

OVERVIEW

The debate between neorealists and neoliberals has been based on a shared commitment to "rationalism," which offers a fundamentally behavioral conception of both processes and institutions: they change behavior but not identities and interests. Neorealists' conception of "self-help" generates inherently competitive dynamics of the security dilemma and collective action problem. Self-help is not seen as an institution and as such occupies a privileged explanatory role vis-à-vis process, setting the term for interaction. While some liberals accept realists' conception, others have spoken of "complex learning," "changing conceptions of self and interest," and "sociological" conceptions of interest. Strong liberals do not accept privileging of structure over process; transformations of interests and identities through process are transformations of structure. Constructivists are interested in how knowledgeable practices constitute subjects in IR. Self-help does not derive logically or causally from anarchy; it is due to process, not structure. *Self-help and power politics are institutions, not essential features of anarchy. Anarchy is what states make of it!*

ANARCHY AND POWER POLITICS

Waltz defines anarchy as a condition of possibility for or "permissive" cause of war—"wars occur because there is nothing to prevent them." Then he slips to active causal claim that "war may at any moment occur." In *Theory of International Politics*, Waltz spurns first and second image theories as reductionist. This is unfortunate, since in the permissive view, only human or domestic factors causing to attack will lead others to defend. Anarchies may contain dynamics that lead to competitive politics, but they also may not. Neorealism substantially reduces the role of practice in shaping the character of anarchy.

Anarchy, Self-Help, and Intersubjective Knowledge

Waltz's three dimensions of political structure predict little about state behavior (whether friends/foes, recognize sovereignty, revisionist/status quo, etc.). Without assumptions about the structure of identities and interests in the system, Waltz cannot predict the dynamics of anarchy. Self-help is one such intersubjective structure. The question is whether this is logical or contingent on anarchy. *People act toward objects, including other actors, on the basis of the meanings that the objects have for them.* Actors acquire identities—relatively stable, role-specific understandings and expectations about self—by participating in such collective meanings. Identities are the basis of interests. An institution is a relatively stable set or "structure" of identities and interests, often codified in formal rules and norms. They are fundamentally cognitive entities that do not exist apart from actors' ideas about how the world works. But institutions come to confront individuals as more or less coercive social facts, though they are still a function of what actors collectively "know." Self-help is an institution, one of various structures of identity and interests that may exist under anarchy. Under anarchy processes of identity formation is concerned with security of the self. Concepts of security differ in the extent to which and the manner in which the self is identified cognitively with the other. This cognitive variation determines the meaning of anarchy. A continuum of security systems exists ranging from competitive (realist) to individualistic (neoliberal) and to cooperative system. States do not have conceptions of self and other apart from or prior to interaction, thus Waltz assumes too much.

Anarchy and Social Construction of Power Politics

The meanings in terms of which action is organized arise out of interaction. Wendt examines a hypothetical interaction between ego and alter. An ego's gesture is inferred by alter based on the physical qualities of the gesture and of ego and on what alter would intend by such qualities were it to make such a gesture itself. In short, Wendt claims that there is no reason to assume a priori before the gesture that ego is threatening. Only through a process of signaling and interpreting the costs and probabilities of being wrong can be determined. Social threats are constructed, not natural. It is through reciprocal interaction that we create and instantiate the relatively enduring social structures in terms of which we define our identities and interests. The forms of identity and interests that constitute security dilemmas are themselves ongoing effects of, not exogenous to, the interaction.

Predator States and Anarchy as Permissive Cause

Predation, an efficient cause, in conjunction with anarchy as a permissive cause may generate a self-help system. For whatever reason, some states may become predisposed toward aggression. The aggressive behavior of these predators forces other states to engage in competitive power politics. The timing of the emergence of predation relative to the history of identity formation ("mature" versus "immature" anarchies) in the community is crucial to anarchy's explanatory role as a permissive cause. Whether defense to predation will be collective or individual will depend on history of interaction. This is consistent with systematic focus on process.

INSTITUTIONAL TRANSFORMATIONS OF POWER POLITICS

In a realist world of anarchy characterized by collective, insecurity-producing practices, if those practices are relatively stable, they do constitute a system that may resist change. There are institutional transformations of identity and security interest, through which states might escape a Hobbesian world.

Sovereignty, Recognition, and Security

In a Hobbesian state of nature, security is only a matter of national power; state security does not have any basis in social recognition. The principle of sovereignty transforms this situation by providing a social basis for the individuality and security of states. Sovereignty is an institution, so it exists only in virtue of certain intersubjective understandings and expectations; there is no sovereignty without an other. The understanding also constitutes a particular form of community, a spatially rather than functionally differentiated world. Moreover, the sovereign state is an ongoing accomplishment of practice, not a once-and-for-all creation of norms that exist apart from practice. How would such a structure of identity and interest arise in the first place. 1) The density and regularity of interactions must be sufficiently high and 2) actors must be dissatisfied with preexisting forms of identity and interaction. Legal principles articulated in Peace of Augsburg and Peace of Westphalia help establish criteria and express criteria, but whether the consensus holds depends on practice. Sovereignty transforms understandings of security and power politics in three ways: 1) states conceive of security in terms of preserving their property rights over particular territories 2) if sovereignty norms are successfully

Alexander Wendt, “Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics” IO 46 (1992): 391-425

internalized, states will be more respectful toward the territorial rights of others 3) states can afford to rely more on the institutional fabric of international society and less on individual national means to protect their security.

Cooperation Among Egoists and Transformations of Identity

Game theoretic analysis of cooperation among egoists is at base behavioral, ignoring identity and interest formation, treating norms evolved out of interaction as rules and behavioral regularities external to the actors. Constructivist analysis concentrates on how the expectations produced by behavior affects identities and interests. The process by which egoists learn to cooperate is at the same time a process of reconstructing their interests in terms of shared commitments to social norms. Over time, this will tend to transform a positive interdependence of outcomes into a positive interdependence of utilities. These norms will resist change because they are tied to actors’ commitments to their interests and identities, not merely because of transactions costs. Constructivist analysis of cooperation is at base cognitive.

Critical Strategic Theory and Collective Security

The transformation of identity and interest through an “evolution of cooperation” faces two constraints: 1) process is incremental and slow and 2) the evolution presupposes that actors do not identify negatively with one another. This situation may be amenable to quite different logic of transformation, one driven more by self-conscious efforts to change structures of identity and interest than by unintended consequences. This voluntarism is not at odds with constructivism, because of the distinction between the social determination of the self and the personal determination of choice. Roles are not played in mechanical fashion but are taken and adapted in idiosyncratic ways by each actor. Actors always have a capacity for “character planning”—for engaging in critical self-reflection and choices designed to bring about changes in their lives. Conditions for such reflection are new social situations unmanageable in terms of preexisting self-conceptions and the expected costs of intentional role change cannot be greater than its rewards. If the conditions are met, actors can “change the games” in which they are embedded. The first stage in intentional transformation is the breakdown of consensus about identity commitments. The second stage is critical examination of old ideas about self and other and of the structures of interaction by which the ideas have been sustained. Then in the third stage, in order to change the self, it is necessary to change the identities and interests of the others that help sustain those systems of interaction. But ego’s efforts to present its new idea of self and structure must be rewarded by alter. Over time, reciprocal encouragement of such practice will institutionalize a positive identification between the security of self and other.