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## **Realist Tradition- Shaping the International Relations Theory Lens**

Stemming initially from different roots, International Relations became a discipline in where a vast array of perspectives collided. Liberal and Realist standpoints provide different insights, and accordingly it is a major fallacy to say that one standpoint will have ultimate supremacy in the discipline. This is mainly due to the nature that each perspective provides specific insight into a particular method of interpreting the perception one has of the political sphere. The Realist heritage is founded from Realpolitik, representing an American perspective of International Relations Theory. Realism allows the scholar to derive the interests of states, and also attests to the ability into how states act, co-act, and react in a landscape of anarchy. Although this insight holds weight, it wrought the counter argument for Liberals.

To restate the work not covered in class, Jervis claims that liberal reformers do not identify that Realism can provide logical conclusions to interactions of states. Perhaps it is a misinterpretation on the part of traditional Liberals to find that 'no one loves a political realist,' but that might come from the viewpoint that some Realists claim that anarchy will indefinitely bind states to prior circumstances. Although this is true at the current moment in human existence, Liberal reformers tend to oversimplify the utility that the Realist perspective offers International Relations Theory. Anarchy is not doomed to forever repeat. This paper will discuss (1) the historical perspective and foundation Realism has provided for understanding the complex relationship states have with other states and the structure of the states, (2) the validity Liberalism has in pinpointing other interests of study in IR Theory already conceded to overcomplicate the Realist

perspective, and (3) how the reinterpretation of the article by Hans Morgenthau, *Realist Theory of International Politics*, presented by Michael Williams in *Why Ideas Matter in International Relations: Hans Morgenthau, Classical Realism, and the Moral Construction of Power Politics*, and how it allows the Realist critique to describe more whilst fundamentally growing and maintaining the essential tradition of parsimony.

Through simple pinpointing of ideas, Kenneth Waltz set standards for the discipline. Arguing for parsimony and simplification, the understanding of complexity became simple. Although Waltz may not have always practiced his own standards, the ability to convey vast concepts is justifiably present in the Balance of Power Theory. Specifically in *Anarchic Orders and Balances of Power*, after cataclysmic events within the international structure between units, which are coined as agents by David Dessler, balance will be restored (Waltz). The relationship between states and the international system described by Waltz exists in anarchy; however, Waltz left incomplete sections due to the nature of simplification and did not meet his own standard of complete theory. In *What's At Stake in the Agent-Structure Debate*, Dessler completes the initial premise between agents and the structure by providing an apt description of the duality between agents and the structure. The agents refer to states, and the structure refers to the international system, where the states have an equal impact to the international system and vice versa (Dessler).

Alliance formation provides further progress in meeting the standard of explaining the balancing of power between states. Stephen Walt in *Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power*, suggests that American foreign policy should not hinder itself. In other words, alliance formation is a naturally occurring process so as to

happen quicker to more legitimate states. Foreign policy of legitimate states with the intention should aim towards universally accepted practices (Walt). Of course, historical context and perception can change due to the period in which work is written. All of the aforementioned articles were written prior to the end of the Cold War.

With a foundation for Realism presented, Robert Jervis in *Unipolarity: A Structural Perspective*, and William Wohlforth in *Unipolarity, Status Competition, and Great Power War* represent new Realist outlook. Both works, written in 2009, discuss the phenomenon known as unipolarity. Although both Wohlforth and Jervis have tendencies to focus on interactions between states, the conversation of Unipolarity from this Realist perception also relays ideas from Constructivist thought. Wohlforth, on one hand, recognizes that a decline in status, therefore the decline in a state, has a direct correlation on the stability of the structure. In fact, by directly tying together status and power, or identities and interests, a level is created by which Realism can advance itself along lines that Williams identified. Jervis, on the other hand, takes an entirely different approach. Collective security arrangements change when the international system experiences the loss of the unipolar state (Jervis). Constructivist epistemology has apparent impact Realist ontology.

Liberal thought, in a different light, does not convey the broad picture but instead focuses on the specifics in explicit instances. While useful, Liberalism is not Realism. Three examples are presented to exemplify this point. First, Michael Mastanduno presents the ideas that material goods are provided to the benefactor of a unipolar system in *System Maker and Privilege Taker: U.S. Power and the International Political Economy*. Even though this is important to answering specific questions that impact

events surrounding current matters, Mastanduno is unable to explain what impact this will have for the next unipolar state, in addition to whether or not the same concept applies in the case of another unipolar state. Parsimony is not achieved.

Second, Robert Keohane brings to light very valuable insight in *The Demand for International Regimes* which allow for vivid discussion about previously ignored trends; however, Keohane does not create a simple explanation. In fact, many questions are left unanswered that relate to the self-help environment of anarchy, social structure, and the relationship states have to a regime (Keohane). It is clear that regimes have a role in International Relations, but the regime concept has suggested many uneasy thoughts for the discipline which should be examined to greater length. Once again, parsimony is not achieved.

Lastly, Robert Putnam depicts a two level game in *Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games* which to backtrack, examines the relationship between actors on different levels of analysis. The domestic level has an impact on the international level and vice versa (Putnam). The main problem is that it a theory that applies game theory to different instances, and thus the game plays differently in each case study that it is used in for. Unfortunately, it provides little level of predictability, and misperception can completely change the game, therefore promoting poor decision making. Therefore, it is like a vast array of other Liberal works and does not meet the rigorous standards of parsimony.

When Waltz described the standards for International Relations Theory, the goal set was to create theory that would always hold relevance. Even though he did not meet this standard, it is still a good standard to hold the discipline to. Liberal theories are

precise and unambiguous, thus explaining in great detail a specific instance in the international political sphere. The place that Liberal theory has is justifiably important, and the role that Liberals carry would not be replaced by Realists with the same degree of elegance.

Michael Williams writes, intentionally or not, from a Realist ontology with Constructivist insight in *Why Ideas Matter in International Relations: Hans Morgenthau, Classical Realism, and the Moral Construction of Power Politics*. By helping to realign Realism within International Relations, Morgenthau is now able to be seen in a different light. In fact, the notion and importance of ideas could be one of the fundamental areas of study as has been a major framing tool for many scholars describing Unipolarity. Whilst Morgenthau was not seamless in the explanation, the ability to construe a unique and creative perspective allows the discipline to move forward (Williams).

A few major areas can now be scrutinized by Realists. Realists now have the ability to recognize that the cycle existing between states and the international system, or agents and structures, is not indefinite and does not necessarily repeat in the same manner. In other words, the cycle shifts. The shifting notion allows for a glimmer of hope. Above all, anarchy is not final and can therefore be deconstructed and/or reconstructed into a governed environment, but only Realists have the metaphorically complete tool box to understand and suggest a simple answer to this problem.