CALL FOR PAPERS

Feminist International Relations and the ‘Science Question’:
Positivism, Post-positivism, and Beyond

One-day workshop (20th October, 2018) at the London School of Economics and Political Science.

KEYNOTE: Alison Assiter (Professor of Feminist Theory, University of the West of England)

The ascent of feminist approaches since the mid-1980s has resulted in a significant challenge to the character of the International Relations (IR) discipline. Arising out of the work of countless generations of feminist activists and campaigners, the force and vitality of these approaches became apparent especially during the third ‘Great Debate’ of IR. The debate, that is, between positivist and post-positivist approaches. By siding largely with the latter of these two camps, feminist IR scholars were able to challenge the very foundations of mainstream (‘malestream’) approaches to IR. As opposed to positivism, characterised above all in terms of its ‘masculinist’/‘androcentric’ emphasis on science, feminist scholars systematically argued that the methods and epistemological perspectives which they favour (1) facilitated greater recognition of the ubiquitous analytical significance of sex/gender, and (2) provided a superior basis for explicitly normative concerns like dismantling sex/gender-based hierarchies and forms of discrimination.

By challenging the androcentrism/masculinism of positivist philosophy in these ways post-positivist feminist scholars have significantly enriched numerous discussions within IR. Indeed, the analytical and normative contributions of these scholars have spilled over beyond the ‘ivory tower’ as well, resulting in meaningful contributions to the thinking and conduct of myriad non-profit/governmental organisations, activist groups, think-tanks, and formal political institutions.

By adopting a post-positivist strategy, however, feminist IR scholars have also tended to trade on a conflation of science with its theorisation by positivist thought. For instance, these scholars have commonly assumed that emblematic scientific practices (e.g. experimentation) are adequately theorised by positivism. More generally, they have largely failed to engage with alternative understandings of science, such as those that are provided by anti-positivist approaches like pragmatism, critical realism, and the new materialisms. Importantly, this state of affairs fails to do justice to the work of feminist scholars outside of IR. While some of these scholars have certainly subscribed to positions that are hostile/sceptical towards science – thereby adopting a viewpoint that was already apparent in Virginia Woolf’s famous claim that ‘science [...] is not sexless’ but ‘a man, a father and infected too’ – other feminists have expressed significant enthusiasm with regard to its achievements and emancipatory potential.

This workshop therefore aims to (1) bring together scholars with an interest and expertise in the philosophy of (social) science and/or feminist IR, (2) explore the present-day relationship between (social) science and feminist IR, (3) reflect on the future of this relationship, and (4) stimulate the creation of a research community that explores this relationship.
Specifically, this call for papers invites abstract submissions that explore such questions as:

- Is positivist IR androcentric/masculinist or have feminist IR scholars portrayed its philosophical and methodological orientation in inaccurate/misleading ways?
- Is science only superficially or inadvertently androcentric/masculinist or does it inescapably silence and delegitimise feminist forms of knowing/knowledge-production?
- How should feminist IR scholars relate to the knowledge-claims of natural scientists?
- Should (evolutionary) biology play any role in our understandings of sex/gender-dynamics?
- Is the philosophical orientation that has been adopted by feminist IR scholars genuinely post-positivist or does it inadvertently reproduce (or invert) a number of positivist positions?
- Does the adoption of a feminist orientation towards IR mean that we should abandon rationality, rigour, neutrality, objectivity, etc. wholesale, just because these notions are conventionally associated with positivist philosophy of (social) science? Or is this akin to throwing out the proverbial baby with the bathwater?
- Are the methodological and epistemological stances that are favoured by feminist scholars exclusively feminist or are they simply more suitable for their particular purposes (i.e. do they have broader applications as well)?
- Do efforts to re-theorise/reclaim science by pragmatist, critical realist, new materialist, and other anti-positivist approaches hold any promise for grounding future forms of feminist IR?
- Can broader feminist theorisations of science improve/re-vitalise discussions within feminist IR? What intellectual resources do these theorisations provide?
- To what extent are positivist and post-/-anti-positivist philosophical approaches capable of providing a basis for the normative aims of feminism? What kind of politics do these philosophical approaches suggest/imply?
- Is feminism/feminist IR a political project, a scientific project, or neither/both?

Potential contributors should submit a 250-word abstract to irss.group@bisa.ac.uk by the 30th of June, 2018. Notifications of acceptance/rejection will be sent out by the 14th of July. This workshop is sponsored by the ‘International Relations as a Social Science’ (IRSS) Working Group of the British International Studies Association (BISA). Travel costs may therefore be covered. Priority in this regard will be given to graduate students and early career researchers. Please specify whether or not you are applying for funding when submitting your abstract.

**Workshop Organiser:**
Dr Michiel van Ingen is a Guest Teacher at the London School of Economics and Political Sciences (LSE). His research draws on, and sits at the intersection of, a range of disciplines, including International Relations, conflict studies, the philosophy/methodology of science, (critical/global) political economy, development studies, and anthropology. The three main thematic areas with which his publications have engaged thus far are (1) violence (the study of civil war in particular), (2) the philosophy/methodology of science (critical realism and the new materialisms in particular), and (3) feminism and gender-studies.

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