

whether Hobbes accurately describes the world – of course, he doesn't: much, even most, of politics lies outside his scope – we should ask whether his theoretical assumptions help us to understand important elements of international political reality.

Hobbes, like most realists, is sceptical of altering human nature. Analysts may reasonably disagree about the variability and malleability of human nature or the interests of states. Most, however, would agree that Hobbes' emphasis on competition, diffidence and glory represents a penetrating, if one-sided, caricature that deserves serious consideration.

Anarchy has been replaced by hierarchical political rule within most states. Even vicious and inefficient governments usually provide considerable security for the lives and property of their citizens, dramatically reducing the pressures to replace the international state of nature with international government. International anarchy can therefore be expected to persist, even without taking into account the strong desire of states and their citizens for autonomy.

Material inequality reduces the number of effective players. But unless one is clearly superior to all others, the Hobbesian logic will reassert itself in relations among the strong. 'Great powers' – states with the capacity to inflict punishing damage, even the threat of death, on any other power in the system – are Hobbesian equals. In passing, we should note that this suggests that (Hobbesian) realism is a theory of great power politics, rather than a general theory of international relations. Relations between fundamentally unequal powers would be governed by another logic of interaction.

Each of Hobbes' assumptions would seem to be applicable to important parts of international relations. The crucial question is the extent to which other factors and forces push in different directions. How much of international relations, in what circumstances, is governed by the Hobbesian conjunction of anarchy, egoism and equality? To use social scientific jargon, what are the relative forces of 'endogenous variables' (factors included within the theory) and 'exogenous variables' (those not included)? We will return, recurrently, to this question as we proceed.

Waltz and structural realism

Hobbes' 'classical' realism gives roughly equal emphasis to anarchy and egoism. Although 'neo-classical' realism (Rose 1998) has recently made a modest comeback, most realist work since the 1970s has been more or less rigorously structural, largely as a result of the influence of Kenneth Waltz.

Waltzian structuralism

Structural realism attempts to ‘abstract from every attribute of states except their capabilities’ (Waltz 1979: 99) in order to highlight the impact of anarchy and the distribution of capabilities. ‘International structure emerges from the interaction of states and then constrains them from taking certain actions while propelling them toward others’ (1991: 29). Therefore, despite great variations in the attributes and interactions of states, there is a ‘striking sameness in the quality of international life through the millennia’ (1979: 66).

Political structures are defined by their ordering principle, differentiation of functions and distribution of capabilities. How are units related to one another? How are political functions allocated? How is power distributed?

Hierarchy and anarchy are the two principal political ordering principles. Units either stand in relationships of authority and subordination (hierarchy) or they do not (anarchy). Waltz argues that striking qualitative differences exist ‘between politics conducted in a condition of settled rules and politics conducted in a condition of anarchy’ (1979: 61). Some of those differences are the focus of the following sub-sections.

‘Hierarchy entails relations of super- and subordination among a system’s parts, and that implies their differentiation’ (1979: 93). Consider the separation of legislative, executive and judicial powers. Anarchic orders, however, have little functional differentiation. Every unit must ‘put itself in a position to be able to take care of itself since no one else can be counted on to do so’ (1979: 107). Differences between states ‘are of capability, not function’ (1979: 96). ‘National politics consists of differentiated units performing specified functions. International politics consists of like units duplicating one another’s activities’ (1979: 97).

If all international orders are anarchic, and if this implies minimal functional differentiation, then international political structures differ only in their distributions of capabilities. They are defined by the changing fates of great powers. More abstractly, international orders vary according to the number of great powers.

Balancing

The central theoretical conclusion of structural realism is that in anarchy states ‘balance’ rather than ‘bandwagon’ (1979: 126). In hierarchic political orders, actors tend to ‘jump on the bandwagon’ of a leading candidate or recent victor, because ‘losing does not place their security in jeopardy’ (1979: 126). ‘Bandwagoners’ attempt to increase their gains (or reduce their losses) by siding with the stronger party. In anarchy,

however, bandwagoning courts disaster by strengthening someone who later may turn on you. The power of others – especially great powers – is always a threat when there is no government to turn to for protection. ‘Balancers’ attempt to reduce their risk by opposing the stronger party.

Weak states have little choice but to guess right and hope that early alignment with the victor will bring favourable treatment. Only foolish great powers would accept such a risk. Instead, they will balance, both internally, by reallocating resources to national security, and externally, primarily through alliances and other formal and informal agreements. (Randall Schweller 1994, 1997, however, has argued for the potential rationality of bandwagoning in the face of a rising revolutionary power.)

Structural pressures to balance explain important yet otherwise puzzling features of international relations. Consider Soviet–American relations. The United States opposed the Russian Revolution and for two decades remained implacably hostile to the Soviet Union. Nonetheless, a common enemy, Hitler’s Germany, created the American–Soviet alliance in the Second World War. Notwithstanding their intense internal differences and history of animosity, they balanced against a common threat. After the war, the United States and the Soviet Union again became adversaries. In this version of the story, though, internal and ideological differences did not cause renewed rivalry (although they may have increased its virulence and influenced its form). Enmity was *structurally induced*. In a bipolar world, each superpower is the only serious threat to the security of the other. Each, whatever its preferences or inclinations, must balance against the other.

The Cold War, in this account, was not ‘caused’ by anyone but was the ‘natural’ result of bipolarity. Soviet expansion into Central and Eastern Europe arose from neither vicious rulers in the Kremlin nor rabid anti-communists in Washington. It was the normal behaviour of a country that had been invaded from the west, with devastating consequences, twice in twenty-five years, and once more a century earlier. Cold War conflicts in Vietnam, Central America and Southern Africa likewise were not part of a global communist conspiracy but rather ordinary efforts by a great power to increase its international influence.

This example suggests a very important interpretative point. Realism is a *theoretical account of how the world operates*. It can be used as easily for peaceful purposes – there are a number of Quaker realists – as for war. For example, hundreds of thousands of lives might have been saved, and millions of casualties avoided, had the United States pursued a realist bipolar rivalry with the Soviet Union rather than an ideological Cold War. Leading realists such as Niebuhr and Morgenthau (1970: 33) were not merely strong but early critics of the war in Vietnam.

Robert Tucker (1985) opposed the Reagan Administration's support of armed counter-revolution in Nicaragua. A striking fact about the list of supporters of the American invasion of Iraq in 2003 is the almost complete absence of prominent realists.

Prisoners' dilemma, relative gains and cooperation

Anarchy and egoism greatly impede cooperation. The Prisoners' Dilemma offers a standard formal representation of this logic. Imagine two criminals taken in separately by the police for questioning. Each is offered a favourable plea bargain in return for testimony against the other. Without a confession, though, they can be convicted only of a lesser crime. Each must choose between cooperating (remaining silent) and defecting (testifying against the other). Imagine also that both have the following preference ordering: (1) confess while the other remains silent; (2) both remain silent; (3) both confess; (4) remain silent while the other confesses. Assume finally that their aversion to risk takes a particular form: they want to minimize their maximum possible loss.

Cooperating (remaining silent) rewards both with their second choice (conviction on the lesser charge). But it also leaves the cooperator vulnerable to the worst possible outcome (serving a long prison term – and knowing that your partner put you there). Each can assure himself against disaster by confessing (defecting). The rational choice thus is to defect (confess) *even though both know that they both could be better off by cooperating*. Both end up with their third choice, because this is the only way to assure that each avoids the worst possible outcome.

Conflict here does not arise from any special defect in the actors. They are mildly selfish but not particularly evil or vicious. Far from desiring conflict, both actually prefer cooperation. They are neither ignorant nor ill informed. In an environment of anarchy, even those capable of mastering their own desires for gain and glory are pushed by fear towards treating everyone else as an enemy.

Anarchy can defeat even our best intentions – which realists see as rare enough to begin with. Without insurance schemes that reduce the risk of cooperating, and without procedures to determine how to divide the gains, even those who want to cooperate may remain locked in a vicious cycle of mutually destructive competition. For example, states may engage in costly and even counter-productive arms races because arms control agreements cannot be independently verified.

Herbert Butterfield calls this 'Hobbesian fear'. 'If you imagine yourself locked in a room with another person with whom you have often been on the most bitterly hostile terms in the past, and suppose that each of you has a pistol, you may find yourself in a predicament in which both

of you would like to throw the pistols out of the window, yet it defeats the intelligence to find a way of doing it' (1949: 89–90). The 'security dilemma' (Jervis 1978; Glaser 1997) has a similar logic. 'Given the irreducible uncertainty about the intentions of others, security measures taken by one actor are perceived by others as threatening; the others take steps to protect themselves; these steps are then interpreted by the first actor as confirming its initial hypothesis that the others are dangerous; and so on in a spiral of illusory fears and "unnecessary" defenses' (Snyder 1997: 17).

Anarchic pressures towards balancing and against cooperation are reinforced by the relativity of power. Power is control over outcomes, 'the ability to do or effect something' (*Oxford English Dictionary*). It is less a matter of absolute capabilities – how much 'stuff' one has – than of relative capabilities. Facing an unarmed man, a tank is pretty powerful. The same tank facing a squadron of carrier-based attack jets is not very powerful at all.

The relativity of power requires states to 'be more concerned with relative strength than with absolute advantage' (Waltz 1979: 106). Bandwagoning seeks absolute gains, aligning early with a rising power to gain a share of the profits of victory. Balancing pursues relative gains.

Relative gains concerns dramatically impede cooperation. One must consider not only whether one gains but, more importantly, whether one's gains outweigh those of others (who, in anarchy, must be seen as potential adversaries). Even predatory cooperation is problematic unless it maintains the relative capabilities of the cooperating parties. In fact, states may be satisfied with conflicts that leave them absolutely worse off – so long as their adversaries are left even worse off.

Polarity

The preceding two sub-sections have considered some of the theoretical implications of anarchy, the first element of structure (ordering principle). If, following Waltz, we see minimal functional differentiation in anarchic orders, the other principal contribution of structural realism should lie in its analysis of the impact of the distribution of capabilities. How does polarity, the number of great powers in a system, influence international relations?

Unipolarity has become a hot topic since the end of the Cold War. Structural logic (Layne 1993; Mastanduno 1997) suggests that unipolarity is unstable. Balancing will facilitate the rise of new great powers, much as a rising hegemon (e.g. Napoleonic France) provokes a 'grand coalition' that unites the other great powers. (Wohlforth 1999, however, rejects this argument. More generally, see Kapstein and Mastanduno 1999.) But whatever the resilience of unipolarity, while it persists hegemony (and