is also silent about the fact that assuming such a state of nature, for Locke, allows him above all to consider the implementation of a government whose prerogatives will be different from the one individuals decide to implement in Hobbes’ theory. Nothing is said about Locke’s vision of property, which is essential. As for Kant, his description of the state of nature is anything but a peaceful and friendly one. And, even though we can find the idea of a move toward peace in his work, the reason why he is an interesting author lies in the reflection that leads him there, and on the implications result from it.

Moreover, Wendt tells us that states are not indefinitely stuck in one kind of anarchy. Change is possible, and usually toward a more peaceful interaction than before. But what does it tell us if two actors can be embedded in a “Hobbesian” culture in their relation, for example, and then switch to a “Lockean” one? Empirically, the way actors perceive each other can change. Therefore the idea makes sense in terms of world politics. However, one cannot switch from Hobbes to Locke this way without distorting their thought. In order to prone a non-absolutist state whose leaders would be held accountable before the citizens, and be granted with limited prerogatives, Locke had to assume a completely different state of nature than the one described by Hobbes. There is a coherence in the work of both authors, and the characters of the state

¹² Thom KHUELS. *Beyond Sovereignty Territory: The Space of Ecopolitics*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996, p. 61.

¹³ Richard Ned LEBOW. *A Cultural Theory of International Relations* op. cit., p. 18-19. Even though Waltz associates, as expected, the idea that human nature is the relevant level of analysis (or, as he calls it, the first image) with Hobbes, he also refers a lot (if not more) to Baruch Spinoza.

¹⁴ Alexander WENDT. “Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics”, *International Organization*, 46 (2), 1992, p. 401-402. Wendt refers to the work of Michael Williams, “Rousseau, Realism, and Realpolitik,” *Millennium* 18, 1989, p. 188-204.

¹⁵ As there is no inter-subjectivity in Rousseau’s state of nature.

¹⁶ *Social Theory of International Politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 258.

they portray is a logical consequence of the attributes of the state of nature which preceded it, and which was stable. One just cannot go from the “Hobbesian” state of nature to the “Lockean”, as they are essentially different...unless the terms “Hobbesian” and “Lockean” have nothing to do with Hobbes and Locke respectively. And this is precisely the case in Alexander Wendt’s work, as this may be the case in IR more generally.

Wendt does not superficially quote Hobbes, Locke and Kant. He never quotes them at all. He only refers quickly to famous classifications, made by other IR scholars, here Martin Wight and Hedley Bull (which also is a problematic practice in terms of history of political thought, as will be shown at a later stage) to justify the use of these three qualifying adjectives, which ultimately have nothing to do with the authors whose name appear in it. In other words, Wendt does not deceptively use names of political thinkers to dress up his theory; he openly uses adjectives derived from their names as a label.¹⁷

Admittedly, when Wendt speaks of “Hobbesian culture,” it does not just imply a situation of strong enmity, but shared perceptions of it. The same could be said regarding the term “Lockean” for rivalry, or “Kantian” for friendship. But if this is so, it is not because he uses these terms in a sophisticated way. It is because they are used next to the term “culture,” which contains an inter-subjective dimension. As such the term “Hobbesian” refers to nothing more than strong enmity, as for the term “Lockean” for rivalry and “Kantian” for friendship.

But one should not be surprised, as these adjectives have a different meaning than the one a philosopher would expect: their meaning is independent from the work of the political thinkers they explicitly refer to. Now, the term “Hobbesian” or “Kantian” have acquired their proper meaning in IR, and are part of the discipline vocabulary as such.

2. Using codes

As the stag hunt metaphor is now used in game theory as a dilemma, separately from Rousseau’s work,¹⁸ the terms “Hobbesian” and “Kantian” are used to depict a state of war, and a state of lasting peace/friendship, independently from Hobbes’ or Kant’s thought respectively.

The fact that the authors who misused the names of classical thinkers have gone onto influential in IR probably helped promote these labels in the first place. But this certainly cannot explain why they have become accepted codes within the discipline. For that purpose, the practice had to be reproduced. And this was done by scholars and professors when they agreed to reproduce them while conducting their research, writing handbooks and teaching IR.

This is how, for example, in their book *the Logic of Political Survival*, published in 2003, Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and his collaborators go so far as to elaborate what they call the “Hobbes index” by which they statistically calculate how a given country’s society looks like Hobbes’ state of nature. To do so, they intend to measure how 1) short, 2) poor, 3) nasty, 4) brutish, 5) and solitary life appears to be within every nation, using indicators for each character, on a scale

¹⁷ Wendt explicitly uses the term “label”, idem, p. 257.

¹⁸ James FEARON, “A rationalist explanation for war”, *International Organization*, 49 (3), 1995, p. 404.

from 0 to 100, 0 being the closest to Hobbes' state of nature. The Hobbes index is the sum of these five scores, divided by five.¹⁹

Needless to say, such a use of Thomas Hobbes' name is incongruous, and none of these operations reflect the Englishman's thought. But let's note here that this work is not a marginal scientific production in IR, nor are its authors unknown. *The Logic of Political Survival* won the Best Book Award 2002-2003 from the *American Political Science Association* (Conflict Processes Section), and Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, though less reputed than Waltz or Wendt, is ranked among the most influential IR scholars.²⁰ As for the Hobbes index, it has not, to our knowledge, generate serious criticism.

This once again shows that no one really expects IR scholars to use the name of classical thinkers with respect to their work, especially when these names have become labels in the discipline, as it is the case with Hobbes. And this sure does not mean that IR scholars are incapable of taking the history of political thought seriously, nor that they really ignore these thinkers. The superficial use of their work is deliberate. The point is to adapt to the codes of the discipline.

As proof, Hedley Bull, the main representative of the English school, in his major book *The Anarchical Society*,²¹ makes superficial use of classical thinkers. Inspired by Martin Wight's distinction between the various traditions within the history of political thought, Bull refers to Hobbes as a figure of realism through the idea of the state of war, to Kant as a figure of universalism advocating a human community, and to Grotius as a *via media* between the two, conveying the idea of an international society, a notion that he eventually accepts as relevant. Bull seems to be aware of the fact that he is oversimplifying these authors' thinking. But he relegates nuances to footnotes, or to other works, of a different nature, like with his article *Hobbes and International Anarchy*, in which he seriously analyzes the Englishman's thought, and does so through the perspective of the civil war, and in light of his other writings.²² As for Stanley Hoffmann, who is a very bright and knowledgeable scholar, author of a profound analysis of Rousseau in 1963²³, he adapts his vocabulary when it comes to inter-paradigmatic debate in IR, and use the codes that go with it. This is how he writes, in his preface of *The Anarchical Society* that "Bull's work was too 'Grotian' for the Machiavellians and the Hobbesians, too statist for the Kantians and the cosmopolitans."²⁴

Now, if Hobbes is closely associated with the idea of the state of war, and Kant with the one of state of peace, not all classical thinkers' name have such stable use. Thucydides, for example, if commonly linked to realism, is more generally associated with the whole discipline of IR. And if Hobbes can be countered by Rousseau or Kant, Thucydides can hardly be countered at

¹⁹ Bruce BUENO DE MESQUITA, James D. MORROW, Randolph M. SIVERSON et Alastair SMITH. *The Logic of Political Survival*. Cambridge : MIT Press, 2003.

²⁰ According to the 2011 TRIP Survey, Wendt is most influential IR scholar of the past twenty years, Waltz the third, and Bueno de Mesquita the eleventh.

²¹ Hedley BULL. *The Anarchical Society. A Study of Order in World Politics*. 4th Ed, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012 [1977].

²² "Hobbes and International Anarchy". *Social Research*, 48 (4), 1981, p. 717-738.

²³ Stanley HOFFMANN. "Rousseau on War and Peace", *American Political Science Review*, 57 (2), 1963, p. 317-333. The same can be said for Kenneth Waltz' article on Kant: "Kant, Liberalism, and War", *American Political Science Review*, 56 (2), 1962, p. 331-340.

²⁴ Foreword to the Second Edition of Hedley BULL. *The Anarchical Society*, *op. cit.*, p. xxix.

all. Therefore, as with Carl von Clausewitz regarding war, it will be very valuable to have Thucydides on your side, no matter what your theoretical position really is.

Also, not all the names of political thinkers have become labels. Do Hobbes, Locke and Kant have catchier names than Aristotle, Spinoza and Tocqueville. Is that because they are likely to fit in one syllabus and can easily be made into an adjective that they have become labels? Linguistic morphology aside, authors whose names have become labels have the specificity of appearing in the famous classifications of political thinkers that are commonly made in IR, Martin Wight's being probably the most notorious.²⁵ Now, one could also argue that referring to classical thinkers this way may sound like a dubious practice. Do such traditions of thought really exist, and are they relevant for international relations? Or are they *a posteriori* made up by contemporary authors, who bring together, with a lack of rigor, different thinkers, without taking into account their whole work, the historical context, and the thinker's original purpose? Does it make sense to isolate an element from a powerful thought, and to reduce one author to this element? Not every classification will combine all these characters, but the traditions used in IR can still be highly criticized.²⁶ If this practice may have pedagogical values for IR students, it has probably contributed, on the other hand, to the making of labels out of political thinker's names.

Now, should it be concluded that using the name of classical thinkers as a label is necessarily wrong? Admittedly, it does not make much sense in terms of history of political thought. But what about explaining world politics?

By reducing classical authors to an insignificant element of their thought, many IR scholars are no longer able to benefit from these great thinkers' lights, and gain no explanatory power from their work in order to explain phenomenon in world politics.

But on the other hand, by using their names as a label, not only do they make their own work look good, but they also communicate efficiently with others. These names have become part of the discipline vocabulary. The meaning of these terms is identified, and it brings practical advantages to use them this way. One of them is that it helps IR students have benchmarks in the field of IR, especially regarding the various theories that have been developed. In any case, if these labels are now part of discipline codes, not teaching them could leave the students clueless when reading mainstream IR literature. This is all the more true that these codes have been deeply integrated within the discipline, and that a way back seems therefore highly unlikely at this stage.²⁷

If one does not have the intention to do history of political thought, and if using classical thinkers' name is helpful to convey an idea, then why not doing it?

²⁵ Martin WIGHT. "The Three Traditions of International Theory", in Gabriel Wight and Brian PORTER *International Theory: The Three Traditions*, Leicester : Leicester University Press, 1991, p. 7-24.

²⁶ David BOUCHER. *Political Theories of International Relations*, *op. cit.*, Duncan BELL, « International relations: the dawn of a historiographical turn? », *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 3 (1), 2001, p. 115-126; Brian SCHMIDT. *The Political Discourse of Anarchy: A Disciplinary History of International Relations*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998.

²⁷ It does not mean that one cannot do history of political thought and IR, but rather that the terms that have already become labels, such as « Hobbesian » or « Kantian » have now their own meaning, and that it will be hard to use them differently.

One immediate problem is that others may want to do it. Now using labels is confusing, and prevent students and scholars alike from properly referring to classical thinkers. This is why, I think, by making clear that these codes exist independently from the classical authors whose names they are derived from, one is potentially able to draw a clear line between the two positions, and become aware of the possibilities to do history of political thought. My point here was then less to criticize the practice of labelling one's work with the name of classical thinker (even though it could be), than to identify it, and show what its inherent logic consists in. Therefore, confusions may be more likely to be avoided, and one could know better what to expect when undertaking the serious study of political thinkers in IR.