

1 Classic realism

5. september 2021

11:06

Chapter 1

- Meta-theory: Theories concerning the philosophy of social science - underlying assumptions of theories instead of specific events.
 - Ontology: theory of being: What is the world made of? What objects do we study?
 - Epistemology: Theory of knowledge: How do we come to have knowledge of the world?
 - Methodology: theory of methods: What methods do we use to unearth data and evidence?

Robert Jervis

Realism is a post-WW2 IR theory. It is pessimistic about the appeasement policies. Central to Morgenthau's analysis was, that all states acted based on their national interest, and the central national interest is power. Morgenthau never defined the concept of power

Politics Among Nations mentions some of the obvious sources of power, but not underlying sources of power. Morgenthau's conception of realism does not lead to any specific policy prescriptions or ways to do deep empirical research.

Instead his realism was one that told statesmen how to think, not what specific conclusions to reach.

He argued that his views on IP was based on and borne out by international history, and it made no sense to yield testable propositions from Morgenthau's realism theory. To M, it made no sense to try and equate the practice and study of politics with science.

Later realists criticized the lack of scientific method and claimed that realism had great limitations because of this. Scholars had to develop theories, if they wanted to go further. They needed to deduce testable propositions and thereby making deeper analysis to identify structures that could create a more consistent framework. This led the way to **neorealism (Waltz)**. The importance of power and the national interest is still stressed.

NR does not regard variations in domestic politics or decision-makers' beliefs and values as very important, because the international environment exerts sufficient compulsion on its members to ensure that their behaviour can only be marginally affected by these factors.

But because these variations are not regarded as important, NR omits a range of factors that Morgenthau felt were important - the role of morality, and statesmanship itself.

Both R and NR are descriptive and prescriptive. They simultaneously seek to explain how states behave right now AND how states should behave. Statesmen must follow the inevitable laws of international politics, as they are inevitable and it therefore makes no sense to pretend to behave otherwise.

A problem with the laws of realism being inevitable is that the theory then seems to be disconfirmed every time a state acts differently from the laws stated in realism.

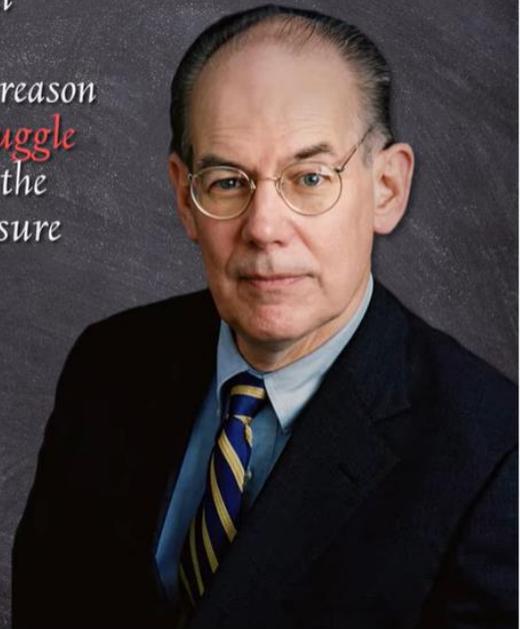
Realism is deeply rooted in material interests, and Morgenthau often implied that the national interest was objective. But he also put emphasis on concepts such as ideas, morality and diplomacy

Ideas

Realism paints a rather *grim picture* of world politics. The international system is portrayed as a brutal arena where states look for *opportunities to take advantage of each other*, and therefore have little reason to trust each other. Daily life is essentially a *struggle for power*, where each state strives not only to be the *most powerful actor in the system*, but also to ensure that no other state achieves this lofty position.

Mearsheimer, John J. "The False Promise of International Institutions." *International Security* 19, no. 3 (1994)

JOHN MEARSHEIMER
UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO



2 Structural realism

13. september 2021

09:42

International Relations Theories - Chapter 3 Structural Realism

Realists: Power is the currency of international politics - economic power, military power etc. It is important to make sure no other state has more power

- Realists: States want power because of human nature
- Structural realists: The structure of the international society forces states to strive towards power because no one is going to protect them
- **Defensive realists**
 - It is unwise for states to maximize their power, because the system will punish them if they gain too much
- **Offensive realists**

- Amount of Poles (uni- bi- og multipolar)
 - The distributions of capability can change over time
- Balancing
 - The key assumption that nations live in an anarchic world, states want to ensure their own survival
 - Major states balance other major states to prevent submission/annihilation
 - Two ways to ensure balance
 - Transforming your wealth to the military domain (internal balancing)
 - Make an alliance with other states (external balancing)
- Balancing: Defensive realism
 - Kenneth Waltz: states are pretty wise in how they balance. States respond to actions from other states
 - States seek to maximize **security** not **power**
 - In multipolarity states seek ally with weaker countries, because they are threatened by the stronger
 - In bipolarity - same as above, but usually with countries that make geographical sense
 - In unipolarity (after the cold war) the basic incentive is to balance against the hegemon (Denmark didn't do that, we bandwagoned with the hegemon)
- Offensive Neo-realism
 - John Mearsheimer: The Tragedy of Great Power Politics, 2001
 - 1989 was the end of the Cold war and bipolarity
 - Is the US a hegemon? Can US remain sole superpower? The kind of questions he is dealing with
 - **Five assumptions**
 - Great powers are the ones who really matters in the grand scheme of things
 - All states have offensive military capabilities - you can't have an only defensive military capability.
 - States can never be certain about other state's intentions (the security dilemma)
 - The main goal of states is survival (Old Realist legacy)
 - States are rational actors operating with imperfect information (and they sometimes make mistakes)
 - Power: Offensive neo-realism
 - Waltz: States are concerned with security. Mearsheimer: NO, they are concerned with maximizing power and achieve hegemony. You have to accumulate more power. This is a far more unstable world
 - Great powers can aim for regional hegemony
 - Continental vs. Insular powers -
 - Insular powers face fewer enemies than continental powers because of their geography. But it has not happened yet
 - The US is a hegemon, but it is a regional hegemon, and that position can probably be maintained even after unipolarity
 - They have their backs free geographically (Canada and Mexico are not a threat), no one is seriously trying to constrain them, and they face no fear of a border attack
 - Balancing: Offensive Neo-realism
 - This theory is applicable to major states only!
 - Aspiring for regional hegemony
 - China is trying to achieve regional hegemony in southern Asia

- International institutions was made under the assumption that it is possible to lock one another into institutional agreements that have been signed
 - Reduced temptation to cheat, because the other states will know about it
 - Cooperations may begin with agreements that require little of the nation, but then becomes greater and more difficult to handle, and then defection can seem to have significant benefits
 - Institutions can alleviate two important aspects of defection
 - Compliance - the extent to which states can be encouraged to abide by international agreements
 - Enforcement - the extent to which states can be forced into compliance and punished for not doing so
 - Compliance is encouraged because states are regularly evaluated in the international institutions
 - Issue linkage is an important aspect of compliance - issues become linked in international forums
 - Economic sanctions can be used as a way of enforcement, but are only effective if all relevant partners agree to do it
- Autonomy
 - Neoliberal assumption: International organizations are created by states to serve their self-interests.
 - BUT international organizations also act as norm setters and agenda setters in global politics - they are not neutral and solely act on the states' interests
 - They promote certain common, shared values, and some argue that they socialize states into global norms, which is a relatively powerful political agenda
 - Principal-agent theory
 - States (principals) delegate tasks and authority to international institutions as their independent representatives (agents)

Exercises

- States: How are states assumed to behave?
 - Cost-benefit analysis. If the benefits for the state is higher than the costs they will participate
 - They will maximize utilitarianism for themselves
 - It's about rational calculation
 - There is cooperation in the world - not to create a Kantian world, but to benefit those who cooperate
 - Neo-realists: Don't believe in cooperation, maybe to gang up on other states
 - Because states are self-interested they are predictable
 - English School: No, it depends on history. States have histories that they will build their behaviour on
 - Institutions are patterned practices, middle men, organizations, arenas where they can negotiate with other states. They shape what members do
 - Institutions can incentivize state behaviour, and a good design of an institution will allow states to maximize gains, because they will benefit from doing good things and lose from doing bad things. But states will only join that institution, if they can see the benefit

- Rationalists focus on how structures constrain, while structuralists focuses on how actors are not static but evolve over time and are able to change structures, because they are shaped by history, culture, politics and material circumstances
- Social facts
 - Rationalists: The world is static and actors are primarily concerned with their own interests
 - Constructivists: Interests are important, but are tied to the subject, as interests are created in a world of social meaning
 - Most objects in IR are social facts created in a certain context, they are not material or objective facts.
- Social cognition
 - Constructivism builds on the Weberian concept of **understanding (Verstehen)**, the hermeneutic theme that "action must always be understood from within".
 - Verstehen is the collective interpretations, practices, institutions of the actors themselves. Each individual thinks for themselves, but is based on collective knowledge

Constructivism as middle ground

C has been a middle ground between poststructuralism and rationalism approaches to IR (a ground shared with the English school)

C has an intersubjective ontology, meaning that it emphasizes norms, social agents and structures, but still has an epistemology close to positivism where it tests hypothesis, causality, and explanations. They are interested in finding the truth and bringing back the social aspect to IR theories.

Conventional constructivism is distinct from its more critical versions like post constructivism.

Shifting the middle ground

A constructivist epistemology, as part of the 'linguistic turn' in IR, builds in the notion that we cannot get behind our language to compare it with what it describes. Words are bound up in the world rather than a mirror of it.

A rationalist epistemology says that objects are there regardless of how we perceive them, and we use words to describe them, words are labels for objects. Words are a mirror

Approach or theory

Onuf (1989) argues that C is not a theory. If C is a theory, it is hard to build it on positivist epistemology, because it accepts a scientific reality

Consistent constructivism

There are two schools in constructivism, one that sees no problem with mainstream methods and one that understands constructivism as an approach with roots in the linguistic turn (this school is the most inconsistent with the role of languages on the one hand, and the question of causality on the other).

- Language and rules
 - The role of language has been mostly ignored in the debate between rationalists and constructivists, mostly to make a distance to poststructuralists and interpretive relativism.
 - An interpretation of language in the social ontology of constructivism should also occupy an epistemological middle ground.
 - Language can either be a mirror of the world or pure interpretation
 - In mainstream science language is a set of labels for the objective reality. For C, language is fundamentally social. We are socialized into it and in the process we do not simply learn words.

They have an ethical position - make the world better by showing the different power structures to enable people to change things. This is an implicit ethical stand

The Critical Attitude

They seek to deconstruct the way things are. In IP we take many things for granted, we have to question the way things are.

De-naturalise: the way things are is not a given, it is not neutral.

We need to do that because everything in IP rests on a certain understanding.

If we do this we can build new and better practices resulting in a better world. This is more explicit in some PS than in other

PS' Critique of IP

PS criticise the mainstream (realism, liberalism etc.)

Realists: "We are just describing and theorizing IP, we are just a tool, and we are open so you can prove us wrong."

PS: "No, you create and constitute identities, actors, roles. They construct, legitimize and justify power"

When states are described as rational actors, they also justify what is done is rational.

Problems with Positivism

Empiricism does not work for the social sciences. There is not an independent external world in IP. Knowledge is mind-dependent (a table is only a table because we conceptualize it in a certain way). We don't have a universal language, it's not a transparent medium. It constructs selves and others.

There are no "naked facts". Knowledge is always infused with a power relationship.

Positivism aims to uncover social laws. PS says that we cannot have uncovering laws in social science, because we have a mind that changes, reflects, takes new positions, reads new things.

Knowledge cannot be separated from the person that produces it (this is situated knowledge). It is not something we can "discover".

Mind-dependence and Independence

PS say that knowledge is mind-dependent. Objects exist, also when you don't think about it. But they cannot substitute themselves as object without discourse. It is the concept of a table that allows us to think and reflect about it. Our describing of the world is political (reflectivism).

Mind-independent would say that concepts for them describe the world - it doesn't make it. Our describing of the world is neutral (rationalism).

Anti-foundationalism

Foundationalism: The more facts we have, the more we can verify that a point is correct

Anti-foundationalism: We exist in discourse, we cannot step outside of it to verify a statement. The statement itself exists in a discourse. E.g. there's no way of stepping outside of mathematics to verify a mathematical statement. We have to stay inside the mathematical discourse in order to verify it. It can only be verified within this discourse.

Linguistic Structuralism