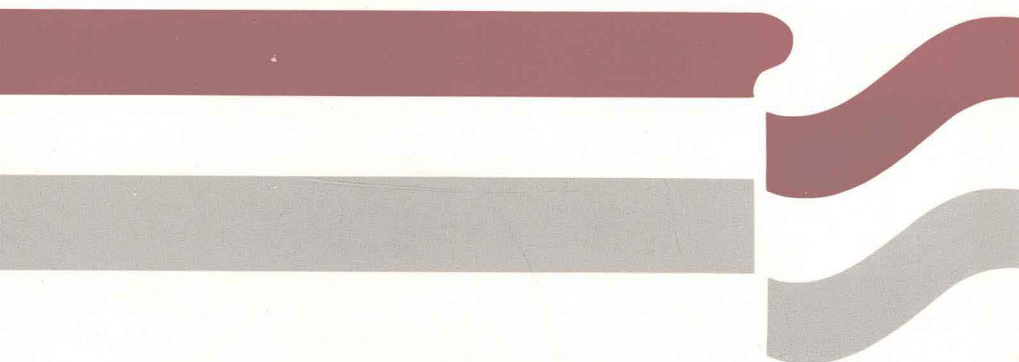


Journeys through World Politics

Autobiographical
Reflections of Thirty-four
Academic Travelers



Joseph Kruzal
James N. Rosenau

Journeys through World Politics

Autobiographical Reflections of Thirty-four Academic Travelers

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Excerpt from the poem "History," p. 58 from *The Outskirts of Troy* by Carl Dennis.
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Journeys through World Politics

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James N. Rosenau
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1

Mapping and Organizing the Journeys

James N. Rosenau

This book depicts how thirty-four separate lives journeyed down thirty-four different paths to a common destination. The paths were clearly marked—say, “early years,” “education,” “professional affiliations,” “intellectual opportunities,” “epistemological commitments,” and “career accomplishments”—but these signposts pointed in only the most general of directions and did not confine the travelers to a straight and narrow route. Quite to the contrary, they traced a wide-ranging and venturesome course around and through the obstacles and complexities of world politics. Occasionally their paths crossed and sometimes they joined together (either in collegial or teacher–student partnerships) for part of the trip; but mostly each went his or her separate way. Some began the journey before World War II. For others the impetus to make the trip originated in the war itself, even as still others acquired focus and direction in the cold war years of the 1950s or the turbulent 1960s. Some have been on the journey for a long time and are inclined to look back; others are still looking forward to encountering new challenges around the bends in the road that lie ahead.

Nor is the diversity of their travels marked only by generational differences. In a few instances the journeys spanned continents, encountered detours across battlefields, or passed through the corridors of government. Some took turns to the left, some veered off to the right, and some traced a wavering line down the middle. Likewise, the travelers relied on different compasses to make their way along the diverse paths, with some using largely case histories even as others employed quantitative data or mathematically derived axioms to sustain their work. And, not least, their journeys further diverged when they came upon crossroads that offered chances to undertake action in the international arena: Some were impelled by deeply held values to seize the opportunities, but others rejected direct action in favor of the perspectives to be gained through a measure of detachment.

Yet, whatever the routes they traversed, all thirty-four travelers eventually

pulled into the same terminus as the home base for their journey—that large, engaging structure known as Ivory Tower, located at the corner of Theory and Method, in a place called Campus wherein like-minded colleagues interactively seek to generate, analyze, and communicate knowledge about the nature of world affairs. The tower is an engaging structure because it enables one to stand back from the daily bustle of world politics. From high in the tower one has the time and the perspective—not to mention the freedom—to uncover the patterns and anticipate the problems that are not ordinarily discernible. It is an ideal home base from which to make sojourns around the world precisely because the gleam of its ivory casts a refracted and penetrating light into the murky recesses of human experience and conflict. Little wonder, then, that the journeys of such able and diverse people converged upon this terminus and made it the locale for their life's work!

In some respects, of course, the convergence has been temporary and limited. Upon arrival at the tower many of the travelers discovered that its floors were organized around Centers devoted to a diverse set of specializations, and thus they diverged again to resume their journey down different paths. On occasion they might meet in the library, the computer center, and the classrooms within the tower and at professional meetings outside it; but mostly they settled in one or another of its centers for long stretches of time, particularly in those where issues involving epistemology, peace and conflict resolution, strategy and security, and international political economy could be addressed with like-minded colleagues. Some moved back and forth among the centers, and a few even sought to build links between two or more; but for the most part all tended to regard one center as the main locale for their work.

A Sheer Crazyiness

But why are these journeys worth writing about? Why not simply take them for granted and focus on world politics directly? Why have so many busy scholars taken time out to contribute to this book?

The answer has several dimensions. The most immediate concerns a shared aspiration to portray the pleasures and pains of a scholarly career in the field for undergraduates and graduate students who may contemplate entering it. None of the contributors would argue that the lessons they have derived from their own journeys are necessarily relevant to others, but all concerned are hopeful that, taken together as a collection of diverse experiences, these essays will prove of some value to those who take on the tasks of knowledge building in the future. Some of our warts are evident here and so is a bit of our dirty linen; but most of all we have collectively conveyed the sense of urgency, the ethical concerns, and the joys that attach to the opportunity of

probing and comprehending why and how the course of events unfolds as it does. Here the reader will find accounts of restless minds at work, always persisting and perfecting as the world undergoes change and poses new challenges. Here is the anguish of discerning actors on a collision course and the satisfaction of knowing that one has added a modicum of clarity to the dangers inherent in a collision. Here is the audacity, the sheer craziness, of daring to think one can begin to grasp the dynamics of politics on a global scale!

A second set of reasons for having compiled this collection involves a more long-run, intellectual consideration, namely, highlighting for those who may enter the field the close relationship between observers of world affairs and the observations that they make and record. Although the canons of science suggest that the findings of systematic inquiry should be free of values or otherwise independent of those who uncover them, this precept is profoundly misleading. Value-free inquiry makes sense as a goal, a standard against which inquiries can be usefully assessed; but in any practical sense it is neither an attainable goal nor an applicable standard. Why? Because observers cannot tell the whole story, depict the full picture, or otherwise account for their subject in its entirety. Of necessity, they must select some of its aspects as central and dismiss others as trivial, and in so doing they necessarily tailor the findings their research instruments generate. In order to know anything, in other words, we have to introduce the distortion that comes from selection, and therein lies the dynamism of the relation between observers and their observations. For it is we, the observers—with all our quirks, biases, and limitations—who must differentiate the important from the trivial and then infuse meaning into the former.

Responsible and disciplined inquiry is not helpless in the face of this dynamism. One need not despair that all knowledge is sheer prejudice or unverifiable impressions. Rather, careful scholars engage in a variety of practices that enable their readers to trace the scholars' connection to research materials and thereby assess their findings. Most notably, they strive to achieve detachment from their inquiries by explicating at every stage the concepts, procedures, and values on which their analyses rest. In this way readers are able to evaluate for themselves whether the interpretations derive from the materials observed or the limitations and biases of the observer. Thus it is more accurate to see ourselves as engaged in a value-explicit enterprise rather than a value-free one.

Given the inevitability of this close connection between scholars and the subjects of their inquiries, it matters—not just anecdotally but also in real knowledge terms—who they are, where they have been, how they were educated, what they stand for, and the ways in which they see themselves as sorting out the valid from the erroneous, the significant from the mundane, and the pattern from the anomaly. Such is perhaps the prime virtue of this book: it demonstrates that the diverse literature of the field springs from the labors

of complex men and women who are no less moved by hopes, fears, defeats, and triumphs than anyone else. Some might be inclined to interpret the personal quality of the ensuing essays from a gossipy perspective, but that would be to miss out on an extraordinary opportunity to assess the underpinnings of knowledge about world politics.

The close links between perceived experience and professional research may not be as self-evident today as once was the case. Lately a broad range of intellectual disciplines—from the social sciences through law, architecture, and the humanities—has witnessed the emergence of what is known as post-modern and/or poststructural perspectives. Originating in Europe and initially brought to the United States through work in comparative literature, post-modernism affirms that the “Enlightenment project” has come to an end after several centuries, that the modernist presumption of a continuing progress is no longer viable, that the idea of a cumulative process of knowledge building is fundamentally flawed, and that thus what counts in scholarship or art is interpreting its texts and not the context or circumstances in which it was created. Viewed in this way, the observer emerges as essentially irrelevant to the materials he or she has written, so much so that some postmodernists have announced the death of the author. Hence what is above regarded as a prime virtue of the ensuing essays would be considered absurd by postmodernists. If such a reaction seems far-fetched to the reader, let it not be hastily dismissed. The inroads of the postmodernist perspective into the international relations field may prove to be an ephemeral fad—an outcome that I, as a modernist, would not regret—but it is also possible that it has just begun to capture the attention of students in the field. No thoroughgoing postmodernist is among the contributors—largely because they are to be found mainly among the successor generations—but work in this genre has cumulated to the point where it can be gathered together in a collection of essays.¹ Thus, if the post-modernist approach does endure, it seems likely that the journeys recorded here will become a focus of contention as well as effort to provide some guidelines.

Some might suspect another reason why so many busy scholars have seen fit to contribute to this book: that beyond a concern for successor generations and an appreciation of how the underpinnings of knowledge operate lies a strong ego, that academics like to write about themselves and their accomplishments. Such a suspicion is misplaced. It downplays the larger commitments within which our egos express themselves. It overlooks the aspiration to extend understanding of the human condition, to provoke curiosity among students, and to influence the course of events—aspirations that are recognized to be attainable only through a measure of humility and a continual flow of negative feedback. To be sure, to engage in autobiography is to focus on the self and one does not take on such a focus without a sense that one’s energies have been well spent and that one’s writings are worth citing. And surely it is

the case that one does not opt for a life in the classroom without a readiness to have many eyes centered on one's performances.

Nevertheless, it would be a gross error to view these essays as products of self-serving egos. Quite to the contrary: Aware that their work stands or falls on the force of their ideas and findings, and not on the power of their presence or the charisma of their personalities, the contributors have long adhered to the traditional practices of social science—the practices that, in effect, assert that the word "I" is not part of the normal discourse of social science, that analysts strive for a measure of detachment, that they remain open to criticism and always allow for the possibility that their interpretations are proven wrong, that, indeed, they keep their egos in check. If one wants to nurse and protect a fragile ego, in short, becoming an academic is hardly the most expeditious career to follow.

Viewed in this way, the ensuing essays are an exception to the standard mode of scholarly writing. Their authors had to counter deep-seated habits in order to consider even making a contribution, much less writing one. The editors became acutely aware of this reluctance to use a personal context in the process of inviting contributions and, even more, of getting them submitted before deadlines. Some invitees obviously wrestled with the decision, wavering between their aversion to personalizing social science and their sense of wanting to contribute to a book designed for future students in the field, and concluded they would be unable to carry through on the assignment. Others accepted the task and discovered midway that it simply was not their medium. Still others needed to be pressed to complete their essays and, in a few cases, the editors found themselves asking for revisions on the grounds that the authors had abandoned the autobiographical context after their opening paragraphs.

Readers will have to make their own judgment as to our success in getting personal experiences linked to scholarship, but the editors came away from their interactions with the contributors convinced that the writing and submitting of their essays involved considerable courage. Writing is by its very nature a lonely enterprise, and coupled with an aversion to making oneself the focus of an essay, preparing an autobiographical account becomes a monumental challenge that could be met only through an unusual commitment to future generations of students.

Nor should the frequency with which the contributors have cited their own works be interpreted as transforming intellectual journeys into ego trips. At work here is pride of authorship. Unwilling to settle for ill-formed, contradictory, and impressionistic ideas, social scientists tend to become deeply immersed in the theories and formulations, even the paragraphs and phrases, through which they express their findings and conclusions. Much like the artist and the composer, their identities thus becomes inextricably and intimately associated with the tangible products of their creative energies. One does not

fashion incisive understandings of human experience that are subjected to (and survive) close scrutiny by tough-minded peers without becoming attached to the worth and craft of what one has managed to eke out of the welter of materials one has gathered.

Even the so-called “jargon,” those phrasings that can be so offensive to readers of a literary or journalistic bent, is encompassed by the pride of craft. It is simply not the case that social scientists purposely substitute unfamiliar terms in order to confound what critics call “simple language.” Perhaps some may seek to differentiate their work from that of others by coining their own phraseology, but for most the rhetoric of so-called “jargon” is a rhetoric of precision, a means for introducing nuance and differentiation in order to avoid ambiguity and misinterpretation. And, as such, this technical language is best viewed not as a showy display of intellectual virtuosity, but as a dedication to disciplined and careful inquiry. The fact that the ensuing essays are relatively free of technical phraseology is a measure of the extent to which the authors have successfully transcended their usual mode of expression to serve the special requirements of autobiography.

Cynics might contend that the extensive research product cited throughout the book is less pride of authorship and more a reflection of the pressures to “publish or perish.” Such reasoning is, again, a gross misreading of what motivates productive scholars. Early in a career, to be sure, concerns about furthering a career and getting the necessary promotions are preoccupying and do perhaps contribute to the dynamics that sustain research and lead academics to publish their writings. But if this were a prime motive for the extensive publications of the contributors to this book, surely they would have been less productive as their careers moved on from the early, pretentured stage. Yet such is not the case: Many of the citations that pervade the essays are dated well after their authors had surmounted the tenure-promotion hurdles and established themselves in the profession. What drives these journeys through world politics, to repeat, is the push of wanting to widen the frontiers of knowledge and the pull of a world desperately in need of deeper understanding.

An Article of Faith

But, some readers might wonder, if it is recognized that the world is troubled and in dire need of constructive inputs on the part of decent people, why would anyone want to confine himself or herself to a life of the mind, to endless reading and writing? With so much in need of betterment, why confine the travel to the remote confines of the Ivory Tower? Why not move on to the world itself, to the centers where decisions are made about war, welfare, and

the other great issues of our time? Why not, in short, extend the journey through world politics into the public arena?

Again the answer has several dimensions. As will be seen, some scholars do venture out for periods of service in government; others are active in a variety of policy advisory positions that can be performed in addition to their teaching and research commitments. Still others are inclined to keep their direct contacts with the public arena to a minimum, either out of a concern to avoid compromising their critical perspectives or because their temperaments are ill-suited to the fast-paced, gregarious, and impulsive character of the policy world.

Besides the specific accommodation every academic makes to the demands of the public arena, however, lies a more encompassing reason for remaining well ensconced in the Ivory Tower. It springs from a presumption that the tower is located well within, and not outside, the flow of events. Conceived as inescapably part of the society's communication system, the tower offers its occupants an opportunity to be active even as they stand apart, to be involved through detachment, to be passionate in their belief that the world can be improved through dispassionate inquiry. Despite their deep concern about war, peace, and distributive justice, in other words, many—and perhaps all—of the contributors to this book are committed to the proposition that creative and detached scholarship can help to ameliorate such problems. They do not see themselves as isolated from world affairs; rather, they proceed from an article of faith—it is as simple as that—in which the knowledge they generate is understood to filter through society and eventually become relevant at those crucial points where action decisions are framed and made.

Yet it is not an article of faith that can be readily compromised. Policy research, knowledge founded on an immediate rather than a broad context, can provide some shortcuts. But such a compromise is not without its limits. As one of the contributors put it in an earlier formulation, most

international relationists in the universities are not well situated to do policy-oriented studies nor are we very good at them. . . . Our collective job is not to whisper in the ear of today's dictator, but it is to help those in and out of government with present or future influence on the policy process understand some of the expected middle-run and long-run consequences of alternative policy choices.²

It is instructive to ask what images underlie the article of faith that posits the eventual relevance of basic research in world politics. How can those who fully appreciate society's complexity be so naive as to also believe that their long-range research matters? Is it just rationalization of one's preferences for the quiet of the Ivory Tower to think that the noise of the real world can echo one's formulations and findings? Or is it a deep-seated elitism that encourages