

# Realism and neo realism essay



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Realism underlines the constraints on politics forced by human nature and the absence of international government. Jointly, they make international relations mainly a realm of power and interest. " Human nature has not changed since the days of classical ancient times" (Thompson 1985: 17). And that nature, according to realists, is at its core self-centered, and thus inalterably leaning towards immorality. As Machiavelli puts it, in politics " it should needs be taken for granted that all men are wicked and that they will constantly give vent to the malignity that is in their minds when prospect offers" (1970: Book I, ch. ).

Some realists, such as Reinhold Niebuhr (1944: 19) and Hans Morgenthau (1946: 202), Machiavelli's claim as mainly descriptive. Many, like Machiavelli himself, contend simply that there are enough egoists to make any other postulation unduly risky. All, however, underline the egoistic passions and self-interest in (international) politics. " It is above all significant not to make greater demands upon human nature than its infirmity can satisfy" (Treitschke 1916: 590). " It is fundamental not to have faith in human nature.

Such faith is a current heresy and a very devastating one" (Butterfield 1949: 47). Though we will discuss Realism and neo realism in context of power, national interest, and the structure of the international system. Power Realism's persuasive power comes partially from its presentation of a stiff narrative of world politics. This narrative appears the majority of the time not in strict story form, but rather in the way of the narration in a classical oration: that portion of the speech giving a statement of the circumstances of the case.

The narration was intended to set the scene for the description of arguments, which it preceded. Narrations can be renowned (involving perceptibly imaginary characters such as Chiron the centaur), historical (linking actual past characters such as the Peloponnesian War), or “realistic” (concerning things that could have happened such as Rousseau’s stag hunt). Whatever the type of account, persuasive success typically requires that it be brief, clear, and plausible. The realist’s narrative of world politics exemplifies these characters of influential exposition.

It sets the scene, and in so doing both structures successive argument and defines the natural attitude of the discourse—it’s most consistent, core knowledge of the world. Several of the significant elements of this narrative are integrated in the following sketch. In the discourse of realism, nation-states are the prime actors in world politics. Since these states essentially inhabit a condition of anarchy, they learn to carry out their foreign policies on the base of national interest distinct in terms of power.

Consequently, they calculate and compare benefits and costs of substitute policies and rank each other according to their power, which is measured mostly in terms of material and particularly military capabilities. Thus, national foreign policy decision makers use whatever means are most suitable, including direct violence, to attain the ends of national interest defined in terms of power. This typically is augmented with numerous additional claims as well, which set up it as an account of a permanent, ubiquitous, essential condition.

These facts of international competition are stranded in human nature and confirmed by political history. The key to achievement in this real world of nation-states challenging for survival is to see things as they are rather than as we would desire them to be. Alternative accounts are either illusion temporarily afforded by circumstances of virtual peace or prosperity, or special pleading by those who lack the potential to defend themselves otherwise. The story of realism persists indefinitely, for it is a story of the fatal limits of human nature. The persuasive power of this narrative must not be underestimated.

In a few sentences, it produces a logical account of the international environment that manages all the key elements for representing human motivation: an actor (the nation-state) in a scene (the state of anarchy, a state of nature) uses an agency (calculation) to act (the application of force) for a purpose (national interest). Additionally, by articulating this simple but powerful calculus as a general, even tragic condition, the narrative suggests that it and it alone, can provide one to survive and explicate the natural conditions of state competition.

Its full implication, however, becomes more evident in combination with realism's other story. Realism complements this story of a world of raw power and normal calculation with a story about itself. In this tale, realism is the main actor in the world of theory, with power greater than other theories. This story of self-justification develops in three parts. First, realism emerges as the natural outgrowth of the leading development in world politics: the development of the nation-state.

Realism's roots are entangled with the history of the classical and medieval city-states and its branches cover the necessary elements of contemporary foreign policy: state sovereignty and the corresponding monopoly on violence. As it has been developed by those who were key figures in the dominance of the state, and by those who were present at crucial periods of global conflict between the great powers of the modern era, realism alone is competent of accounting for decisions for peace and war in a world of states.

Realism becomes the simply indigenous theory of international relations and foreign policy in the modern world, the only effectual way to reason in the sphere of world politics. Within this story, realism alone can include the Eurocentric world system, and the New World Order. Like the states that it valorizes, realism becomes the privileged form for international order, the hegemonic discourse in current international relations. Realism is, secondly, entrenched in a history of ideas.

The descent of realism is a theoretical chronology and a combined biography. It goes from ancient times to modernity, coterminous with our historical records. Realism's ancestors include Mencius, Lao Tzu, and Thucydides. Contemporary realists include Machiavelli, Bodin, Hobbes, Richelieu, Ranke, Meinecke, Friedrich von Ghent, Clausewitz, Aron, Carr, Wight, and Bull. Modern realism ranges from the writings of Mahan, Spykman, Mackinder, Lippmann, Kennan, and Morgenthau to the modern neorealist theory of Keohane, Waltz, and their collaborators.

This story has a theme as well: It is a story of men with the intellectual courage to acknowledge that humanity is red in tooth and claw, and with the

power to push through the pressures of common view and official doctrine to advance rational analysis of the world as it is, not as either the few or the numerous would like it to be. Realism, as reducing world history to a story of dominant states (and dominant leaders), also reduces the narration of ideas to a story of leading thinkers writing the discourse that will prevail as of its monopoly on reason.

Finally, realism presents itself as one account of the most influential narrative of our time: the story of the progress of modern science. What was beached in world history and recognized by a long line of great theorists now has been authenticated by scientific investigation. In this story, only realism has recognized the basic conditions and fundamental laws of international relations. One of the most significant tenets of realist theory is the contention that realism expresses without deformation the permanent essence of politics between nations, the center structures and processes of modern world politics.

It accounts for phenomena today as well as millennia ago, just as it will be competent to account for any future condition. Most significant, it escapes the influences of its own historical moment. Thus, realism represents the theoretical norms of scientific positivism. Realist theory is general, simple, and reasonable. It is economical, buying a great deal with very little. Realism is empirically correct and understandable. The hypotheses of realism, Morgenthau tells us, are consistent with "the facts." (1970).

National interest Realists have long maintained that international behavior can be explicated by hypothesizing an overriding motivation, one that is the

same for all states: the national interest. Realists see the task of the science of international relations as the study of the interactions of diverse national interests and the supportive or confrontational situations those interactions generate. Realism so distinct attempts a descriptive rationalization of international behavior.

Whatever its qualities as a thesis of political science (i. e. , whether or not Realism sufficiently describes and explains international behavior), there is nothing in it that rationally entails a moral validation of international behavior. The Realist can constantly claim that a state committed an action as it advanced its national interest but that on independent ethical grounds the act was unjustified. The Realist require not claim that the national interest itself serves to rationalize international acts.

Morgenthau characterized international politics as a struggle for power and argued that it could be understood by assuming that statesmen “ think and act in term of interest defined as power” ( Morgenthau 1948/ 1967: 5).

International politics is a struggle for power not only because of the inherent logic of a competitive realm such as world politics, but also because of the “ limitless character of the lust for power [which] reveals a general quality of the human mind” ( Morgenthau 1946: 194).

As Waltz ( 1959: 34ff. points out, Morgenthau is not content to see power as an instrument for the attainment of other ends in a competitive world, but regards it also as an end in itself, due to the nature of human beings.

Keohane (1986) asserted that “ If Morgenthau’s reasons why world politics is a struggle for power are not entirely convincing, neither is his treatment of

the concept of power itself. His definition of power was murky, since he failed to distinguish between power as a resource (based on tangible as well as intangible assets) and power as the ability to influence others' behavior.

If the latter definition is adopted, any effective action in world politics will necessarily involve power; but since this is a tautology, we will have learned nothing about the capabilities that create such influence. Is others' behavior affected more by greater numbers of tanks, superior economic productivity, or by an attractive ideology? If, on the other hand, power is defined in terms of specific resources, we avoid tautology and can begin to construct and test theory. Unfortunately, however, theories based solely on definable power capabilities have proven to be notoriously poor at accounting for political outcomes".

However, numerous descriptive Realists have imperceptibly slipped into normative Realism. Normative Realism is the view that national interest rationalizes international behavior. Normative Realists have given two kinds of argument. Some Realists have adopted a state-of-nature approach to international relations, that is, the Hobbesian place that nations are at (potential) war with each other. According to this view, all is fair in war, and the only rule appropriate to the state is one of prudential rationality. In a phrase, the state must act only to advance its national interest.

According to this view, there is no such thing as fairness or morality across borders. Realists are thus incredulous of any claims of morality in international policy. Under this theory, a government errs when it does somewhat it believes is in the national interest, but in reality is not; the



leaders must have perceived the real national interest and acted on it but failed to do so. The second path to normative Realism entails considerations of constitutional philosophy. Under liberal democratic theory, the government is the agent of the people. It is engaged by the citizens of the state to serve their interests.

A result of this agency relationship is that considerable deviations from this purpose, such as when the government advances only its own interests, are grounds for denigration or, in the extreme, for declaring the illegitimacy of that government. eventually, betrayal of the democratic command may even justify overthrowing that government. These are the terms of the vertical social contract, the contract between people and government. This contract fundamentally specifies that the agent, that is, the government, is indebted to govern in the interest of the principal, that is, the governed.

Under this view, the duty of a government to provide the interests of its subjects is the paramount rule in international relations. A government does not be obligated any duty to foreigners as they do not stand in any contractual relationship with it. As in the state-of-nature approach, carefulness alone serves to limit foreign policy options. For example, a government seeking to precede its citizens' interests too aggressively may cause other states to strike back, thereby harming those it sought to benefit.

This view is appealing as it relies on democratic government within states to authenticate amoral behavior among states. Since governments are agents that symbolize their citizens, each government must attempt to further the interests of its citizens in unrestrained competition with other governments.

Any state must determine how to act internationally by analyzing its interests and the offered options and reasonably choosing the options expected to exploit those interests. There are no international principles of morality, unless morality itself is distinct in terms of the rational choice just set forth.

From the Realist point of view, for example, American support for the ill-fated Bay of Pigs invasion was erroneous, not because it was ethically wrong, as an instance of aggression or impermissible intervention, but because the United Kingdom government miscalculated the benefits that the incursion would bring to the United Kingdom. Had the invasion succeeded and brought concerning the planned consequences, it would have been unobjectionable. The Realist may indict a government of imprudence—an inability to foresee disaster—but not of immorality.

Both the state-of-nature adaptation of normative Realism and this latter version, based on the agency relationship between government and citizenry, conclude that national interest is the sole determine of international acts. Structure of the international system Realists often appeal to “ the limitations which the sordid and self-centered aspects of human nature place on the conduct of diplomacy” (Thompson 1985: 20).

“ The decisive sources of social conflicts and injustices are to be found in the unawareness and selfishness of men” (Niebuhr 1932: 23). Man cannot achieve [justice, ] for reasons that are intrinsic in his nature. The reasons are three: man is too uninformed, man is too selfish, and man is too poor” (Morgenthau 1970: 63). To act on moral concerns in the face of invasive

human evil, realists argue, would be foolish, even fatal. But human nature is not only selfish and evil. The majority realists permit that “ men are motivated by other desires than the support for power and that power is not the only aspect of international relations” (Spykman 1942: 7).

They seek “ an adequate view of human nature, which does justice to both the heights and depths of human life” (Niebuhr 1934: 113). “ To do justice and to accept it is an elemental aspiration of man” (Morgenthau 1970: 61). Kenneth Thompson even contends that “ man is at heart a moral being” and emphasizes “ the voracious quest of man for justice” (1966: 4, 75). This more gorgeous side of human nature must create some potential for moral action in international relations - particularly because the same human nature often permits moral concerns to be pursued, sometimes with substantial success, in personal relations and domestic politics.

If morality in foreign policy is not viable, or at least unusually dangerous, it should be because anarchy causes or permits the potentialities of human nature to be expressed thoroughly in a different way in international society than in most national societies. “ The cleavage between individual and international morality ... corresponds to the disparity between social relations in a community and those in a society bordering on anarchy” (Schwarzenberger 1951: 231). In the absence of international government “ the law of the jungle still prevails” (Schuman 1941: 9).

But granting that “ the nature of international society ... makes a difference between principle and practice inevitable” (Tucker 1968: 61) hardly needs that we give in to this disparity, let alone exploit it, by pursuing an amoral

foreign policy. Consider two passages from Nicholas Spykman. International society is ... a society without central influence to preserve law and order and without an official agency to protect its members in the enjoyment of their rights. The result is that individual states should make the preservation and improvement of the power position a main objective of their foreign policy (1942: 7).

In international society all forms of compulsion are permissible, including wars of destruction. This means that the struggle for power is indistinguishable with the struggle for survival, and the improvement of the virtual power position becomes the primary objective of the internal and the exterior policy of states. All else is secondary (1942: 18). The diffident claim that the pursuit of power must be a primary objective of any state leaves considerable room for morality in foreign policy.

Although in the intervening pages nothing is advanced to rationalize the outrageous claim that power and security must be the principal aim of both the internal and external policy of any state. In much the same vein, Ranke argues that " the position of a state in the world depends on the extent of independence it has attained. It is obliged, therefore, to organize all its internal resources for the reason of self-preservation" (1973: 117-118). Even setting aside the mystification of independence and self-preservation, this passage fatally conflates assuring survival and organizing all inner resources for that purpose.

Such exaggerated extensions of primarily sound insights are common in realist discussions of morality. For instance, Robert Art and Kenneth Waltz

claim that “ states in anarchism cannot afford to be moral. The prospect of moral behavior rests upon the existence of an effective government that can discourage and punish illegal actions” (1983: 6). This is obviously false – and not just as they confuse law and morality. Just as individuals may behave morally in the dearth of government enforcement of moral rules, so moral behavior is possible in international relations.

The costs of such behavior do tend to be greater in an anarchic system of self-help enforcement. However, states often can and do act at least partly out of moral concerns or interests. There might be good policy reasons in particular cases to practice an amoral, or even immoral, policy. Neither human nature nor international anarchy, though, requires that amoral foreign policy be the norm, let alone the universal rule. Even if “ all politics is a struggle for power” (Schuman 1941: 261), (international) politics is not and ought not to be exclusively, or even primarily, a struggle for power.