Chapter 1 Realism

The rest of this work will explore the analytical matrices just outlined as well as the modernist context they articulate. It will explore the main discourses that analysts and practitioners use in talking about world affairs as well as some of the analytical dialects. "Classical" accounts of each discourse will be compared with "neo-" or hyper-accounts. The "neo-" or hyper-account will be the more abstract account and as such will typically (but not always) post-date the "classical" one.

Analysts and practitioners talk about world affairs in their preferred and particular ways. Doing this without an overview of all the analytical languages (and dialects) that it is possible to use, however, means being an unwitting spokesperson for a particular point of view.

Non-analysts and non-practitioners hear such talk in turn but without an awareness of the constraints as well as the strengths of what they hear. As a result they readily become proponents of one or another such articulations. They find themselves unwittingly promoting a point of view they uncritically understand.

This work is an attempt to provide the requisite awareness of such strengths and constraints. However, because it is only an overview there is a limit to how detailed it can be. There is a limit to the background it can provide to each account.

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This is not considered here to be a critical concern, since the point of this work lies not in the detail it provides but in how well it is able to locate the discipline's analytical languages and dialects in relation to each other and in relation to the pattern they represent as a whole. To be comprehensive, this pattern has to provide a systematic account of all these languages. It has to provide not a complex account of any particular analytical language or a close scrutiny capable of satisfying specialists who want to see every doctrinal nuance included and discussed but rather a summary account of all analytic languages and dialects, mapped with regard to their underlying assumptions.

Classical Realism

When we confront world affairs, we are typically faced, first and foremost, with issues of international violence. Issues of this kind are highly dramatic. They loom large in the history of the subject and they continue to dog a wide range of inter- and intra-national relations. They are not, as it happens, necessarily the most important issues in the discipline (marxists, for example, would cite modes of production as being more significant) but for those caught up in the events that they involve, they can certainly seem so.

International violence can be talked about in the terms provided by every one of the analytical languages outlined in the matrices in the Introduction, as well as by those doctrines that stand outside these matrices. This represents a wide range of possible points of view, each one of which has something potentially important to say.

Because of its pessimism with regard to human nature, however, and its politico-strategic (state-centered) focus, classical realism is the doctrine most closely associated with international violence. Classical realists talk about the world in kill-or-be-killed, dog-eat-dog terms. Classical realists are also prepared actively to countenance violence to preserve the sovereign state. It is the state, they argue, that is a people's best defense against the ungoverned nature of the state system. This draws them into discussions of international violence much as liberals are drawn into discussions of the market or constructivists are drawn

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into discussions of ideas and norms or feminists are drawn into discussions of gender analysis.

One of the most frequent accounts of what is considered to be classical realism is the one Thucydides provides in Book 5, Chapter 17 of his *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. There is some debate about whether the historical circumstances of his day warrant parallels being drawn that pertain to the present. Since the story Thucydides tells is cited so often, however, it is worth recounting here.

In the fifth century BC, the Athenians invaded the island of Melos. After invading, the Athenians invited the Melians to submit and become tributary allies or fight and face ruin. In the words of Thucydides, the Athenians said: "you know as well as we do that right … is only in question between equals in power … the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must". The Melians asked for the "privilege of being allowed … to invoke what is fair and right", to which the Athenians responded by offering only the advantage of submitting or suffering the worst. The Melians subsequently said they would be neutral. The Athenians declined this guarantee because they said that it would make them look weak. The Melians then argued that Athenian aggression was only likely to inspire others to become their enemies. The Athenians said they did not care. The Melians tried another tack, suggesting they would be cowards to submit. The Athenians pointed out that the contest was not an equal one and that given the far superior strength of the Athenians it was Melian self-preservation, not Melian shame, that should be the Melians' main concern. The latter responded by arguing that they might still prevail and that hope was better than despair. However, the Athenians called hope "danger's comforter"; they told the Melians to stop deluding themselves. At which point the Melians cited an alliance with the Lacedaemonians as providing the rational basis for their hope. The Athenians said the Lacedaemonians were too pragmatic to come but the Melians cited this same pragmatism as the basis for their confidence that they would. The Athenians demurred citing Athenian control of the seas as a good reason why they would not. The Melians tried to debate how much control the Athenians had in this regard but the Athenians simply reminded them of the scarcity of Melian

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resources, the need for the Melians to be prudent, and to eschew any "idea of disgrace … [I]t is certain" they concluded "that those who do not yield to their equals, who keep terms with their superiors, and are moderate towards their inferiors, on the whole succeed best". When the debate ended, the Athenians withdrew. The Melians decided to remain resolute and fight on. After some unspecified treachery, they lost the siege, the Melian men lost their lives, and their women and children became slaves (Thucydides, 2008 [416 BC]).

Despite contemporary misgivings we can see in what Thucydides said the basic elements of a classically realist reading of international relations. We can see the focus on independent politico-strategic entities, in this case, an autonomous island and an imperially minded city-state. We can see the focus on human nature as fundamental. In addition, we can see a pessimistic account of this human nature, namely, that it prompts "men" to seek to rule whenever and wherever they can. Thucydides saw these elements as perennial. As the Athenians pointed out:

> … it is not as if we were the first to make this law, or to act upon it when made: we found it existing before us, and shall leave it to exist forever after us; all we do is to make use of it, knowing that you and everybody else, having the same power as we have, would do the same as we do. (Thucydides, 2008 [416 BC])

In the story that Thucydides told, an imperial city-state with superior power compelled compliance by overwhelming a weaker people. The Athenians with their military might managed to prevail. There are two forms of might, in other words, with those possessing the more martial form likely to emerge victorious.

Why this account continues to resonate as a key way to talk about international relations, however, is because there are two forms of right as well as two forms of might. One form of right articulates the Athenian doctrine that might is all that matters. Like the steady beat of a military drum, the Athenians kept saying that their victims should surrender and they would do what they wanted to do simply because they could. The other form articulates the Melians' preparedness to

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argue, in the face of the Athenian force, in favor of fairness, reciprocity, the possibility of neutrality, the desire not to seem cowardly, the hope that allies would intervene, and the interest that the invaders themselves might have in other than mere victory.

The great strength of classical realism is that it articulates a singular truth about world affairs, namely, the importance of strategic power. There is ample reason from the historical record to acknowledge this truth and as a consequence, ample cause to be pessimistic about human nature. Taken together with a regional or global system made up of autonomous strategic (military and diplomatic) actors, and constant vigilance and eternal suspicion would seem to be — at least in part — a necessary and perennial policy response.

The great weakness of classical realism is that the truth it supposes is not as singular as it might appear. Military power is not the only factor of importance in international relations. There is ample reason from the historical record to acknowledge alternatives and ample cause to be more optimistic about human nature or to highlight human nurturing practices instead. There are also actors other than state or state-like ones. This suggests that there might be other ways of organizing the world than one centered on the state.

What do we find two and half millennia later in this regard? What we find is classical realism still being articulated as a perennial truth about human nature and strategic autonomy. Nothing has radically changed. If we look around the contemporary world in the light of this discourse, we find people talking in the same way. Classical realism, in other words, remains the dominant account of international relations to this day.

One who exemplifies very well the contemporary reading of this discourse is Hans Morgenthau. He has famous antecedents such as Niccolo Machiavelli (Machiavelli, 1961 [1514]) and Thomas Hobbes (Hobbes, 1968 [1651]) but Morgenthau stands out as the most prominent heir in the present-day to Thucydides.

Morgenthau was born in Germany just after the turn of the twentieth century. He was educated there as a lawyer, but he fled from Hitler in the 1930s. He subsequently went to the United States where he had a distinguished career as an academic as well as an advisor to

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the Departments of State and Defense. For a generation his text, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, became the standard work for analysts of world affairs.

In his text-book, Morgenthau provided an account of international relations as a discipline based on "human nature as it actually is", hence his claim that his perspective was one of "realism" (Morgenthau, 1973 [1948], p. 4). This is an ingenious piece of concept-capture since calling his perspective "realism" allowed him to make every other perspective look unreal, thereby consigning the rest of the discipline to a utopian or idealist penumbra. What Morgenthau failed to appreciate, or tried to conceal, is that there are other accounts of human nature as it "actually is", and that these accounts differ from his in what they say human nature happens to be. Moreover, some of them are not as pessimistic as the one he chose to endorse. Nor does this make the other accounts less realistic. Indeed, it is worth noting in the light of Morgenthau's "realism" how he idealized a state-centric approach to international relations. This made him an "idealist", or at least, no less of an idealist than those his realism was meant to marginalize.

Morgenthau's text began by spelling out six fundamental principles, namely, that politics is governed by "objective laws that have their roots in human nature"; that international relations primarily involve the "concept of interest defined in terms of power"; that interest defined as power is "an objective category which is universally valid" (though its meaning as a concept is not fixed "once and for all"); that the "moral significance of political action" remains a key feature of political action (and particularly the moral significance of prudence, which is where political action is judged by its political consequences); that for a particular nation to identify its moral aspirations with the "moral laws that govern the universe" is "indefensible"; and that the difference between political realism and other schools of thought is "real, and … profound" (Morgenthau, 1973 [1948], pp. 4–11).

Since Morgenthau's first principle depicts politics in general (and international relations in particular) as being determined by human nature, he belongs in the first matrix. All politics, including

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international politics, he saw as being a consequence of how we arrive in this world rather than what we subsequently learn to be having arrived here.

Morgenthau was also highly pessimistic with regard to human nature. For example, he saw our "elemental bio-psychological" drives in terms of a desire to "live … propagate, and … dominate". These drives are "common to all men [sic]", he said. (Morgenthau, 1973 [1948], p. 34). They are even, he observed in a footnote, characteristic of animals such as "chickens and monkeys", who like human beings create "social hierarchies" based on "will and the ability to dominate" (Morgenthau, 1973 [1948], p. 34, fn. 5).

This pessimism apropos human nature, together with a clear focus on the sovereign state, places Morgenthau in the first quadrant of the first matrix (Morgenthau, 1973 [1948], pp. 307–323, 482). This is what makes it possible to characterize him so readily as a classical realist.

With regard to human nature Morgenthau went on to say that:

> Even though anthropologists have shown that certain primitive peoples seem to be free from the desire for power, nobody has yet shown how their state of mind and the conditions under which they live can be recreated on a worldwide scale so as to eliminate the struggle for power from the international scene. It would be useless and even self-destructive to free one or the other of the peoples of the earth from the desire for power while leaving it extant in others. If the desire for power cannot be abolished everywhere in the world, those who might be cured would simply fall victims to the power of others. (Morgenthau, 1973 [1948], p. 34)

Morgenthau's reference to anthropology was a reference to an article by his colleague at the University of Chicago, Malcolm Sharp. This article was a survey of the anthropological literature of the day. It concluded that human beings are fundamentally a violent species since only one of the groups surveyed by Sharp — the Todas of India — he deemed to be pacific. As a consequence, Sharp said that humankind was indestructibly homicidal (Sharp, 1947).

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Morgenthau based his entire analysis on this one article (Morgenthau, 1973 [1948], p. 34, fn. 4). If all but one of the world's people are warlike, he argued by inference that humankind itself is warlike and we must be pessimistic about our prospects of acting in other than violent ways.

Substantiating his argument like this, i.e., citing a single article that agreed with his particular viewpoint which he then tucked away in a footnote and referred to entirely uncritically, does not seem a very scholarly way to proceed. At the very least one expects a more complete survey of the academic literature pertaining to this fundamental point.

Nor does this seem consistent with what Morgenthau himself declared to be the "first lesson" that the student of international relations should learn, namely, how complex international relations are, and how reducing them to "simple solutions and trustworthy prophecies" is well-nigh "impossible". Indeed, in discussing the science of international politics, Morgenthau noted how in "every political situation contradictory tendencies are at play", and that trying to tell which tendency will prevail is "anybody's guess". As a consequence, "[t]he best the scholar can do", he said, "… is to trace the different tendencies that, as potentialities, are inherent in a certain international situation. He can point out the different conditions that make it more likely for one tendency to prevail than for another and, finally, assess the probabilities for the different conditions and tendencies to prevail in actuality …" but he cannot do any better than this (Morgenthau, 1973 [1948], p. 21).

As a classical realist Morgenthau saw international relations in terms of a "struggle for power". This struggle was not only "universal in time and space" and an "undeniable fact of experience …" but also posed a perennial dilemma for those who want peace (Morgenthau, 1973 [1948], pp. 27, 34). He saw the subject in terms of power politics, in other words, and power politics in terms of "control over the minds and actions" of others. This control was a "psychological relation" that came from "the expectation of benefits, the fear of disadvantages, [and] … respect or love for men or institutions". As such, power can be distinguished from force or influence; can be usable or unusable; and can be legitimate or illegitimate. Thus,

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Morgenthau saw a difference between military power, where physical violence takes the place of any psychological relationship, and diplomatic power, where the latter relationship is still in evidence. The latter he saw as political, that is. The former he did not (Morgenthau, 1973 [1948], pp. 28, 29).

As a classical realist Morgenthau focused on power in its most state-centered and competitive forms, which meant that he did not think of nations as "normally" engaged in international relations when they concluded something like an extradition treaty with other nations, for example, or when they exchanged "goods and services" with other nations or cooperated with them to provide "relief from natural catastrophes" or promoted the "distribution of cultural achievements …" (Morgenthau, 1973 [1948], p. 28). Because of his state-centricity he also highlighted such issues as "national power", the "roots of modern nationalism", "national character", "national morale", as well as the balance of power that results from "several nations, each trying either to maintain or overthrow the status quo …" (Morgenthau, 1973 [1948], pp. 104, 106, 128, 135, 170).

While such a focus makes sense from a classical realist view of the world, it is quite an extraordinary focus when we consider what a "normal" account of international relations might actually require. Morgenthau's perspective prompted him to dismiss out of hand, for example, what he called "economic" theories of imperialism. All such theories, he said, "fail the test of historic experience". Capitalists, he argued quite categorically, are "not imperialists" (Morgenthau, 1973 [1948], pp. 50, 52). Such a blanket dismissal of analytic doctrines such as the liberalist, marxist, neo-marxist, and meta-marxist ones, however, is misleading at best and presumptuous at worst. Even Morgenthau could not sustain such a dismissal indefinitely, which is why he was eventually obliged to talk not only of military imperialism but of economic and cultural imperialism too (Morgenthau, 1973 [1948], pp. 60–64).

Morgenthau did acknowledge limits to the crudest kinds of realism. A world that subscribes only to the morality that might-makes-right will ultimately prove "impotent and self-destructive", he said. Hence, the attempt to mitigate the struggle for power among nations using

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global public opinion and international law (Morgenthau, 1973 [1948], pp. 226, 227, 229). Mitigation included the way war is no longer seen as being between "whole populations", as it was before the Thirty Years' War, but rather as being between "armed forces". This created a distinction, he observed, between combatants and non-combatants, which is now one of the "fundamental legal and moral principles governing the actions of [contemporary] belligerents". The Hague Conventions on the Laws and Customs of War on Land (1899 and 1907) and the Geneva Convention (1949) have given legal sanction to this moral sentiment and have received global endorsement as such. Indeed, since the middle of the 19th century there has been a whole raft of treaties "humanizing warfare", seeking to secure "human treatment of prisoners of war", for example, and generally condemning war, on moral grounds, as a political "evil" (Morgenthau, 1973 [1948], pp. 235–237).

At the same time Morgenthau noted the total character of contemporary war and the negative effect this has had on people's moral inhibitions. "Mass armies" that have the support of the "productive effort of the majority of the civilian population" are now much more the norm, he said, which makes defeat of civilian populations just as significant as the defeat of armed forces. This trend has been exacerbated by the impersonality of the way in which wars are now waged. Contemporary technologies, he pointed out, have made it possible to objectify and reify adversaries to an extraordinary degree. The result is a world where state-makers are becoming less rather than more constrained by a universal morality that is not might-making-right. At the same time Morgenthau noted the effect of a more democratic world and the dismantling of an international society governed by aristocrats. This has served, he said, to render more civilized international moral restraints a mere "fiction", though he saw nationalism as the main culprit when it came to accounting for the destruction of the international society that previously made universal ethics of a less competitive kind possible. "Most individuals today", he said, resolve the conflict between "supranational and national ethics" in favor of "loyalty to the nation" (Morgenthau, 1973 [1948], pp. 238–240, 246, 251).

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Again, while such a conclusion makes sense from a classically realist perspective, it says nothing about the liberalist doctrine of universal human rights, for example. There is no entry in the index to Morgenthau's text on human rights and there is no discussion of it in the text itself. This is bizarre given the international significance of this doctrine. Human rights claims are regularly made globally to articulate liberalist standards of moral behavior and to define moral responsibilities of a cosmopolitan kind. They are a key feature of world public opinion and to say that an appeal to the "… conscience of mankind" or to those standards "shared by men [sic] everywhere" is to appeal to "nothing real" in that it "only yields to the general tendency … to raise a particular national conception of morality to the dignity of universal laws binding upon all mankind" is to ignore the extent to which liberal internationalists and liberal individualists have managed to bring a very different universalist morality into being (Morgenthau, 1973 [1948], p. 267).

Morgenthau did acknowledge the existence of international law but as a classical realist he saw national legal systems as being more effective than international ones and certainly more effective when it came to regulating the international struggle for power. He also acknowledged that international violence could be brought to an end by having a world state, though this would require a world community, he said, "willing and able to support it" of the kind that institutions such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) try to create. As a classical realist Morgenthau saw UNESCO laboring under a "basic fallacy" in this regard, namely, that the more people understand each other the less likely they will be to go to war. This was false, he said, because more understanding was likely to lead to more of a reason for conflict, not less of a one. Nor need misunderstandings be "imaginary". They are often the result of real concerns (Morgenthau, 1973 [1948], pp. 273, 493, 501–502).

Once again, while Morgenthau's case makes sense from a classically realist perspective it radically understates the significance of the role international law and international organizations arguably play in international relations. At the same time, it says nothing about

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transnational corporations. Indeed, Morgenthau wrote these off from the beginning by choosing to ignore the world political economy. He had nothing to say about global social movements either or the sorts of issues raised by the globalization of the modernist culture that underpins classical realism or the issues raised by those marginalized by global modernism such as women, indigenous peoples, post-colonials, environmentalists, and the poor. Nor did he consider the significance for international relations of religion, except in a historical sense. He certainly did not consider any of the auto-critiques of modernist culture, preferring to stay with an account of international politics that highlighted national interest and the struggle for power.

It is worth noting where Morgenthau's text ends. Since classical realists highlight the military and the diplomatic aspects of statism, those analysts or practitioners who do not want to exercise the military option are left with the diplomatic one. Morgenthau was no warmonger and it is no surprise, therefore, to find him finishing his text with two chapters on diplomacy, the last being a mini-manual on how to be a good diplomat. It is only by using diplomacy, he said, that we can build the sort of world community that will make a world state and a permanent peace possible (Morgenthau, 1973 [1948], pp. 519–550).

Compare at this point the democratic peace thesis, which posits a very different reading of how to achieve stability. Liberalists say that democracies tend not to fight each other (Doyle, 1997). This does not mean that democracies are always peaceful, or that non-democracies are less peaceful than democracies. Indeed, democratic states seem to be just as violent and war-prone as non-democratic states. Over the last two centuries, however, democracies seem rarely to have clashed with one another in violent or potentially violent ways. They seem to have virtually never fought one another in a full-scale international war. There seems to be something about being a democracy, in other words, that stops it from fighting other democracies, even though it is just as likely to be involved in violent conflicts as non-democracies are.

The democratic peace thesis was first proposed by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (Kant, 1795). To Kant "perpetual peace"

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would be the consequence of having constitutional republics, a federation of free states, and a cosmopolitan commitment to the principle of universal hospitality. Having constitutional republics would not, Kant thought, guarantee peace by itself, though it would mean that only those wars that citizens supported would be likely to occur. It would also introduce restraint on those governments responsible to what their people feel. A federation of free states, Kant thought, would make for an environment where the resort to arms as a way of settling disputes would become literally unthinkable. Kant thought that a cosmopolitan commitment to hospitality would allow universal cooperation of the kind universal peace would require. In a supplement to this treatise, he also highlighted material incentives. In order to benefit from the prosperity that markets make possible, he said it is necessary to have a peaceful political environment rather than a war-torn one. Or as he put it:

> … the spirit of commerce … sooner or later gains the upper hand in every state. As the power of money is perhaps the most dependable of all the powers … states see themselves forced, without any moral urge, to promote honorable peace and by mediation to prevent war wherever it threatens to break out. (Kant, 1795 First Supplement, Part 3)

Kant knew that democracies are not necessarily peaceful. Indeed, he distrusted unfettered majorities. He was very much one of those who for "two thousand years before the modern age" associated "popular rule … with aggressiveness … or imperial success" (Doyle, 1997, p. 287). However, the three principles pronounced above, he thought, taken together, should be sufficient to bring an end to international war.

Kant's prescription was restated by Dean Babst in 1972 (Babst, 1972). It has been tested many times since and to quote Jack Levy, now comes as "close as anything we have to an empirical law in international relations" (Levy, 1988, p. 662). Zeev Maoz and Bruce Russett call it "probably one of the most significant nontrivial products of the scientific study of world politics" (Maoz and Russett,

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1993, p. 624). While there remain issues defining just what constitutes a democracy and just what constitutes peace, one summary of early attempts to test this thesis concludes:

> … Democracies are less likely than non-democracies to become involved in crises, though once in a crisis, violence — even against other democracies — is not precluded … Democracies have undertaken foreign interventions against fellow democracies, although they have always refrained from full-scale war … [O]nce in war, democracies are not restrained from inflicting high casualties … [however, n]ormative expectations of the democratic peace find empirical support in the tendency for democracies to enter into alliances, to keep their treaty commitments, to accept third-party mediation, and to settle disputes by negotiation …. (Chan, 1997, pp. 82–84)

This has significant implications for classical realism. It suggests that talking about international relations in classically realist terms alone is likely to mislead global audiences, whether this audience is composed of analysts or practitioners. If global non-violence follows from having a world of democracies then we have a very different way of bringing about world peace. We do not, as classical realists say, have to rely on balances of power or the appropriate diplomacy to provide us with non-war. We need only foster the spread of the sort of regimes where governments are hired or fired.

Neo-Realism (or Hyper- or "Structural Realism")

Thirty years after Morgenthau wrote his widely taught text, Kenneth Waltz wrote a *Theory of International Politics.* In this work he tried to remedy the deficiencies of all other theories, including the deficiencies of classical realism (Waltz, 1979).

Waltz saw Morgenthau as a first-order modernist. As such he saw him as being prepared to objectify international relations and to talk about it in an abstract way but as not being prepared to go any further. He saw him as being prepared to engage in theorizing of a kind that was systematic but not scientific.

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By contrast Waltz saw himself as a second-order modernist who sought to meet the standards of the "philosophy-of-science". Second-order modernists use the idea of "theory" in the same way natural scientists do or social scientists such as economists do (Waltz, 1979, p. 6). As such Waltz recommended describing and explaining international relations in a much more rigorous way. Indeed, he sought the most reliable knowledge about the subject possible, which to his way of thinking was the kind of knowledge arrived at using the hypothetico-deductive method (Waltz, 1979, p. 13).

This made Waltz a proponent of the "behavioralist" revolution. It made his work an attempt to depict non-hypothetico-deductive analyses such as Morgenthau's as "traditionalist".

Behavioralism was an artifact of the Cold War. It was an attempt to generate knowledge sufficiently reliable to allow the kind of prediction and control that would permit the United States to prevail over the Soviet Union. It was also, however, part of a more radical move to take the scientific revolution from the Old World and to demonstrate the superior methodological rigor possible in the New.

To explore further what second-order modernism meant, Waltz contrasted the way theories take a "reductionist" as opposed to a "systemic" form. Reductionist theories explain wholes by exploring their parts and their interaction. Systemic theories explain wholes by exploring how they work at their own level (Waltz, 1979, p. 18).

As an example of reductionist theories, Waltz cited the economic explanations of imperialism developed by Hobson and Lenin. These, he believed, were the "most impressive" of such theories, though in his opinion they failed to satisfy the criteria for success that being a theory ultimately required (Waltz, 1979, p. 19).

As an example of systemic theories he cited the political explanations of international relations developed by Rosecrance, Hoffmann, and Kaplan. He was not satisfied with these either, however (Waltz, 1979, p. 50).

Waltz preferred systemic theories. Firstly, he believed that "propositions at the unit level do not account for the phenomena observed at the systems level", or in other words, that "[i]t is not possible to understand world politics simply by looking inside states"

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(Waltz, 1979, pp. 65, 69). Secondly, he noted the "striking sameness in the quality of international life throughout the millennia …" and that in attempting to understand this sameness, we find a seeming paradox, namely, a "variety of actors" whose varied actions are "… not matched by the variety of outcomes". This paradox was resolved, for Waltz, by assuming that "systemic causes are in play" (Waltz, 1979, p. 65). Thirdly, systemic theories allowed Waltz to depict international politics as a discrete domain, i.e., to view international politics as being basically different from the "economic, social, and other" international domains (Waltz, 1979, p. 79).

As a system, Waltz saw international relations as being structured in anarchic terms, since it manifest "order without an orderer" or "organizational effects where formal organization is lacking". The analogy he offered was that of microeconomics (Waltz, 1979, p. 89). Later, he went on to explore in detail what anarchy meant and how anarchic systems change, but his basic assumption was that "[b]ecause some states may at any time use force, all states must be prepared to do so — or live at the mercy of their militarily more vigorous neighbors" (Note the similarity to what Thucydides says here). International politics are basically competitive, Waltz said, because "[a]mong states, the state of nature is a state of war". More radically, he argued, "[a]mong men [sic], as among states … the absence of government … is associated with the occurrence of violence". For him men were violent, peace was only ever a lull between wars, and the international system was basically one of "self-help" (Waltz, 1979, pp. 102, 104, 117).

As a self-help system, the most distinctive political theory of world affairs was that of the balance of power. Testing such a theory was not simple, however, particularly given the standard that Waltz set at the beginning of his study for establishing what was most reliable in this regard. He thought it could be done, though, if the testing process was rigorous enough (Waltz, 1979, pp. 124–125).

As well as being anarchic, Waltz noted how the international political domain was structured in state-centric terms and how, despite their diversity, states were "like units". He did concede that there were other international actors, such as corporations and transnational

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movements, but as far as he was concerned states were the major players in international politics.

This made the state system by definition the predominant international political system. Again, he made an analogy with economics in that economists define markets in terms of firms while he defined international politics in terms of states. As to states being basically similar, this meant describing any particular state as an "autonomous political unit" or "sovereign". States might vary in their capacity to do what states do, but they were the same, Waltz said, in the "tasks … they face" and the extent to which they duplicated each other's activities (Waltz, 1979, pp. 93, 94, 96–97).

Finally, Waltz noted how the international political domain was characterized not only by state similarity but also by a system-wide "distribution of capabilities". Because of this distribution, "groupings of states … tell us something about how states are placed in the system". The general picture, in other words, was a "positional" one, where a description of the "ordered overall arrangement …" should be read in terms of the "placement of units" rather than in terms of their individual qualities. Once again, he used market theory to explain what he meant (Waltz, 1979, p. 98).

With regard to the "distribution of capabilities", Waltz wanted to know if we would prefer "larger or smaller numbers of great powers", though to do that he had to first demonstrate that such a preference matters and that we should not be seeing the world in terms of systemic interdependence instead. His conclusion was that systemic interdependence is low regardless of a palpable growth in the number of non-state actors, the advent of multi-polarity and the emergence of common problems such as pollution and resource depletion. Indeed, he saw the "myth" of interdependence as obscuring the "realities" of international politics, which he saw as being a world of gross inequality and "bristling nationalisms", where a few states benefit and most do not. His conclusion with regard to the preferred number of great powers is that the smaller the better and that two was best since "[t]wo great powers can deal with each other better than more can" (Waltz, 1979, pp. 129, 138, 139, 158–160, 193).

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Waltz did not, to be fair, ignore the "management" of world affairs, but his preoccupation with bipolarity prompted him to question any change to a bipolar system, for example, he questioned any advantage in having a united Europe. As to the most powerful nation on the planet, he concluded that the United States had "overmanaged" world affairs since the end of World War II. He saw it as having a unique role to play in world affairs but in line with his assumptions, he remained wary of how a great power like this could constructively manage international affairs, particularly as the system changed (Waltz, 1979, pp. 207, 210).

So, Waltz was state-centric, pessimistic about human nature, and saw the international system as competitive. In the conventional parlance of international relations, this makes him a realist.

He subsequently went on to locate the key cause of international competition in the self-help logic of the state system as a whole. This makes him a structural or neo-realist.

In trying to be so abstract, however, Waltz ended up seeking a degree of scientific rigor that is ultimately unconvincing. In falling short of using the most uncompromising version of the hypothetico-deductive method, he ended up being no more persuasive than someone less ambitious in this regard; someone such as Hans Morgenthau.

When we look at Waltz as a realist, the assumptions that he makes about states and human nature allow us not only to anticipate what he says about international relations but also what he does not say. Realism has both strengths and weaknesses. It describes and explains international relations from a particular perspective and there is no denying the importance of that perspective. It only tells part of the truth, however. It does not tell the whole truth. It is not able to deny the importance of other perspectives and what they offer in terms of the analysis and practice of world affairs.

For example, in realist parlance, international politics is a separate domain. Consistent with realist talk of world affairs, Waltz wanted us to see politics there as being separate from economics, the social, the cultural, and the sacral.

What if politics is not separate, however? What if it is ubiquitous? What if — as the propensity to get our own way — we find politics

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everywhere, that is, in families, institutions, countries, and the world? Then the attempt by Waltz to confine international politics to the realm of the state has to be abandoned. We still have that realm but we have to re-describe it as the politico-strategic realm, that is, the military and diplomatic realm. By defining politics as wanting to get our own way, in other words, we acknowledge the need to talk about international politics more extensively. For example, we acknowledge the need to talk about politics (as Waltz does not) as pertaining to its politico-economic dimension and its politico-social one.

As a realist focused upon states and violence, Waltz was also preoccupied with the balance of power. He saw this as being the key device for ordering the state system.

What if this is only part of the story, however? What if the mode of production is just as important in describing and explaining how international relations are ordered (as marxists and meta-marxists say)? What if ideas and values matter just as much in this regard (as the constructivists say)? What if we should be reading the subject in terms of gender or the environment or indigeneity or post-colonialism or poverty (as those marginalized by the modernist project say)? What if the modernist project itself is at issue (as the postmodernists, the poststructuralists, the psychopathologists, the romantics, the phenomenologists, and the sacralists say)?

The way Waltz talks leaves most of this unsaid. Indeed, it actively occludes most of what could be said in this regard. The strength of neo-realism, as with that of classical realism, is in the part of the truth about international relations that it helps reveal. The weakness of neo-realism, however, as with that of classical realism, lies in all those parts of the truth that it helps conceal.

Conclusion

To talk about world affairs in terms of classical realism or neo-realism is to talk about the subject assuming the worst about human nature. It also means still seeing the sovereign state as the key unit of analysis. Neo-realism is a more abstract version of classical realism, one that focuses on the anarchic structure of the state system as a whole and the

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self-help policies that characterize it. Neo-realism is no less pessimistic about human nature, however, nor is it any less centered on the state.

Talking about realist accounts of world affairs, as the main way to describe and explain them, results in analyses and practices that highlight military power and diplomatic prowess. This tells us more about the pessimism of realists and neo-realists than it does about the subject itself, however. The extent to which such pessimism is warranted is much debated. It certainly is some of the time and in particular contexts. At other times and in other contexts, other aspects of human nature can be said to prevail.

Talking about such accounts also tells us about the reluctance of realists and neo-realists to see the subject in non-state terms. This is much debated too. As non-state actors, such as transnational corporations and global social movements, grow in number and significance, the sovereign state may continue to dominate the world stage. It can no longer stand alone, however, if we want to provide a comprehensive account of world affairs.

Then there is the issue Thucydides originally raised. On the one hand we have might making for a particularly brutal form of being right. This is realist morality *par excellence*. On the other hand we have right in less brutal forms such as fairness. The fact that those with might try to create a morality convenient to their cause should not be allowed to obscure the self-serving nature of such an attempt. Nor should it be allowed to obscure the other forms of morality that other perspectives provide.

What then does talk about world affairs actually require? If we only talk in terms of realism, we tend to accept such an account as all that is necessary to understand the subject. Since this is manifestly not the case, the next step is to go beyond the limits and constraints of what realist talk entails.

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