

Review idealism and realism in international relations.

[Politics](#), [International Relations](#)



Question: - Review idealism and realism in international relations.

Introduction When studying international relations as an academic discipline studying about Idealism and realism is a major concern. These two approaches are used widely when it comes to decision making procedures. In idealism the decisions are made using ideas. Institutions such as League of Nations, United Nations as well as Local organizations like Organization of African Unity are developed according to the idealist tradition. This was introduced as a educational thought in 400 BC by Plato.

He thought that the humans could be improved from within by correcting their thoughts and discovering knowledge already lies within since birth. The more perfect our ideas are the better we can serve the world. In realism world politics are driven by competitive self-interest. This further details that all states operate under as the greatest factor in causing nations to diverge from morally guided behaviour. Until World War II the actual theory of realism did not come about. Realism theory has been introduced from historical writers such as Machiavelli, Hobbes, Thucydides and Sun Tzu.

But Hans J. Morgenthau and E. H. Carr are considered most instrumental in establishing the tenets of classical realism theory in modern age. This theory differs from all considerations of legality and moral guidance from state policy that holds that all states are capable of violating laws if there is any necessity to advance their interests and power. These two different theories created a significant change in International Relations all over the world. Most political, economical decisions are taken by using Idealism and realism as reference to analyze and understand the facts.

Idealism Idealism is a term applied to any idea, goal or practice considered to be impractical. As examples entrusting international security to the UN, creating an African union on the model of European Union, global eradication of poverty and injustice, etc. can be pointed out. Idealists usually rest on a pessimistic perspective towards human nature along with an historical judgment to achieve a change in world affairs. Idealists emphasize the power of reason. They strongly believe in the effectiveness of ideas. Through this they see the possibility of establishing a political system primarily on morality. This will lead the humans to remove their selfish ideas and helps to build a nation that forms peace, prosperity, cooperation and justice. When a person looks at war in an idealist view, it can no longer be considered by anyone as a suitable way to achieve goals. It is because it affects both parties severely. Former President of the United States of America Woodrow Wilson is considered to be one of the key founders of Idealism. He presented the “Fourteen points” proposal that was contained on his speech to a joint session of congress on 1918.

The address was intended to assure the world that the Great War (World War I) was being fought for a moral cause and for postwar peace in Europe. One of the most well known outcomes of Idealism is the democratic Peace Theory. This states that similar modes of democratic governments do not clash each other. As an impact of Idealism on International Relations Organizations like League of Nations. This was resulted in the covenant of the League of Nations with 42 original members. But this was ineffective because it had no power to enforce its decisions and issues in security.

Due to these reasons the league was dismantled in the year 1940 but it had served as a model for the United Nations. Following the failure of League of Nations and the outbreak of the Second World War, descendent theories like Liberalism and Neo-conservatism were created. Through Liberalism organizations like United Nations, NATO, International regimes like Bretton Woods System were built. Neo-conservatism was drawn from Liberalism and focused more on universal values such as Human rights, democracy, free trade, minority protections etc. Unlike other theories Neo-conservatism is willing to use force if necessary to push for its goals. Realism This is a theory that world politics is driven by competitive self-interest. It implies that realists see that humankind is self-centered and competitive. Also they believe that the principal actors in the international system are sovereign states. The basic assumption of Realism is that man is wicked, aggressive and bad and also state struggles for power. This implies that realism possesses a pessimistic, negative and a suspicious behavior.

This was originated after the Second World War. But its primary assumptions were noted in its earlier writings. People like Thucydides, Sun Tzu, and Otto Van Bismarck can be pointed out as examples. It began as a wide field of research after the war. People like Hans J. Morgenthau, Carl von Clausewitz are considered as the modern thinkers of the classical realism. This theory has been associated with thinkers like Niccolo Machiavelli and Thomas Hobbes. Hans J Morgenthau described about six principles of Political Realism. 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 of political realism is the concept of interest defined in terms of power, which infuses rational order into the subject matter of politics, and thus makes the theoretical understanding of politics possible. Political realism avoids concerns with the motives and ideology of statesmen. Political realism avoids reinterpreting reality to fit the policy. A good foreign policy minimizes risks and maximizes benefits. 3.

Realism recognizes that the determining kind of interest varies depending on the political and cultural context in which foreign policy is made. It does not give "interest defined as power" a meaning that is fixed once and for all. 4. Political realism is aware of the moral significance of political action. It is also aware of the tension between the moral command and the requirements of successful political action. Realism maintains that universal moral principles must be filtered through the concrete circumstances of time and place, because they cannot be applied to the actions of states in their abstract universal formulation. . Political realism refuses to identify the moral aspirations of a particular nation with the moral laws that govern the universe. 6. The political realist maintains the autonomy of the political sphere; he asks "How does this policy affect the power and interests of the nation?" Political realism is based on a pluralistic conception of human nature. The political realist must show where the nation's interests differ from the moralistic and legalistic viewpoints.