

International relations : a distinct discipline. assignment



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The question of whether International Relations is a distinct discipline has been a matter of consistent controversy. However, any field of study needs to fulfill certain criteria in order to be classified as a distinct academic discipline. Accordingly, I believe, that International Relations is indeed a 'Distinct Discipline' since it has many characteristics of a distinct academic discipline. International Relations can be interpreted by some to be 'actual relations between states' but in the academic field of International Relations, we give it a somewhat different definition.

Whilst there has never been a precise definition regarding the discipline of International Relations it can be broadly defined as ??? " A branch of social sciences dealing with policies, developments and interactions, the effects of which cross national boundaries and affect the lives of people in different countries and in several parts of the world. " Though IR as an academic discipline is of recent origin, relations among nations is a phenomena that is as old as history itself. Scholars often trace the origin of International Relations back to 1648.

This is due to the fact that although actual relations between states had taken place since the ancient civilizations such as Egypt, Greece, Rome -they were incidental, sporadic and limited in nature. But by the Westphalia Treaty of 1648 International relations assumed a new character. It was from this treaty that the concepts of " territorial sovereignty" and " independent nation state" were born. But it isn't until the period after World War I in the 1920's that International Relations developed as a " distinct discipline".

The industrial revolution in the 19th century, brought with it new thought, technology, communication, transportation. Trade, transit and transactions had become the order of the day. All these developments had made international relations more systematic, regular and comprehensive. The trauma of the First World War made people demand a better understanding of foreign relations; War and peace came to the forefront; all these developments drew peoples' attention to the growing importance of international relations as an academic discipline.

In order to explore if International Relations is indeed a 'distinct discipline', we need to first understand what is meant by a distinct discipline or academic discipline. Some scholars consider a distinct discipline to be a separate field or study wholly distinct from any other field or study. If this is the case, then International relations cannot be considered a 'distinct discipline' because it is a well known fact that International Relations is not a subject that can be learnt, taught or studied by itself. It is closely linked to many other fields and subjects such as Political Science, History, Sociology, Law, Economics, etc.

At least some basic knowledge of these fields is essential if you hope to grasp the multi-dimensional nature of international-relationships, and therefore International Relations can be classified as an "inter-disciplinary" subject. But on the other hand, if by the words 'distinct discipline' is meant a disciplined study of a particular field, with a recognizable focus of interest and body of theory, then International Relations is, and always has been a 'distinct discipline', a discipline that has tended to evolve with the times.

According to the Webster Online Dictionary an academic discipline is, " A branch of knowledge that is formally taught, either at the university, or via some other such method. Therefore International Relations would fall into the category of a distinct academic discipline as it has evolved into being a field of study which is formally taught in many Universities and professional institutions. " " International Relations is a subject which began to be studied formally after World War I (1919) but since then, it has grown much both in terms of the number of scholars involved and in the literature that has been produced regarding it. ??? Trevor Taylor. This discipline is so new that it can be called the youngest of all social sciences. " (V. K. Malhotra, 2002) After the 1st World war, the systematic study of international relations was initiated by the North Americans and the West Europeans. The first chair of International Politics was founded in 1919 in the University College of Wales (U. K.). Several prominent historians like Alfred Zimmern, E. H. Carr, C. K. Webster were early occupants of this chair. This is considered to be the seed of International Relations as a distinct discipline. There has never been a precise agreement amongst scholars regarding the definition of the discipline of International Relations. Scholars have emphasized different aspects of the discipline in each of their definitions of IR as a discipline. Here are some scholarly definitions regarding IR as a distinct discipline: ??? Holsti believed that IR is " A study of the International system ??? a collection of independent political entities interacting with considerable frequency according to some more or less regularized processes. ??? Thompson stated that IR was " The study of rivalry among nations and the conditions and institutions which ameliorate or exacerbate these relationships. " ??? Quincy Wright once said that " It is not only the nations which International

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Relations seek to regulate. Varied types of groups ??? nations, states, governments, people, regions, alliances, confederations, international organizations, even industrial organizations, cultural organizations, and religious organizations must be dealt with in the study of IR, if the treatment is to be realistic. ??? Rosenau mentioned that “ The outstanding feature of IR is the decentralized milieu (location) in which they take place. ” Even though there is no one precise definition of the discipline of IR, it can be concluded that IR deals with policies and actions of states, their representatives as well as non-state actors too. These policies and actions extend beyond national boundaries and are largely political but are also concerned with social relations as well.

International Relations as a field of study, has a long history of growth and development. This is yet another important factor in proving that it has indeed developed into becoming a distinct academic discipline. Between 1900-1939, the study of International Relations was gradually progressing and as an academic discipline it received a wider recognition during the inter-war period (1919-1939). Its development was further aided by the many universities, research bodies, and organizations that showed a great interest in IR at the time.

The League of Nations also had a considerable role to play in the development of IR as a distinct discipline, as it encouraged the study by its work as a forum for international discussions and by sponsoring many International Conferences. After the 2nd World War, the concept of war had once again rocked the entire world with the multitude of death and destruction it brought with it and this underlined the compelling need to <https://assignbuster.com/international-relations-a-distinct-discipline-assignment/>

improve the techniques of inter-state relations for the survival of the human race.

After its birth in first half of the 20th century, IR, attained adulthood in the post-second world war era passing through several stages. This development can be divided into a few phases such as the Prenatal, Organizational, Cold War and Scientific Phases. Kenneth Thompson has summed up the development of IR as a discipline in the following stages. 1. The first stage ??? up to the end of the World war I (1919) IR was taught by diplomatic historians who were more interested in history than in politics, their main concern was the description of past events rather than the analysis of present ones. . The second stage starting after the end of World War I stressed only on the study of current affairs. This was a reaction to the excessive concentration on the past done during the first stage. 3. The third stage ??? was during the inter-war years (1919-1939) also known as the 20 year crisis period. Scholars during this time tended to take a more moralistic and legalistic approach towards studying IR. More emphasis was laid on the importance of international Law and International Organizations. Especially the League of Nations which was formed during this time, with the ope of narrowing nationalism by internationalism. The Idealist approach became popular during this time. 4. The fourth stage ??? was the period following the World War II (1945) During this era people had lost faith in the power and authority of international organizations and international law as a tool of maintaining peace; because of the failure of the League of Nations (its failure to prevent yet another world war). Therefore the emphasis of this period

shifted towards a scientific analysis of the developments of international politics.

Scientific studies were conducted on what causes war, how to avoid war, what influences the behavior of states, etc. Kenneth. W. Thompson had formulated these four stages in the 1952 whereas so many new things have happened in the world since then and the study of IR has accordingly taken several new forms and contents. Therefore the following stages maybe added to understand the development of IR as a distinct discipline up-to-date. 5. The fifth stage could be described as cold war phase (1945-1989) There was no complete war or peace during this time; hence it was described as the Cold war period.

One of the main characteristics of this era was the intense rivalry between USA and USSR by way of bloc politics. What was most essential during this time was a Balance of Power. In the 1950's and 1960's the Realist approach became the popular approach in IR, they believed that Politics is nothing but a struggle for power. Marxism also raised its head during this time. From the mid 1960's to the 1970's The Behavioural Approach became popular. During the era of " Detente" in the 1970's another approach known as Post-Behaviouralism was adopted. By the mid-1980's Realism had once again emerged in the form of Neo-Realism. . The sixth stage is the post-cold war era which scholars used to try and establish what the cold war was all about, why it took place and what it was aimed at and what it ultimately achieved. International Relations consist of many characteristics of a distinct discipline, which are common to all social sciences. It has a distinct field of study, area of focus, separate subject matter, analytical methods, key elements, unique <https://assignbuster.com/international-relations-a-distinct-discipline-assignment/>

approaches, theories and concepts, and its own vocabulary which sets it apart from being a simple study and proves its distinctive disciplinary nature.

On the road to becoming a distinct discipline, any social science tends to create and adopt its own theories, approaches, and concepts in order to explain certain phenomena found within the field and outside as well. This is often referred to as a social science's particular "way of seeing" the world. Similarly IR too was recognized as a distinct discipline once it adopted its own way of seeing the world. Thus IR has its own theories, approaches and concepts. International Relations has its own theories. During the early stages of the discipline it did not have its own theory or theories.

However after IR became a systematic and distinct discipline in the early 20th century the gradual process of IR theory formulation was underway. The word 'theory' is derived from the Greek word "Theoria". A theory can be simply defined as "A systematically organized knowledge applicable in a relatively wide variety of circumstances especially a system of assumptions, accepted principles and rules of procedure derived to analyze, predict or otherwise explain the nature or behaviour of a specified set of phenomena".

Like any other theory the IR theory too, is abstract and is a generalization. According to Stanley Hoffman the theory of IR is - "a systematic study of observable phenomena trying to discover the principle variables to reveal the characteristic types of relations among national units." And Quincy Wright a prominent scholar believes that "they are a comprehensive, comprehensible, coherent and self-correcting body of knowledge, which

predicts and evaluates the relations among states and the conditions of the world. “

IR has a variety of approaches or proto-theories, which are used in order to explain particular phenomena within the discipline of IR. The approaches can be classified as the Idealist approach, Realist approach, Behavioural approach, Post-Behavioural approach, Neo-Realism approach and others.

Political Idealism is an approach that emerged in the 1920's after the end of the 1st world war. It was based on an Utopian concept of ' what should be, rather than what is' and it was positive, optimistic and legalistic in nature.

Political idealism's philosophical basis was that ' man is good by nature. ' Idealists believed that man is made aggressive by weak institutions and that progress in the international system can only be achieved through peace. It was based on this idealism that the League of Nations was formulated in 1920 hoping to bring lasting peace to the world through such an institution. But this concept of political idealism was clearly unsuccessful as it didn't not achieve its primary purpose because before long the World War II took place.

Among some famous idealists are U. S. President Woodrow Wilson, Hugo Grotius, Emmanuel Kant and Rousseau. After the World War II people lost faith in the political idealist approach and a new approach emerged in IR known as Political Realism. The basic assumption of realists was that ' man is evil by nature' and ' the state works only to secure power'. Realism focuses on the actual situation at hand rather than the idealist utopian outlook. Hans. J. Morgenthau once said : “ All politics is a struggle for power”. Some of the pioneers of political realism were E.

H. Carr, Hans. J. Morgenthau, Kenneth. W. Thompson, Henry Kissinger. “ The twenty years crisis” written By E. H. Carr conveyed the essence of Political Realism. In the mid 1960’s and 1970’s another approach of IR could be identified as the Behavioural approach. This was the post-realist paradigm which concentrated on scientific analysis of the developments and phenomena of IR. Behaviourism in IR was a larger movement spreading across the social sciences known as the scientific approach or quantitative methodology for analyzing IR.

Behaviourists sought greater precision of analysis and tried to replace subjective belief with verifiable knowledge. This trend was pioneered by Charles Merriem and later followed by Robert Dahl, George Caitlin and others. But formulating verifiable knowledge is an extremely difficult task thus towards the end of the 20th century the field of IR moved towards approaches such as Post-Behaviourism and Neo-Realism because they were dissatisfied with the Behavioural approach as they felt it was ‘ too scientific’ and thus it undermined the substance of politics.

Apart from the various theories and approaches in the discipline of IR, International relations also talks about many concepts such as the state, nation-state, power, national interest, national security, war, peace, balance of power etc. all of these theories, approaches and concepts have helped towards shaping the field of IR into a distinct discipline of IR today. There have also been many books that have been written regarding the discipline of International Relations which further contributed towards IR becoming a distinct discipline. An introduction to the study of IR”, jointly written by Grant, Hughes, Greenwood, Kerr and Ugruhart published in 1916 (Britain), “ <https://assignbuster.com/international-relations-a-distinct-discipline-assignment/>

the history and nature of IR” edited by E. A. Walsh in 1922 (New York) and Professor Buell the Research Director of the Foreign Policy Association of USA wrote a lengthy text called “ International Relations” in 1925, these are some of the books written early on in the field of IR which have helped in the growth and development of IR as a distinct discipline. CONCLUSION The origin, growth and development of the subject of IR can be traced back to the beginning of the 20th century.

It is therefore a comparatively new discipline. During this short time the subject has passed through different phases and stages. Every phase is marked by its own perspective and approach. IR has evolved into a distinct discipline with time. IR is interdisciplinary and thus is closely related to many other fields of study. It developed from idealism to realism, from realism to Behaviourism, scienticism, neo-liberalism radicalism, neo-realism and so on. IR also has many characteristics common to social sciences which are essential in order to be considered a distinct discipline.

Such as a distinct field of study and area of focus, specific subject matter, and analytical methods. IR has also developed its own theories, approaches, concepts which further prove that it has indeed grown to become a distinct discipline. Furthermore IR has its own vocabulary consisting of specific words and terms that hold specific meaning within the field of IR, which is also another characteristic of a distinct discipline. Today IR has grown into being a highly skilled specialized field which is taught in a number of prestigious Universities and academic institutions globally.

Many scholars and theorists have worked tirelessly in order to create comprehensive definitions regarding the discipline and to write books such as Morgenthau's ' Politics among nations : struggle for power and peace'' which is only an example of the many great works this distinct discipline of IR has produced. In conclusion after careful consideration of facts, I would like to state that, IR has undoubtedly developed itself from being a branch of subjects such as political science, history and law to being an autonomous distinct discipline today. REFERENCES 1.

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