

Preface

This book is an overview of all the ways in which international relations analysts and practitioners talk about world affairs. It is a systematic, comprehensive meta-account of how they describe, explain, and prescribe for global politics. It is an “account of accounts”, in other words, sufficiently orderly and all-encompassing to allow anyone interested to understand the discipline as a whole.

Having such an overview makes it possible to tell at once what those who talk about the subject are saying — and more importantly perhaps — what they are not saying. The main organizing principle that makes this possible is the distinction analysts and practitioners draw between human nature and nurturing practices. In reality, it is impossible to disentangle these two aspects of human being. We embody both in complex ways that are poorly understood. Analysts and practitioners subscribe to this distinction regardless. They smuggle it back into nearly all their accounts of world affairs, providing in the process one of the keys to the pattern that underpins their analyses and their policies. The other core key is the modernist project their talk articulates.

Those who do not subscribe to such an overview tend to provide lists of analytical languages. They tend not to ask whether such lists are comprehensive or how specific languages stand in relation to each

other. By contrast, what follows incorporates all such lists. At the same time, it remains mindful that reality cannot be categorized with any great degree of precision. That is why it depicts each language as the site of diverse analytical dialects. That is why it looks, for example, at “classical” and “neo-” dialects in each case, where the “neo-” version is the more abstract and detached (though not necessarily the more contemporary) of the two.

In not being a mere list, the overview sketched below is somewhat heterodox. Without it, however, an account of ways of talking about and practicing world affairs presents as a kind of mental minestrone. It looks colorful and it is intellectually nourishing but it is not coherent. With it, the diversity the discipline presents can be ordered in terms of the assumptions analysts and practitioners make and in terms of their cultural context.

Readings have been chosen that illustrate each analytical language and a justification for each choice is also provided. None of the readings is definitive. The text quotes directly from each one so as to remain as close as possible to what it has to say, but the devil lies not in the detail. It lies in the way each reading relates to the overview as a whole. (Space constraints preclude any attempt to survey the secondary literature that pertains at each point or to accounts of a more subjectifying kind.)

Though an overview such as this does require the adoption of a detached perspective, and being and knowing in this way does provide clarity, standing back does blind as well as illuminate. To compensate for this blindness, detachment can be tempered by standing close, listening, and taking part. Standing back to look a second time initiates a cycle of knowing that stops detachment from becoming too relativistic. This would seem the most credible way to do social science.