



CHAPTER 15

Traditional Theories of International Relations

This chapter provides a critical overview of long-established and highly influential theoretical approaches to IR. Liberalism and realism are placed in historical context, and there are discussions of key theorists (e.g., Kant and Woodrow Wilson for liberalism, Machiavelli and Hobbes for realism). The liberal inspiration of key institutions like the United Nations (UN) is explored. A core theme of the book is revisited in a methodological section concerning empirical and normative approaches to IR. The chapter also discusses other “traditional” approaches to IR: the English School, neorealism, and neoliberalism. While all of these approaches are closely related either to liberalism or to realism, the chapter carefully explains the ways in which they are distinctive, examines the circumstances which led to their development, and provides a critical analysis.

Chapter Outline

- Liberalism and the Rise of International Relations
- The Realist Turn
- Behaviouralism versus Normative Analysis
- The English School and the Idea of International Society
- Neoliberalism and Neorealism
- Conclusion

Key Terms

Agency	Human nature	Normative analysis
Anarchy	Humanitarian intervention	Pluralism
Balance of power	Imperialism	Political obligation
Behaviouralism	International civil society	Positivism
Communitarianism	International society	<i>Raison d'état</i>
Complex interdependence	Intervention	Realism
Constructivism	Liberal democracy	Security dilemma
Cosmopolitanism (IR)	Liberal internationalism	Self-determination
Deterrence	Methodology	Solidarism
English School	National interest	State of nature
Ethnocentrism	Natural law	Statecraft
Good governance	Neoliberalism	Utopia
Hegemony	Neorealism	

Discussion Questions

1. If you were to adopt a view of human nature in line with either a liberal or realist approach, which would you choose? Why? What factors may complicate your decision?
2. Does ethics or morality play a role in international relations? Upon what kinds of evidence is your answer based?
3. Does the absence of a global “super-sovereign” necessarily lead to conflict? Would the imposition of a world ruler solve the problem of international conflict?
4. What is complex interdependence, and why should we (or should not) pay attention to it?
5. What causes security dilemmas? Once you are in one, is there any way out?
6. Why does Kant’s *Perpetual Peace* endure? What is germinal about the principles?
7. Why did the League of Nations fail? Did the League’s failure make it easier for the United Nations to flourish?
8. Why are some feminists critical of positivism?
9. Is economics the real deterrent to war?

Further Resources

- <http://www.constitution.org/kant/perpeace.htm>
Full text of Immanuel Kant’s “Perpetual Peace”

- http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/wilson14.asp
Full text of Woodrow Wilson's "14 Points" address from the Avalon Project
- <http://www.theory-talks.org/>
Collection of interviews with noted IR theorists
- <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/realism-intl-relations/>
Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy entry on Political Realism in International Relations
- <http://www.un.org/en/>
Home page for the United Nations
- <http://duckofminerva.com/>
Duck of Minerva is a well-known scholarly blog for international relations scholars and practitioners
- <http://www.e-ir.info/>
Open Access website for students and scholars of International Politics