



# Idealism

vs

# Realism

**BA III**

# Idealism and Realism

- ❖ Idealism and realism are philosophical theories propounded by two Greek philosophers **Plato** and **Aristotle**, respectively.
- ❖ **Plato** is known as father of idealism while **Aristotle** is known as father of Realism.
- ❖ In a layman's language , idealism is a theory that professes that reality exists only in ideas. It also states that ideally , every thing and every one should be perfect and flawless. Realism , on the other hand, has a more practical approach of looking at things. Realism states that things and people should be accepted as they are, that is, with all their defects and weaknesses.

# IDEALISM

- As early as the 14<sup>th</sup> Century the Italian poet Dante wrote of the “universality of man” and envisioned a unified world state
- Immanuel Kant argued that doing good was an end unto itself rather than a means to some other end
- Hope to minimize conflict and maximize cooperation among nations
- Focus attention on legal-formal aspects of international relations, such as international law and international organizations
- Also focus on moral concerns such as human rights

# Liberalism (Idealism)

- Human nature is basically good; individuals are rational
- People can improve moral and material conditions
- Societal progress possible
- Injustice/war
  - not inevitable, can be moderated, eliminated through institutional reform or collective action (collective security, e.g., League of Nations, UN)
  - product of inadequate, corrupt social institutions, misunderstandings
  - Through learning and education, humans can develop institutions to bring out their best characteristics
- Expansion of human freedom best achieved through democracy and free-market capitalism
- Trade and commerce create interdependencies between states, reducing likelihood of war
- Emphasis on international institutions and international law

# **Woodrow Wilson as a champion of IDEALISM**

- **Wilson had announced his “Fourteen Points” as a proposed basis for the armistice a year before the Paris Peace Conference opened.**
- **Represented a school of thought that a new world order had to be constructed based on a respect for law, the acceptance of shared universal values, and the development of international organizations.**
- **Many perceived Wilson’s Fourteen Points as excessively idealistic.**
- **For the Allies, they conflicted with the secret wartime agreements they had made to distribute among themselves territories and possessions of the defeated nations.**
- **For the defeated powers, the harsh treaties that would be later imposed upon them certainly seemed to violate the spirit of the Fourteen Points**

# Fourteen Points

- **Wilson envisioned:**
  - Open covenants of peace, openly arrived at,
  - Absolute freedom of navigation upon the seas in peace and in war,
  - The removal of all economic barriers and the establishment of an equality of trade conditions among all nations,
  - Adequate guarantees for a reduction in national armaments,
  - Adjustments of colonial disputes to give equal weight to the interests of the controlling government and the colonial population, and
  - A call for “a general association of nations”

# ARGUMENTS AGAINST IDEALISM

- Idealists are of the opinion that the world, and everything in it, is but a creation of our minds and there is no objective reality.
- Imagine an idealist philosophers in an aeroplane at a certain altitude and the philosophers is ejected from the plane. They are wearing a parachute, but it is not fastened. They must decide if they wish to fasten themselves to the parachute or not . This eliminates idealist philosophers / philosophy- they either fasten the parachute and thus acknowledge the truth of physical reality - or they do not and fall to their death

## Main argument against Idealism

- Possibly the best argument against idealism is Darwin's Theory of Evolution. It makes it very clear that reality existed in form and matter much before the mind of man evolved to an extent where it could hypothesize about the nature of the world. It is an absolute refutation of the principles of idealism as they stand.

# REALISM

## Origins of Realism

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- ❑ The realist theory of international relations came into being during the time of the Great Depression of 1929 when the economies of the major powers of the world collapsed. This together with the rise of two brutal dictators gave rise to the realism theory of international relations. Realism presents a very negative view of human nature.
  - ❑ The classical realist Machiavelli points out that “it must needs be taken for granted that all men are wicked and that they will always give vent to the malignity that is in their minds when opportunity offers.” Realists believe that nation states are always in conflict with each other and the disputes can only be resolved through war.
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# Realism

- ***Realism***
- Explains international relations in terms of power
- Foundation is principle of dominance
- Developed in reaction to a liberal tradition that realists called idealism
  - Idealism emphasizes international law, morality, international organizations as key influences on international events
  - Human nature basically good
  - International system is a community of states with the potential to work together to overcome mutual problems.
  - Idealists particularly active between World War I and World War II
- Long tradition of realism
  - Sun Tzu
  - Thucydides
  - Machiavelli
  - Hobbes
  - Morgenthau

# Elements of Realism

- For realists the main actors on the world stage are states, which are legally sovereign actors.
- Other actors all have to work within the framework of inter-state relations (less important).
- As for what propels states to act as they do, realists see human nature as key.
- For realists, human nature is selfish - thus the desire to enjoy an advantage over others & to avoid domination by others is universal.
- As a result, world politics represents a struggle for power between states each trying to maximise their national interests.
- Such order as exists in world politics is the result of the workings of a mechanism known as the balance of power.
- This obtains when states act to prevent any one state dominating.
- Thus world politics is all about bargaining and alliances.

# Is realism void of moral consideration?

- Following political philosophy of Machiavelli and Hobbes, traditionally realism defines IR exclusively in pursuit of politico-military advantage, with moral consideration playing a minimal role.
- On the other hand, most of policies that are engineered towards better conduct of IR are advocated by realists.
- Realists do not reject moral considerations, but they question the boundaries of these considerations.
- They do not reject liberalism in total, only particular form of it: cosmopolitan liberalism.

# Classical Realism

- Thomas Hobbes – the state of nature is a permanent state of war of every man against every man.
- Men escape/survive through the creation of the sovereign state – to protect them from both internal disorders and foreign enemies.
- Men and women cooperate politically because of their fear of being harmed by neighbours.
- The core value of Hobbessian realism is domestic peace.
- International Security dilemma
- No possibility of forming a world government.
- According to Hobbes, states can contract treaties to govern their affairs.
- Thus, the classical realism of Hobbes emphasises both military power & international law.

# Morgenthau's Six Principles

## Six principles of political realism

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- Politics is governed by objective laws; IR theory is a rational theory that reflects these laws
- Politics is an autonomous sphere, independent of economics and personal morality
- International politics is about national interests though these interests reflect the political and cultural context within which foreign policy is formulated
- The political ethics is different from the universal moral principles
- Particular nations cannot impose their national aspirations on other nations
- Pessimistic knowledge of human nature is in the centre of international politics



# Neo-Realism

- ▶ Realism consists of three main concepts:
  1. **States** are main actors trying to dominate international politics.
  2. State behavior depends on the structure of the system and not on the state nature. **Survival** is the major concept of state.
  3. **Power** and **strength** is most important for states as they compete with each other to gain power. And the result is the war that is the natural occurrence.

**Neorealism** or **structural realism**, sometimes called *structural realism*, is a 1990s adaptation of realism. It explains international events in terms of the international distribution of power. Compared to traditional realism, neorealism is more "scientific" in proposing *general laws* to explain events in IR.

**Neorealism** as a theory was first outlined by Kenneth Waltz in his 1979 book *Theory of International Politics*. It is one of the most influential contemporary approaches to international relations. Neorealism emerged from the North American discipline of political science, and reformulates the classical realist tradition of E.H. Carr, Hans Morgenthau, and etc.



# Limitations of Realism

- ┐ Vague; offered no criteria for determining what historical data were significant in evaluating its claims and what epistemological rules to follow when interpreting relevant information.
- ┐ Does it account for significant new developments in world politics?
- ┐ Realisms disregard of ethical principles and about the material and social costs that some of its policy prescriptions seemed to impose

# Difference b/w Idealism and Realism

## 2 Approaches to Foreign Policy: Realism & Idealism

	REALISM	IDEALISM
what do nations want?	power	Peace in the world according to principles defined by nation
what are nations motivated by?	self-interest	values, principles
what is the source of conflict in the world?	competing interests (e.g. territory, resources)	competing "isms" (e.g. democracy vs. monarchy, totalitarianism, or communism)
what is the source of security?	faith in <b>power</b> to protect the nation	faith in <b>law or morality</b> to protect the nation
what kind of security?	national security	global security
willingness to use power	limited to interest at the time	omnipotent; unlimited
	Skeptical of nations' ability to transcend self-interest	Faith in ability of nations to control themselves; common interest in universal goals

IDEALISM

LIBERALISM

**Thank you!**

International

Relations