

The Prospect of Processing a Religious Theory in the International Relations

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Abstract

In recent decades, the presence and the role of religion in the public sphere of societies and at large in the international environment have become so evident that the abolishment of former beliefs about the inevitable decline of religion and the causal relationship between modernity and secularization have been substantiated. Therefore, today, the debate over whether religion and religious actors can be influential at various political levels seems to be over and unnecessary. Rather, the discussions of experts are now focused on the question of 'How religion should be treated and interpreted. Is religion in international relations objects that can be examined and explained by various IR theories, or can religion itself act as a subject and provide an independent perspective and worldview in the form of a scientific theory for understanding and interpreting the world?' There are two views that will be discussed in this article. Some believe that it is possible to address religion in the form of existing IR theories, and others argue for the need to process independent theories by emphasizing the inadequacy of existing theories when referring to religion. While accepting the second view, this paper proposes that in the current state of IR discipline and given the inherent failure of existing theories of this knowledge to understand and interpret the behavior of religious actors caused by fundamental meta-theoretical differences, it is completely possible to develop a religious theory that can provide researchers with an independent perspective and worldview. This hypothesis, if proven, would underpin the formation of the religious theory of International Relations.

Keywords: Resurgence of Religion, Post-Secularism, Theory, Religious Theory.

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Introduction

Until recently, the "Secular" knowledge of International Relations was not capable of accepting religion in the field of scientific studies and was resisting the recognition of the role and influence of religion and religious actors in the public sphere of societies and, on large scale, in the evolution of the world system. The depth of the deposition of the "Secularism Dogma" in the minds of Western scholars in the field of International Relations was so great that even events such as the Islamic Revolution of Iran were not enough to force them to reconsider their old assumptions. Eventually, however, reality overcame theory, and the event of September 11, 2001, was a wake-up call which opened the eyes of IR theories to the power of religious actors and influencing the religious ideas that shape their behaviors. Since then, the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, the role of Islamic jihadist groups, and the activism of religious organizations in various societies have also led scholars to talk more on the global resurgence of religion, return of religion from exile, and the beginning of the so-called post-secularization (Mavelli and Petito, 2014; Wilson, 2012).

In the post-secularization era, the pervasive past notion that religion has no place in the public sphere and that with the modernization of societies and separation from traditions, religion will inevitably become deteriorated, is not justifiable and acceptable, and myriad of reliable and scholarly books and articles have confirmed the fact that religion is an influential factor driving international changes and developments (Fox, 2008; Fitzgerald, 2011).

Thus, principally, the presence and influence of religion cannot be doubted, and it seems that trying to prove it is no longer necessary. Rather, the focus of the today's debate is on how to deal with the issue of religion in relation to the knowledge of International Relations. Is religion merely a matter of recognition that a wide range of IR theories, whether mainstream or reflectivity theories, 'Can each put into their analytical framework and examine its dimensions from their own perspectives?' Or can it act as a subject that independently presents a worldview and a theory for understanding and interpreting the world from a new perspective?' (Sandal and Fox, 2013).

So far, the first assumption has been more widely considered, and analysts have attempted to examine the influential role of religion and religious actors as independent or dependent variables in world politics from the perspective of existing IR theories. However, these analysts themselves sometimes confess to the failure of International Relations knowledge to theorize about religion (Kubalkova, 2003; Thomas, 2005).

Because the fundamental ontological and epistemological differences and the tendency of materialist and idealist theorists to assume secularization have hindered their true understanding and interpretation of the meanings behind the behavior of religious actors and how he views world system phenomena. Therefore, it can be said that the existing IR theories are flawed in having a complete understanding of religion, for this requires the merging of the material with the spiritual and metaphysical, and of course this does not fit within their theoretical and meta-theoretical frameworks.

Accordingly, this paper claims that in the current state of IR, religion can and should be regarded as a subject as well as an object. To understand the meaning of the behaviors of religious actors whose influence and role in different levels of world politics today cannot be denied requires understanding the worldviews, ideas, and systems of meanings and thoughts that govern their minds; and to do so, developing of a religious theory of International Relations based on independent meta-theoretical foundations, including epistemology, ontology, and methodology is inevitable. Otherwise, we will witness the continuity of inefficient theories in understanding religion and in correctly predicting and analyzing political events with religious themes such as the Islamic Revolution of Iran, and analysts will still find these events "Exceptional" and "Pre-modern" and the behavior of religious actors will also be called "Irrational." Consequently, it seems that substantiating the assumption of religion as a recognized subject, which is the concern of this article, could pave the way for the establishment of a new theory called "Religious Theory of International Relations."

Regarding the role of religion in international relations and world politics, many books and articles have been written and published during past years which can be classified into three categories. Some books focus on the relationships between religion and politics in the public sphere and try to investigate and evaluate religion's impacts on political life, among them are *Religion and Politics in the International System Today* (Hanson, 2006) or *Global Rebellion: Religious Challenges to the Secular State, from Christian Militias to al-Qaeda* (Juergensmeyer, 2008). Some other books try to integrate religion into IR discipline and study it as an object from the viewpoint of the existing IR theories, among them are *Religion in International Relations Theory: Interactions and possibilities* (Sandal and Fox, 2013) and *Bringing Religion into International Relations* (Fox and Sandler, 2004). There are other books which take the religion's capacity for theory building into account and regard it as a subject in IR discipline. The best

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examples are *The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Relations* (Thomas, 2005) and *Religion in International Relations* (Hatzopoulos and Petito, 2003).

In this paper, the author tries to utilize all of such books and draw inspiration from them in order to present his hypothesis.

The present study uses a descriptive-analytical method. Descriptive analytics is the process of using current and historical data to identify trends and relationships. It's sometimes called the simplest form of data analysis because it describes trends and relationships but doesn't dig deeper (Cote, 2021) so it can be a suitable method for investigating current trends of religion studies in the world. It is written in three sections: The first section is about the resurgence of religion in world politics and its impact on IR discipline; the second section discusses the role of religion as a recognized subject and proves its necessity, and section three examines the evolution of the concept of theory in IR and answers the question of when and by considering what conception of theory will the production of a religious theory be possible.

1- The Resurgence of Religion and the Response of IR

Since the end of religious wars in Europe and the establishment of the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 that laid the foundation of modern international relations on the principle of secularization, the political, social, and cultural effects of religion in the public sphere of Western societies was so diminished that scholars reported its inevitable deterioration or at least its restriction to the private sphere. Contrary to what was predicted, however, the end of the twentieth century saw the return of religion to the context of developments.

During this time, events such as the Islamic Revolution of Iran, the Arab-Israeli conflict, the emergence of Islamic fundamentalism, the Soviet defeat in Afghanistan, Balkan crisis, genocide of Bosnian Muslims by Serbs in Europe, Kashmir crisis between India and Pakistan, horrific bombings of 11th of September by Al-Qaeda, empowerment of Christian Zionism in America, and the role of militant guerrilla groups such as Hamas, Hezbollah and ISIL in the Middle East have finally convinced political analysts to consider religion as an influential element in international developments, especially in global south. This influence intensified, especially after the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the bipolar system, so that the global influences of Islam and Christianity and the national influence of all religions have increased dramatically (Hanson, 2006: 6, 42).

Subsequently, the "Secular" nature of world politics has been deeply questioned and the process of privatization of religion has been

reversed, with sections of the public sphere ranging from politics and economics to culture have been becoming normatized again. Observing the persistence of religious beliefs, even in Western secular societies, has therefore made it clear to international observers that religion cannot be removed from the world.

Moreover, with considering the role that religious actors play at various levels, it must be acknowledged that the Western world is in the era of "Post-secularization", and that religion experiences a return to the context of events again. Consequently, contrary to the requirements of the Westphalian logic of the international system being marginalizing religion and disengaging it from social and political affairs, the course of events of the last decades of the world clearly shows that not only the capacity of religious actors has been strengthened, but we are also witnessing a type of challenging behavior from them against the existing dominant system (Shah and Philpot, 2011: 34).

There are, generally, three types of large-scale religious change in the late twentieth century that have had profound political consequences: First, the global decline of atheism and state-sponsored religious suppression or governmental secularization especially seen in Soviet-dominated societies, which had destabilizing effects on the internal order of many of these societies and was considered as one of the major causes of the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe; then, the dramatic increase in the number of Muslims and Christians, who now make up about half of the world's population, have led most governments to express their identities based on these two religions; finally, the global increase in religious diversity as a result of the growth of individualism around the world, the growth of the global flow of information, and the movement of people on a larger scale.

All in all, attention to religious identities by governments, the deterioration of the governments sponsoring atheism, and the decline of governmental secularization, all suggest that religion will play a more prominent role in world politics and perhaps in international systems in the near future (Dark, 2000: 60-69, 74).

2- Responses of Theories to the Reality of the Presence of Religion

Observing the field events and the emergence and role-playing of religious movements, especially Islamic ones, in world politics over the past years has been a wake-up call for theorists of International Relations because after decades of continued neglect and ignorance, they have attended to these movements and the conceptual influence of religion in the development and definition of their goals, aspirations, and identities. Therefore, there is a growing understanding of the role

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of religion in world politics as well as the active capacity of religious leaders such as the Pope, Khomeini, or the Dalai Lama among intellectuals, and it can be said that developments in the practical field of international relations have inevitably influenced the theoretical arena and have made it to react (Sandal and Fox, 2013: 1).

As a result, since the 1980s, political scientists have reevaluated theories of religion and ethnicity, and sociologists such as Jürgen Habermas (2006) or Peter Berger (1999) also questioned the validity of secularization theory, taking a more serious approach to the discussion of post-secularization. There has been a growing belief among scholars that no understanding of international relations will be complete without considering the role of religion, and it is therefore no longer possible to deny people's tendency to religion and its influence on the social institutions and behaviors of religious people. As such, the return of religion to the field of politics within societies as well as at the global level has led to the inclusion of religion in books written on world politics and to the emergence of theoretical and empirical topics on the status of religion.

Different IR scholars have reacted differently to the return of religion. For some, the return and resurgence of religion means bringing religious actors, traditions and institutions into the study of International Relations; others see it as involving leaders and religious communities in the process of managing and resolving crisis. Even some others see religion as a variable that can explain international consequences, such as the frequency and duration of violent conflicts. All of these approaches seek to bring religion to its proper place in the theory and practice of international relations (Shakman Hurd, 2012: 944).

Today, this consensus among IR scholars that religion should be on the sidelines of studies and that governments should treat it as an internal affair have been questioned for two reasons: First, religion relates to international relations when its dangerous forms can be taken out of the state's control and do effective measures that confronting them requires the collective action of governments to overcome religious intolerance. Second, religion is concerned with international relations when it can be used to promote common good at the international level in the form of humanitarian projects or human rights campaigns.

The underlying assumption is that if religious moderates are understood, empowered and involved in international relations and mutually religious fundamentalists are identified and removed, then the problems posed by religion will decline and religious freedom will

expand throughout the world. Better understanding of religion will help academics and international relations practitioners better understand the effects of religion and be able to reconcile religious attitudes with efforts to resolve international relations problems and engage official representatives of religion in international policy-making institutions and processes. Naturally, if religious activists and practices are properly incorporated into the theory and practice of international relations, the problems associated with religion will be resolved and its capacity to help improving the world will emerge (Shakman Hurd, 2012: 944-945, 947).

Overall, various studies have shown that religion has regained its public influence in the field of world politics, and its influence may be increased in the light of religious diversity in the world. This fact has resulted in some sort of retreat by classical secular theorists from their absolutist claims. So that an important paradigm shift is now taking place in the social sciences: A shift from a dominant theory that claimed religion was irrelevant or at least so unimportant that it could be ignored, to a situation where no prominent scientist and social science researcher disagrees with the principle that religion is an important economic, political, and social force and that it deserves scientific study (Fox, 2013: 27).

3- Necessity of Processing the Religious Theory of International Relations

There are no doubt that idea, beliefs, cognitive systems, worldviews, and generally what people consider right or wrong, deeply direct their behaviors and decisions. Heavenly religions have long been one of the most important sources of these ideas and beliefs in human societies. Religion often forms part of people's worldview, affecting their perception of what is happening around them in the world and even how they think. Religion Sociologists believe that all humans have worldviews, perspectives, frames of reference, value-laden orientations, and separate, coherence, and comprehensive systems of meaning which are usually based on religion. This meaning system is the framework that underpins people's interpretation and understanding of the world, and they use it to make sense of events, to organize experiences, and to have guidance and role models for their practice. Even today, in the modern and postmodern era, religion is the focal point of the value system of societies in many parts of the world, and these are the religious values that determine the conceptions of good and the bad for their followers and are often accepted as universal and absolute truth (Fox and Sandler, 2004: 57; Thomas, 2000: 1-2).

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This same key function of religion as a source of worldview lead it to enter the arena of politics and international relations because if decision-makers and policymakers define themselves as religious actors and their behavior be influenced by religious teachings, naturally, they will look at the arena of world politics from the perspective of religious worldviews, and therefore their foreign policy decisions will be influenced by religious considerations. There is also the assumption that the religious worldviews of citizens and nongovernmental groups that influence policymakers' decisions, options, and solutions have the potential to change the direction of the country's foreign policy. Consequently, as much as religion has an impact on the worldview of politicians, it also influences their decisions, and the ideas and insights inspired by their religions and policies can provide the basis for taking positions that lead to particular events at the international arena (Fox and Sandler, 2004, 163-164).

Consequently, by assuming these two clear points that firstly, religion and religious beliefs influence people's worldviews, actions, and decision-making processes, and secondly, all governments, organizations, and activist groups in world politics consist of individuals whose beliefs and ideas, including religious beliefs, influence the decisions and actions of their respective institutions, it then becomes clear that religion can be the cause of changes and events in world politics. Because it alter the values and perceptions of groups or people and directly shape the foreign policy that derives from religious beliefs. The decisive changes and developments in recent years happening in Africa, Eastern Europe and Asia have clearly shown that religious change may lead to large-scale political changes with important regional and global implications and consequences (Dark, 2000: ix, 50, 52).

To regard religion as a subject means to expect it to explain or interpret the events and developments of the world system and to predict future events in the form of an independent and established IR theory based on religious teachings. That is, when we consider on the basis of the mentioned arguments that religion shapes the worldviews of political actors, including individual, governmental, and non-governmental ones, then, to understand and interpret the behavior of these activists better, we must first see what conception of the universe, in general and in international relations, in particular, religion presents and on what order, logic, and pattern it bases the order of events in the system. Such an analysis can be contradictory or complementary to what is considered a competing scientific analysis of International Relations.

The important question that arises in this regard is ‘What is the necessity of establishing an independent religious theory, in spite of the diverse spectrum of existing theories of International Relations, in particular Critical Theory, normative theory and social constructivism?’ And ‘Can't religion be seen as an object in the context of these theories?’ In answering this question, there are two views among experts. Some believe that examining religion in International Relations does not necessarily entail disregarding current theories. We should only take into account the influence of religion on the political and social phenomena that we intend to explain only when we want to develop theories. That is, it is enough to select a theory of International Relations and try to incorporate religion into it as much as possible. But others believe that theorizing about religion is not possible in the secular context of International Relations and requires a paradigm shift and a radical revision of the existing theoretical and meta-theoretical assumptions (Sandal and Fox, 2013: 4-5).

While accepting the second view, the authors strongly believe that theories of International Relations, whether classical or post-positivist ones, are not capable of developing a deep understanding of religion and a correct interpretation of the behavior of religious actors because of inherent meta-theoretical differences. Classical theories, since they are confined to the frameworks of positivism, materialism, and state-centrism, cannot fundamentally theorize about religion in terms of its spiritual and metaphysical natures, and therefore, religion is seen as being marginal and irrelevant to world politics. In general, these theories only consider material phenomena and do not value non-material ones.

Thus given the current state of International Relations, it seems necessary to agree with Scott Thomas (Thomas, 2005: 73-75) that to bring religion into the arena of scientific studies we need more than to adapt it to existing concepts and paradigms. Rather, our view of what IR theory is and how it works needs to be revised if we want to achieve a better understanding of the impact of religion on international relations.

The role of religion cannot be explained through existing approaches and theories, because in this condition then Western intellectuals and politicians will be surprised by the occurrence of events such as those in the Middle East and the actions of leaders like Ayatollah Khomeini. These theories fail to understand and interpret religious phenomena, religious intentions behind the political behavior of individuals and religious groups, and belief in jihad, holy war against infidels, and eternal life in paradise, and the secret of educated

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European citizens joining al-Qaeda and ISIS. It can even be claimed that the failure of the major powers' intelligence services to identify activities that led to terrorist acts such as the bombings of 11th of September was the result of "Asymmetry of Beliefs." In other words, Western intelligence institutions could not properly understand the performance of religious groups because religious beliefs were not an understandable part of the conventional political understanding. As a result, Westerners are still struggling with how to examine religion in relation to political sciences and International Relations.

So it is not enough to acknowledge the resurgence of religion in international relations, and then study this phenomenon through the existing classifications in the theory of International Relations. The resurgence of religion refers to the "Return of the Repressed" or the return of something banned and exiled. The problem, however, is that we report the story of international relations only from the modernist perspective through using modern concepts, and our thinking structure about the international question is based on suppressing theological concepts and replacing them with non-religious ones.

The paradox of the relationship between religion and international politics is how to incorporate the study of religion into the essentially Westphalia and secular concept of international politics. In order to resolve this contradiction, it seems necessary to break the liberal monopoly when developing theories and free International Relations from self-made barriers (Hatzopoulos and Petite, 2003: 12-13, 18).

4- Theoretical Capabilities of Religion in International Relations

Given its undeniable role in guiding foreign policy orientations, intensifying or resolving international conflicts, and determining the values, norms, and identities of religious actors, religion seems to have a very high capacity for explaining and interpreting world politics. In this respect, the religious perspective can complement existing approaches and theories of International Relations, because religion provides us with a new tool to study the importance of non-material forces and non-governmental actors. In fact, religion consolidates a coherent system of meaning in which ideas are produced, interpreted, and substantiated in a different way, and the behavior of religious actors can become meaningful within this context.

Therefore, while Western IR scholars may not regard the metaphysical and immaterial perspective of religion as scientific, many members of religious communities view the world around them from the same perspective, and the correct interpretation of their behavior

makes the reference to the meaning system of religion inevitable even for secular knowledge of International Relations (Barnett, 2011: 156).

Consequently, the religious perspective, as a reaction to the reductionism caused by International Relations neglecting the recognition of large parts of existence, opens a new path for resolving the breakdowns of secular materialistic or even idealist approaches in order to enable people to understand the spiritual and immaterial dimensions of the world better. It means that in situations when human cognitive tools are not capable of discovering many of the mysteries of existence, the religious perspective seeks to provide a different meta-theoretical basis to complement modern Western social sciences whose one-sided approach to what, how, and purpose of cognition has been the subject of much criticism today.

Another dimension of the theoretical capacity of religion is that, unlike the purposeful propaganda of Western politics and the media for promoting Islam phobia and the false relationship between religious beliefs and terrorism, the religious perspective can instead effectively counteract the inhuman wars that emerge from state-centric and profit-oriented approaches to politics. So, humans are equal and are all considered to be spiritual beings that share the same spiritual values and have the same capacity for salvation and freedom. Therefore, refusal to engage in inhumane wars, fratricide, rape and ethnic cleansing are considered religious values. The religious perspective is capable of crossing political, cultural and ethnic boundaries and contributing to the formation of universal citizenship based on the equality of mankind (Runzo, 2007: 96-97).

In this regard, sociologists believe that the main function of religion and religious institutions is to ensure the social order and normative structure of human existence, prevent chaos in society, and guarantee that people's lives, with all their hardships and ease, have ultimate meaning and value. Religious teachings provide explanations for human suffering and promise their followers and believers eternal reward and happiness in the afterlife. In fact, these are promises that can be very effective in relieving of human societies and preventing war, violence and aggression in the world (Selengut, 2003: 8).

Therefore, instead of considering religion as an exceptional space in world politics and a unique force beyond reason, it seems better to regard it as one of the many areas through which the global political can be dealt with. For example, we must always understand Islam in relation to Muslims who express their beliefs and interpret the meaning of Islam in their life experiences. It is only through contextualizing religion in

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relation to the lived experience that one can find how and where religion intersects with politics (Mandaville, 2008: 119).

Consequently, both because of the theoretical capacities of religion referred to above and because of the problems of existing IR theories in understanding and explaining religion, it can be claimed that there is no other solution than to develop an independent religious theory with its own particular meta-theoretical foundations for a comprehensive understanding of the role of religious actors in world politics. Also, the absence of such a theory in IR discipline should not be regarded as its impossibility to be developed in the future, because the epistemology and theory of International Relations are not essentially secular. Rather, they have emerged because of their basis on principles of secular philosophy and realization in a secular cultural context.

Therefore, it is possible to develop a theory of non-secular International Relations outside this social-cultural and epistemological context by considering religious and Islamic presuppositions; because the absence of a religious IR theory does not imply its denial, rather it is because of the incompatibility of religion with the foundations and conceptual framework of the existing theoretical approaches in International Relations.

5- The Possibility of Processing the Religious Theory of International Relations

Certainly, the debate over what a theory is and what the criteria of a desirable theory in a field such as International Relations are has a strong relationship with meta-theoretical issues (Wendt, 1991: 383). In other words, this is an ontological and epistemological approach of a scholar which defines his/her position in relation to theory definition and how one theory is preferred over others.

Responding to the possibility or refusal of indigenous and non-Western theorizing outside the framework of the institutionalized rules and procedures of IR mainstream depends on determining our meta-theoretical approach in relation to the theory. In general, considering the meta-theoretical approaches, there are two competing conceptions of theory that we will discuss later.

5.1. The Positivist Conception of Theory

Based on this hard positivist approach that is the dominant American tradition in the field of International Relations, the theory includes the operational definition of terms, the explanation of the causal relations, and the testable hypotheses. The discovery of the relationship between variables should also be made through the analysis of observable data and information, and the ultimate goal of theory

should be to strive to enhance the capacity of human control over the environment and to solve problems in real life (Acharya and Buzan, 2010 AD/1390 SH: 3).

The mainstream approach regards the theory as a tool. That is to say, from this perspective, theory provides a framework for understanding the real world and a model for describing its events. Believers, on the one hand, emphasize the distinction between theory and the real world, and view the world as completely ontologically independent of the mind while the only responsibility of the theory is to discover the facts contained within it. On the other hand, believers adhere to the tradition of Enlightenment rationality and consider the most appropriate theory to be the one that enables rational judgment among competing claims (Zalewski, 2006: 341-344).

Based on this narrow definition of theory, mainstream scholars in International Relations have designed and imposed criteria for identifying accepted and standardized scientific theories and distinguishing them from invalid theories. Therefore, any theory that was inconsistent with the criteria was put into margins after receiving the "Pseudo-scientific" label. The most important criteria are: Internal consistency (referring to the logical consistency of all the components and propositions of the theory and lack of inconsistency), coherence (referring to the formation of a meaningful whole from the components of the theory and providing a clear definition of its boundaries), simplicity or parsimony (meaning the ability to explain more facts with the least of propositions and assumptions and the least complexity), corroboration/range or explanatory power (meaning the breadth of the range of events that the theory can explain), falsifiability (meaning the possibility of imagining the conditions that would lead to the theory being abandoned), concreteness (meaning helping the theory objectively grasp reality and represent it directly), empirical accuracy (meaning clarity, accuracy, and correctness of the theory based on empirical evidence and its ability to verify new evidence), fecundity (meaning the ability of researchers to guide new events and ideas), methodological conservatism (meaning being consistent with previous theories as much as possible), prediction (Meaning the possibility of predicting some future events), and value freedom (meaning that theory be free from ethical, value and normative propositions) (Moravcsik, 1997: 515-516; Chernoff, 2007: 85-86).

In fact, it can be said that these criteria created a narrower fence around the concept of valid scientific theory that prevented the entrance of mainstream conflicting perspectives into the realm of theory development. Mainstream behaviorists argue that if a theory lacks

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causal proposition, usually, it cannot explain anything at all, and the validity of a proposition depends on its falsifiability, empirical testability, and predictive power. By limiting theory to empirical observation and inductive generalization, behaviorists strongly oppose the inclusion of unobservable elements into the domain of theorizing or influencing ethical considerations in the process of systematically collecting and recording empirical data, and they believe that a valid scientific theory should be entirely based on empirical observation (Sanders, 2010: 40).

With the assumption of materialist ontology and positivist epistemology as the dominant meta-theory, valid scientific theory was only limited to empirical theory and other opposing views were marginalized. In the mainstream perspective, any cognitive claim that is incompatible with the criteria proposed for the optimal theory and the established constitutive and regularity rules of discipline, is nothing more than a set of meaningless, ambiguous and nonsensical propositions without any scientific application. As a result, during the dominance of the positivist approach, it seemed that empirical theory was the only legitimate form of scientific litigation and, outside this narrow framework, it was not possible to theorize and present alternative viewpoints, such as the normative approach.

5.2. The Reflectivist Conception of Theory

Towards the end of the 20th century, in the wake of developments in the area of meta-theory and the emergence of the reflectivist approach, the hard positivist approach to the theory was also deconstructed, and critics of the IR mainstream have fiercely protested against established criteria for a favorable theory. Theories deriving from a reflectivist approach, such as Critical Theory, post-structuralism, feminism, and interpretive constructivism, due to the fundamental differences with the rationalist meta-theory, did not accept the criteria imposed by mainstream theories and pursued their own policy in doing research. For example, criteria such as falsifiability, concreteness, fecundity, and methodological conservatism of the theory could never be consistent with the principles of the reflectivist meta-theory, and therefore, reflectivists had no obligation to obey them. Value freedom was another criterion that was heavily attacked by mainstream opponents. Proponents of Critical Theory strongly rejected the positivists' claim of the possibility and necessity of objective and value-free theorizing and emphasized the contextuality and political nature of all theories. From their point of view, understanding the world is not undoubtedly objective, impartial and value-free, but it always has a political and ethical character to it and is influenced by traditions within societies.

Accordingly, Kimberly Hutchings (1999: 69) stated that “International theory is not only about politics, it also is itself political”. From this perspective, mainstream theories, such as realism, which claim to be value-free and be concerned with objective discovery of facts in a mind-independent world, always have a political bias and justify domination of the ruling political system. Even an idea such as instrumental rationality cannot be free from value but carry moral value, because mainstream scholars consider high value for it and use it to support the liberal free trade order (Devetak, 2005: 138-143; Chernoff, 2007: 172, 178).

The revival and re-emergence of normative theory, that during the dominance of positivism over the field of International Relations have been accused of being value-oriented and non-scientific and put into sideline, is indicator of transformations that have taken place in the definition of IR theory and its criteria. Because today, owing to the greater acceptance by governments of ethical and normative principles, including humanitarian intervention, normative theory, despite its profound contradictions with the foundations of positivism, has once again considered as the focal point of researchers, and it has regained its former position. It is now widely accepted in the field of International Relations that all explicit and implicit theories include normative assumptions and propositions. As Mark Neufeld (1995: 108) says: the "Study of world politics is, and always has been, unavoidably normative."

Thus, by rejecting the narrow definition of theory based on positivist meta-theory, mainstream opponents have promoted a softer reflectivist conception of theory, especially in European circles. According to this broad definition, theory can be regarded as any systematic and coherent idea that organizes a field in a systematic way, structures questions, and provide an integrated and unified set of interconnected concepts and categories. In this respect, theory is not merely an explanatory, empirical, and causal account of external reality with the aim of enhancing human material benefit and power, rather it has a much wider scope and can be a meaningful narrative of how human social life is constructed, and it can incorporate ethical norms and prescriptions to guide how humans be liberated from the present situation (Acharya and Buzan, 2010 AD/1390 SH: 3).

In other words, theory is actively considered in relation to the real world, and its purpose is not only to explain the world as it is, but to understand why the world is as it is in the present and to try to change it by recognizing the ultimate goal of human emancipation. The consequence of this view of theory is the collapse of the wall between

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subject and object and, consequently, a complete break with the belief that world events are ontologically prior to our theories about them (Zalewski, 2006: 345).

5.3. Current Status: Multiplicity of Perspectives

The futility of the controversies at the level of meta-theory and philosophy of science and the domination of pluralism and ontological and epistemological relativism had immediate impacts on IR theorizing and have resulted in a situation that mainstream theories fail to resist the widespread presence of the reflectivist approach; despite all their efforts to put frameworks on this discipline and to establish the criteria of a favorable theory. As a result, the positivists' criteria and their narrow understanding of the theory were undermined by reflectivist thinkers. Therefore, today, there is no grand theory that is able to explain all the developments and phenomena of the global environment individually within its framework. Rather, a plethora of alternative theories answer different questions in different ways, each looking at the world from a different perspective. It also makes no sense to speak of the "Best Theory" anymore, because different theories are regarded as different games that have their own rules and, of course, are incomparable. That is, just as comparing two sports games and preferring one over another or imposing the rules of one on the other is not a rational act, considering the theory of realism or liberalism as superior over post-modernism or feminism is not also rational and justifiable (Jackson and Sorensen, 2013 AD/1395 SH: 58-59).

Consequently, stabilizing the situation of meta-theoretical anarchy has made it impossible to develop a single dominant theory. Today, International Relations is witnessing the simultaneous presence of a wide range of theories as different stories and narratives to explain the world, which from a pragmatic perspective should be seen as tools, each helping us with performing a specific task. In short, in the present situation, there is no escape for the knowledge of International Relations from theoretical pluralism, and even realism that was once the dominant theory, according to Jack Donnelly (Donnelly, 2005 AD/1395 SH: 53), "must be an important, even essential, part of a pluralistic discipline of international studies. No less, but no more". That's why Marysia Zalewski (2006: 352) considers the final winners of the controversy between the adherents of rival theories to be only the publishers of those works. She therefore believes that the field of International Relations must be re-examined in such a way that it must eliminate existing boundaries around what is considered relevant in international politics and what are regarded as legitimate ways of constructing knowledge about the world.

Thus, through the contrast between the narrow and broad approaches to theory, a pluralistic approach has been put forward that recognizes both a positivist, rational, materialistic, and quantitative conception of theory as well as a reflectivist, social, constructivist and postmodernist conception. Because it is a widely accepted view that no single approach can fully explain the complexities of contemporary global politics, according to Stephen Walt (1998: 30, 44), rather than focusing on a single theory, it is better to recognize the existence of a variety of competing ideas, each of which explains important aspects of world politics. In fact, limiting one's view with only one of this perspective will result in our weak understanding of the issue.

6- The Religious Theory Perspective of the Concept of Theory

Given these two conceptions of theory in International Relations, namely the hard positivist conception as an empirical theory and the softer reflectivist as any systematic and coherent idea whose existence is recognized in scientific circles, it can be conclusively said that the religious theory of International Relations is more or less similar to reflectivist theory. Because of the inherent fundamental contradictions, it can never be adapted to a hard positivist conception. In principle, if the concept of theory in International Relations were limited to the materialist and objective empirical theory derived from the observational test and components such as falsifiability, concreteness, empirical accuracy, or methodological conservatism, undoubtedly, the idea of processing a religious theory would have been denied, and those who still speak of the impossibility of doing so reduce the theory to its only positivist, explanatory, and problem solving form. However, in the context of softer reflectivist thinking, it is possible to use falsifiable propositions which are narrative, normative, meaning-oriented, value-laden, and non-empirical in developing theories.

Certainly religious theory can have criteria such as internal consistency (logical consistency between the components of the theory and lack of inconsistency) or coherence (forming a meaningful whole of the components of the theory) or even explanatory power, fecundity and prediction. However, one should not expect it to meet the criteria of positivist meta-theory including falsifiability, concreteness, empirical accuracy, methodological conservatism, and value freedom. Because, first, religious theory contains a number of narrative, normative, and metaphysical propositions to which falsifiability never pertains to. Then, although religious theory recognizes empirical method and sensory observation as the epistemological tools, it is never limited to these tools. Third, religious theory, by its very nature, is never

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capable of adapting itself to the criterion of knowledge freedom from value, because being ethical, value-laden, and normative are inherent characteristics of the theory, and according to the ideals of religion, it is intended to establish paradigms of human emancipation and transcendence from the existing undesirable situation, while drawing on an ideal perfection order. Consequently, religious theory can never be defined as an empirical and positivist theory.

However, religious theory is a scientific theory for exactly the same reason that the spectrum of reflectivist theories such as Critical Theory, normative theory, feminism, interpretive constructivism, post-structuralism, and post-colonialism, despite all their fundamental differences from meta-theoretical principles of IR mainstream, is nowadays considered as scientific theories being acceptable to academic circles.

Because they also contain un-falsifiable propositions, are normative, meaning-oriented, and value-laden, disagree with the correspondence theory of truth and the criterion of empirical confirmation, and each have their own meta-theoretical approaches, arbitration mechanisms, and tests of truth and falsehood that make sense within specific paradigms and from the perspective of the scientists advocating them. Thus, the religious theory of International Relations can be regarded as a scientific theory in the broad sense that presents a systematic, coherent conception of the macro order and logic of world politics. And while it has not yet been endorsed by the official circles of international relations, it is at least a systematic attempt to achieve a general law and an innovative narrative in International Relations, and its creators view it as a theory.

Conclusion

By accepting the self-evident role of religion in international relations and its apparent impact on global developments and the behavior and decisions of actors, the present paper seeks to answer the main question of whether religion should be regarded as an object like other issues in international relations and be examined from various theoretical perspectives, or it can be identified as a subject and be expected to present an independent worldview and theory for interpreting the world and making sense of developments and actions.

Finally, it has been concluded that the study of religion as an object can be placed on the agenda of a wide range of existing International Relations theories, including mainstream or reflectivist spectrum which, because of being based on fundamental tenets of Western

philosophy and thought, are incapable of having a comprehensive understanding of religion and the meaning of the behavior of religious actors who base their action on religious ideas. Therefore, their analysis and perceptions are always mixed with a kind of failure that yields false predictions and inaccurate estimates of the performance of religious actors. As a result, there seems to be no escape from conceptualizing the notion of religion as a subject. That is, in order to resolve the essential flaws in the theories of International Relations related to the understanding of religion, one must first ask religion itself to interpret the world and to clarify the way religious actors behave and the underlying reasons behind those behaviors.

This feeling of need can be the starting point for the development of a new independent theory called "Religious Theory of International Relations or Global Politics." In other words, in a situation where Western thought is not fundamentally capable of completely digesting the subject of religion due to the tendency toward secularism, the only solution is to create a new school of thought from a different social context. Of course, in the feasibility assessment section, we came to the conclusion that the processing of an independent religious theory would be impossible and refused if we consider the theory to conform only to a hard positivist definition, but if we have a softer reflectivist conceptualization of the theory; it would be completely acceptable and possible.

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