

Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

### Chapter 6: Three Cultures of Anarchy

Wendt considers two questions:

- 1) Variation question: Is anarchy compatible with more than one structure/logic?  
Answer: Despite the Neorealist view of the matter, anarchy can have at least three kinds of structure, depending on the types of roles that dominate the system, such as those of enemy, rival, and friend. These correspond to three types of structure: Hobbesian, Lockean, and Kantian.
- 2) Construction question: Does the international system construct states?  
Answer: Despite the Rationalist view, Wendt argues the holist hypothesis that the structure of the international system has construction effects on states: i.e., it affects identities and interests, not just the behavior of states.

According to Wendt, emphasis is usually placed exclusively either on the elements of the international system or on the “anarchic structures [sic]” that give rise to these elements. He chooses the middle road, and argues that structures do give rise to the elements of the international system, but structures vary, and can therefore produce multiple logics. The concept of international anarchy thus becomes meaningless, without the ingredients that make it up. This gives him the best of both worlds, since he resorts to Liberalism’s emphasis on domestic politics *within* a structural approach to the international system. The key to this approach lies in conceptualizing structure in social (in the Weberian sense), rather than in material terms. Thus, to provide a full answer to the construction question, he proposes to examine three reasons why actors observe cultural norms: i) coercion, ii) self-interest, iii) legitimacy of norms. In doing so, Wendt draws attention to two assumptions regarding the international system that stem from his approach to structural theorizing: 1) that there is no relationship between the extent of shared ideas or culture and cooperation, and 2) that roles are not the properties of agents, but of the structures.

Hobbesian Culture: Other = Enemy. The exercise of violence is without limits (i.e. includes death). Mistrust among actors. War of all against all (“kill or be killed”).

Compliance: occurs through coercion, since there is no trust. Also through what is perceived as self interest, while benefits outweigh costs. Despite desire to destroy enemy, “states do not have enough power to ‘kill’ each other”. Thus the actors that are necessary to the very existence of this scheme are sustained, and enmity is seen as necessary and legitimate.

Lockean Culture: Other = Rival. The exercise of violence is limited by an acceptance of the other actors’ right to live (“kill or be killed” of Hobbesian Culture replaced by “live and let live”). Sovereignty is thus recognized not only as “a property of individual states, but an *institution* shared by many states”. Wendt finds that the Hobbesian model fails to describe the world, since the death rate of states is very low, and that this model comes closer. In fact, he uses the Lockean model to rescue Waltz, whose theory he sees as such.

Compliance: States can be coerced by stronger states, and accept the institution of sovereignty, as it is in their interest to do so. Be this as it may, sovereignty is also accepted for its own sake, and is internalized as a norm. The distinction between the second and third (self-interest, legitimacy) is difficult to determine, but nevertheless legitimate, as far as Wendt is concerned.

Kantian Culture: Other = Friend. Disputes are settled without recourse to violence, and common action is possible.

Compliance: Actors are coerced into not attacking one another, but also into cooperating in the face of common threats. It is possible to concentrate on what is to be gained from friendship, so as to weigh the relationship on the basis of self-interest. Bonds of friendship alert actors as to the interconnectedness of particular interests, which leads to an appreciation of friendship as a norm, legitimate in its own right.

Wendt claims that this spectrum is not meant as a progression from the Hobbesian to the Kantian. On the other hand, he is also unwilling to share what he identifies as Realist pessimism regarding the possibility of progress in international politics (as indicated by his next project, on “why a world state is inevitable”). He is willing, however, to argue that it is unlikely that international politics will move backwards (which implies that it has moved forward).