

Lecture 2 - Jan. 9th, 2019

Idealism vs Realism

Hans J. Morgenthau, *Six Principles of Political Realism*

Reading Notes: **Kenneth N. Waltz**, *Structural Realism after the Cold War*

1. Political realism believes that politics, like society in general, is governed by objective laws that have their roots in human nature.
2. The main signpost that helps political realism to find its way through the landscape of international politics is the concept of interest defined in terms of power.
3. Realism assumes that its key concept of interest defined as power is an objective category which is universally valid, but it does not endow that concept with a meaning that is fixed once and for all.
4. Political realism is aware of the moral significance of political action.
5. Political realism refuses to identify the moral aspirations of a particular nation with the moral laws that govern the universe.
6. The difference, then, between political realism and other schools of thought is real, and it is profound.

Anarchy, self-help, and power balancing have been replaced by new conditions which call for new ideas. ← The author agrees that, should the conditions a theory contemplates change, the theory no longer applies.

The question, however, is what sort of changes would be able to alter the international political system so profoundly that old ways of thinking would no longer be relevant? How can realism be completely obsolete?

Waltz's answer:

- Changes in the structure of the international political system are distinct from changes at the unit level. Thus, changes in **polarity** affect how states provide for their security.
 - **Polarity**: any of the ways in which power is distributed within the international system.
- The end of the cold war coincided with a “democratic wave”.
- Democratic peace thesis: democracies don't fight democracies.

What causes war? Kant's answer: anything; the natural state is the state of war. Under the conditions of international politics, war recurs; the sure way to abolish war, then, is to abolish international politics.

Early Theorizing in International Relations

- The distinction between economics and political science as two separate disciplines occurred around WWI.
- After WWI, it was agreed by many scholars of international law that a system, or laws, were needed in order to prevent war between the states. The people that thought this were called idealists. (also called Utopians)

Classical Idealism - To be an idealist meant to strive for a system free of war.

Core Assumptions:

1. Human behaviour can be perfect.
 - An assumption that humans can be very, very good.
2. A “harmony of interests” exists between people and between states.
 - An assumption that everyone has an interest in “getting along” with one another.
3. Therefore war is never an appropriate way to resolve disputes. Instead, the harmony needs to be uncovered.
 - Again, this comes from the attitude after WWI. Even for the winners, the war was incredibly costly and in a way “not worth it”.
4. With the correct laws and institutions guiding behaviour, the harmony of interests will be revealed.

Historians looked at WWI and concluded that it was not unique; there have been wars of such magnitude many times throughout history. Argued with idealists.

Classical Realism

- Prominent authors: **Hans J. Morgenthau**, **Edward Hallett Carr**, and **Reinhold Niebuhr**
- Emphasizes human nature
 - Morgenthau starts with the premise that a theoretical approach towards politics should be considered as an approach towards human beings, who he conceptualizes as rational, egoistic, and power-driven.
 - States must struggle for survival in the same way that men do in Hobbes' state of nature.
- States try to pursue their interests, defined in terms of power, against the interests of other states.

Core Assumptions:

1. Humans have a will to survive, which makes them selfish.
 - This is the key starting point that is different between realists and idealists.
2. The will to survive equals a will to dominate.

3. This creates a competition, which in turn triggers a search for power.
 - This competition can be between individuals, states, etc.

The Evolution of International Relations

- After WWII, many flaws in idealist policy became evident.
- The realists seemed to have much more of an impact on policy making at this time (going into the 1950's)
- **Kenneth Waltz** had an important impact on political realism. Challenged the framing of the early debates.
- He asked, what causes wars?
- Waltz: The debates between realists and idealists have been about human nature; idealists will assume that humans are good at their core, while realists assume that humans are inherently bad. Neither of these assumptions are useful; humans are capable of both.
- When you are making an assumption about human nature, it not only applies to everyone but to all time periods.
- Human nature is not a causal variable, but rather a constant variable.
- Waltz says the same thing about states: the question should NOT be whether states are inherently good or bad. States do both good things and very terrible things.
- According to Waltz, saying the "US is good" and the "Soviet Union is bad" is incorrect.

So, what changes the behaviour of humans? What changes the behaviour of states?

- Waltz says that it is the context/the situation that the actors find themselves in that causes their behaviour.
- Certain situations will illicit bad behaviour, while others will illicit good behaviour.
- By examining the context, it will be evident why states that are "good" at times do "bad" things.
- To Waltz, it is the most useful to look at the *structure* of the international system. What are its characteristics?
- He carves out a separate domain for international relations in the way that he discusses the system-level (or state to state relations); he brings out the notion that we need to look at the system as a separate domain.

Neorealism / Structural Realism

Core Assumptions:

1. States are the most important actors.
 - This is not to say that states are the *only* actors, however.
2. States are unitary and rational actors.
3. The international system is anarchic.

- There is no “international government”.
 - Thus, what you are left with, are several sovereign, competing states. States have no higher authority to answer to; this is not necessarily a bad thing, but leaves states vulnerable to other states.
4. States seek to maximize their power.
- If a state lacks power, its other goals don't matter, for a state cannot act without power.
 - **Waltz**: The US really only fears the Soviet Union, and the Soviet Union only fears the US. This is a good thing; in the past when you had 6 major powers, the states are not able to watch what each other are doing as closely, thus mistakes were made.
 - Essentially, the international system is a dog-eat-dog world.
 - This is appealing to American policy makers (as they are most powerful, thus the biggest dog)

Similarities & differences with other Realist theories

- Agrees with the Realist conception of power as essential for understanding world politics.
- Differs from Classical Realism in that it does not focus on human nature, but rather the absence of a central authority and the distribution of power in the international system.
- Anarchy and the relative distribution of power are the structural causes of competition for security in the international system.
- **Waltz's *Theory of International Politics* (1979)**
 - The political structure in which actors are embedded determines their actions
 - This political structure is always characterized by an underlying ordering principle.
 - Anarchy eliminates functional differences between states: in an anarchical international system, the type of regime is irrelevant - what matters is how capabilities are distributed between regimes.
- Structural realism is interested in providing a rank ordering of states in order to identify the great powers within the international system.
- The number of great powers determines the structure of the international system (unipolar, bipolar, etc.)
- When confronted with an adversary, states can pursue the option of balancing the threat created by the other power.
 - External Balancing: find allies, build strategic alliances; redirect trade among allies.
 - Internal Balancing: arms race; focus on internal development at cost to others
- Waltz's structural realism is often referred to as defensive realism (states maximize security); states should pursue 'the appropriate amount of power' rather than aim to

become the leading world hegemon which would lead to counterbalancing activities on the part of other states.

- This is in contrast to offensive realism, which disagrees with the above; offensive realists argue that hegemony is the best way to ensure one's survival and does not necessarily produce counterbalancing activities

Assuming Rational Action - (These are assumptions; the theory of structural realism *assumes* these things.)

- Actions are purposive.
- Actors have perfect information.
- Actors know their preferences and rank them.
- Actors know all possible options, including the consequences of each.
- Actors calculate the costs and benefits associated with each option.

Waltz's Structural Realism - How is international politics different from domestic politics?

1. Ordering Principle
 - Domestic politics is ordered by hierarchy (municipal, provincial, etc)
 - The ordering principle in international politics is anarchy
2. Differentiation of the Parts
 - Responsibilities are split among the levels of government in domestic politics
 - In the international system, the states do NOT want to rely on other states to fulfill such responsibilities
3. Differences in Capabilities
 - The difference in capabilities between the states varies often
 - All states are not equally powerful

Rivals to Realism still persist, however.

Lecture 3 - Jan. 11th, 2019

Liberalism

Andrew Moravcsik, "Taking Preferences Seriously: A Liberal Theory of International Politics"

Moravcsik

- For liberals, the configuration of state preferences is of utmost importance in world politics.
 - **Morgenthau** and **Waltz** criticized liberalism by contrasting its purported altruism with realism.
 - **Moravcsik** argues that "the basic liberal insight about the centrality of state-society relations to world politics can be restated in terms of three positive assumptions concerning, respectively, the nature of fundamental social actors, the state, and the international system." (515)
 - According to Moravcsik, there are three major variants of liberal theory: ideational liberalism, commercial liberalism, and republican liberalism.
 - Fundamental premise of Liberal IR theory: "that the relationship between states and the surrounding domestic and transnational society in which they are embedded critically shapes state behaviour by influencing the social purposes underlying state preferences" (516)
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Liberalism's Origins

- Not designed to answer the question of war.
- Dates back to the early 1700's/1800's
- It is important to recognize that most states practiced Mercantilism
- Mercantilism emphasized the importance of gold/silver(money). A system of policies designed to maximize the amount of gold and silver that rulers kept.
- Based on the conception that there is a limited amount of wealth.
- In order to win wars/acquire new land, rulers hired mercenaries. These mercenaries would be paid in gold and silver.
- Liberalism criticized mercantilist practices of the late eighteenth century.
- **Adam Smith** writes *The Wealth of Nations* - Attacks mercantilism on multiple levels.
- On one level, it examines the trade policies promoted by mercantilism.
 - The British treated their colonies through mercantilist policies, so that the trade relationship was one-sided (i.e. all gold and silver ends up in Britain's hands).
 - This was what caused the US to desire independence from Britain
- On another level, Smith argues that mercantilism is the wrong way to be thinking about wealth.

- Wealth is not gold and silver; wealth should be thought of as “what we can consume”. (i.e.
- Under mercantilism, no one cared about “what one could consume”. Smith argued that economic choice was necessary.
- How does one generate more wealth? Smith brought up specialization. Specialization in individual trades, as well as countries specializing in the production of certain resources.
- Formal arguments then developed by **David Ricardo**
 - Created mathematical models to explain what Smith said about specialization and trade.
- Britain adopted classical liberal policies internally and externally in the early nineteenth century.

Core Assumptions of Classical Liberalism

1. Individuals are the primary actors.
 - This is a contrast to mercantilism, where monarchs controlled economics and trade.
2. Individuals are rational unitary actors.
3. Individuals maximize utility.
 - Utility can be anything (time, money, prestige, resources, etc)
 - Utility is defined by the individual
4. Everything can be traded.
 - Again, this is an assumption, but in liberal theory we take it to be true.
5. Individual preferences can be summed into societal preferences.
 - The method that is used to bring these preferences together makes a huge difference. (ex: outcome of popular vote vs. electoral college)
 - There is a notion here that individuals do not want the same thing.

Versions of Liberalism

- Some stress the role of individuals, others of states...
 - Ideational, commercial, republican, etc.
- All share an emphasis on voluntary exchange to attain mutual benefits.
 - There is a notion here that markets work through voluntary exchange.
- Making them similar to Idealism...and quite different from Realism.
 - The notion that actors will come together to attain mutual benefits goes against realist principles.
 - Realists will always say power matters before wealth.

Note actors and their desires: individuals vs. states, wealth vs. power, absolute vs. relative gains.

Liberal Ideas

- Focuses on the individual: individuals know their own desires, individuals should determine outcomes.
- Voluntary exchange (through markets) works well to satisfy individuals' desires.
 - The early version of Liberalism stressed the importance of markets
 - In the 1930's, with the Great Depression, it became clear that markets would not always work well for everybody.
 - This carved out areas for the government to engage in the economy.
- Cooperation can effectively resolve most problems.
- Therefore trade and open economic ties deliver material (and nonmaterial) benefits.

Liberalism in IPE (International Political Economy)

- **Analytical Liberalism** is probably the most dominant approach in IPE today.
 - In the 1990's, emphasis was placed on the predictive aspects of liberal theory as opposed to the normative aspects.
- Emerged after the Cold War ended
 - This initiated a crisis, as the main approach used for security relations was structural realism. There was nothing in the arguments for structural realism that indicated that the Cold War would end.
 - Liberalism attributed this to a change inside the Soviet Union's government.
- **Moravcsik** described these new ideas (1997)
 - He attempts to describe how people are trying to bring in elements of domestic politics, use those classical liberal assumptions, but produce something that emphasizes description and more accurate predictions.
 - Rather than making an assumption that all states desire power (structural realism) Moravcsik assumed that all states desire different things.
 - This approach allows us to take a lot of findings from economics and apply them to our own arguments.
- Advantages for addressing questions in IPE: readily incorporates work from economics, easy to apply in democratic settings.

Analytical Liberalism

What does analytical liberalism look like in practice?

Economic models identify array of domestic interests →

- How will a particular trade/monetary policy affect the individuals in your country?

Domestic politics control policy →

- How do individuals gather into groups? How do they compete for control over state policy? Somebody wins the domestic political competition; they are then in control of the state; the state is a passive instrument, it does what the dominant group tells it to go pursue.
- ^We do not assume we know what states want (unlike structural realists-power)

State pursues preferences of dominant group →

International politics as states interact →

- In terms of domestic politics, states are servants of the domestic groups

Lecture 4 - Jan. 14th, 2019

Marxism

Rudolf Hilferding, *Finance Capital*, 1910, ch. 25

3 different versions of Marxism:

Karl Marx - originator of the core principles

Rudolf Hilferding - applies Marx's ideas in new ways, deals with new questions

Vladimir Lenin - led revolution in Russia

Marx observed what was happening in Britain in the late 1840s/50s.

Marx vs Liberalism

- Liberals argued for free choice and voluntary exchange
- Marx criticized liberal policies for failing to deliver the promised results.
 - In Britain, you could receive charity by showing proof of birth. This was stripped away in 1840, and people were encouraged to enter the labour market.
 - Marx felt that the markets were not fulfilling their promise
- His arguments use dialectical logic (i.e. events are driven by contradiction) (there is a thesis, counter thesis, synthesis, etc)
- He uses this logic to explain how society evolves into a capitalist system.
- Contradictions are logically identified inconsistencies which may or may not appear obvious.

Marx used the Labour Theory of Value (i.e. all value originates from labour)

$$V = K + W + SV$$

^Where V stands for value, K stands for capital, W stands for wages, and SV stands for surplus value.

V: what someone is willing to pay for something; SV the return to the entrepreneur (i.e. profit)

Is SV really the product of labour? It is the product of the entrepreneur and their ideas.

Through a Marxist lens, however, the

V should equal W, so what about SV? This is the contradictory element of capitalism that Marx build his argument around.

Core Assumptions of Classical Marxism

1. Social classes are the primary actors. The bourgeois, the working class, landowners, etc. Individuals are not key actors unlike liberalism.