
 <p><b><u>Norbert Merkovity</u></b></p>	 <p><b><u>13-18 minutes</u></b></p>	<p>Thing to remember:</p> <p>Statism is the centrepiece of Realism</p>
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## Realism

Realism has been the dominant theory of world politics since the beginning of academic International Relations. It has often been referred to as a ‘timeless wisdom’.

Outside of the academy, Realism has a much longer history.

***Scepticism* about the capacity of human reason to deliver moral progress resonates through the work of classical political theorists** such as Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Rousseau. So this kind of ‘realism’ can be a much broader interpretation than the kind of realism used in IR.

*It’s not about ‘being real’ as an ontological position in opposition to those things or people that are ‘unreal’.*

### Where are the starting points?

In ‘The Melian Dialogue’, one of the episodes of The Peloponnesian War, Thucydides uses the words of the Athenians to highlight the realist view of a number of key concepts such as self-interest, alliances, balance of power, capabilities, and insecurity. The people of Melos respond in Idealist verse, appealing to justice,

fairness, luck, the gods, and in the final instance, to common interests.

At the end of the millennium, Realism continued to attract academicians and inform policy-makers, although the passing of the cold war has seen a revival in the fortunes of Liberalism, and a variety of more critical approaches grouped under the banner of Post-positivism.

### **Types of realism**

There is a lack of consensus in the literature as to whether we can meaningfully speak about realism as a single coherent theory. There are good reasons for delineating different types of realism. The most important cleavage is between those **who see realism as a licence to take any course of action necessary to ensure political survival (historical realists)** AND those **who see realism as a permanent condition of conflict or the preparation for future conflicts (structural realists)**.

Structural realism divides into two wings: those writers who emphasize human nature as the structure (structural realism I) and those who believe that anarchy is the structure which shapes and shoves the behaviour of states (structural realism II).

At the margins of Realism we find a form of liberal realism which rejects the pessimistic picture of historical and structural realists, believing that the state of war can be mitigated by the management of power by the leading states in the system and the development of practices such as diplomacy and customary international law.

The question whether it is legitimate to speak of a coherent tradition of political realism touches upon an important debate conducted by historians of ideas. Most classical realists did not consider themselves to be adherents of a particular tradition, for this reason Realism, like all other traditions, is something of an invention.

### **Essential Realism**

*Statism* is the centrepiece of Realism.

This involves two claims.

- First, for the theorist, the state is the pre-eminent actor and all other actors in world politics are of lesser significance.
- Second, state ‘sovereignty’ signifies the existence of an independent political community, one which has juridical authority over its territory.

*Survival:* The primary objective of all states is survival; this is the supreme national interest to which all political leaders must adhere. All other goals such as economic prosperity are secondary (or ‘low politics’). In order to preserve the security of their state, leaders must adopt an ethical code which judges actions according to the outcome rather than in terms of a judgement about whether the individual act is right or wrong. If there are any moral universals for political realists, these can only be concretized in particular communities.

*Self-help:* No other state can be relied upon to guarantee your survival. In international politics, the structure of the system does not permit friendship, trust, and honour; only a perennial condition of uncertainty generated by the absence of a global government.

Coexistence is achieved through the maintenance of the balance of power, and limited co-operation is possible in interactions where the realist state stands to gain more than other states.

### **Critiques of Essential Realism**

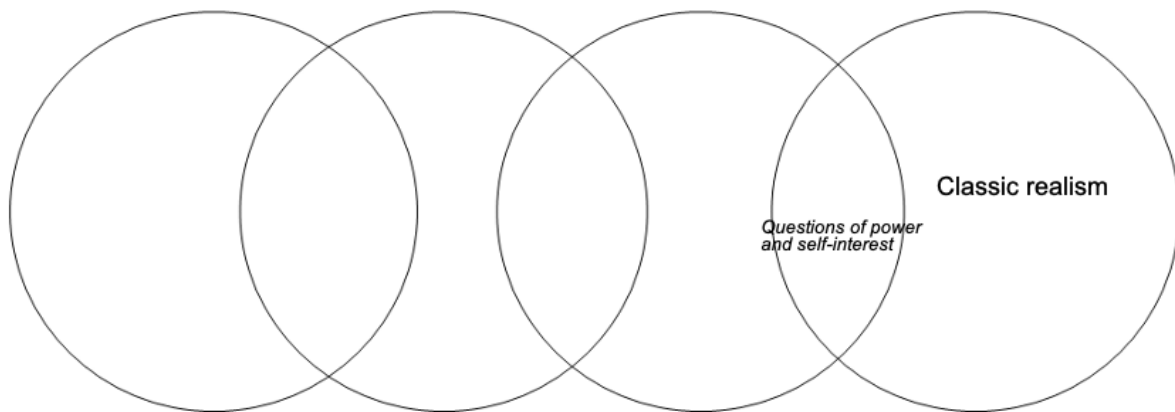
*Key Criticism of Statism:* Statism is flawed both on empirical (challenges to state power from ‘above’ and ‘below’) and normative grounds (the inability of sovereign states to respond to collective global problems such as famine, environmental degradation, and human rights abuses).

*Key Criticism of Survival:* Are there no limits to what actions a state can take in the name of necessity?

*Key Criticism of Self-Help:* Self-help is not an inevitable consequence of the absence of a world government; self help is the game which states have chosen to play. Moreover, there are historical and contemporary examples where states have preferred collective security systems, or forms of regional integration, in preference to self-help.

Conflict vs. cooperation in IR: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4aj87Q2JhdM>

## Progress



Values:

Power&Security

## Questions

1. Is realism about being *real* in IR?
2. Why is the ‘The Melian Dialogue’ important for realism?
3. What types of *realism* do you know?
4. What sub-types of *structural realism* do you know?
5. What are the three elements of *essential realism*?
6. What means that *statism* is centrepiece of structural realism?
7. What do we understand under *survival*?
8. What do we understand under *self-help*?
9. What is the key criticism of statism?
10. What is the key criticism of self-help?

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