Realism and International Relations

Realism is often associated with a tradition of thought that emphasizes the role of state actors in international politics. It is based on the idea that international politics is characterized by competition, conflict, and negotiation among states. Realism views states as rational actors who pursue their own interests in order to maximize their power and security. This tradition of thought is often associated with the work of classical realists such as Thomas Hobbes, Niccolò Machiavelli, and Immanuel Kant, as well as modern realists such as Hans Morgenthau, Kenneth Waltz, and John Mearsheimer.

The Realist tradition is characterized by three main propositions: sovereignty, anarchy, and the survival of the fittest. States are sovereign entities that are not bound by international law and are free to pursue their own interests. The international system is anarchical, meaning that there is no central authority to enforce compliance with international norms. As a result, states must rely on their own capabilities to ensure their survival and security. Finally, the survival of the fittest is a key aspect of realism, which suggests that states must compete with each other in order to maintain their power and security.

The Realist tradition has been influential in shaping international relations theory, and its ideas have been applied to a wide range of political and social phenomena. Realism has been used to explain the behavior of states in international politics, including their motivations, strategies, and outcomes. It has also been applied to the study of other social phenomena, such as terrorism, economic development, and social inequality.

Neorealism and Neoliberalism

Neorealism and neoliberalism are two major schools of thought within realism. Neorealism focuses on the impact of changes in the distribution of power on the behavior of states. It emphasizes the role of the anarchical structure of the international system in shaping the behavior of states. Neoliberalism, on the other hand, focuses on the role of markets and institutions in shaping the behavior of states. It emphasizes the importance of economic and social forces in shaping the international system.

Critics of realism argue that it is an overly simplistic and deterministic view of international politics. They argue that it fails to account for the complexity and fluidity of international relations. They also argue that it is too focused on the behavior of states and neglects the role of other actors, such as non-state actors and international organizations.

Despite these criticisms, realism remains a dominant school of thought in international relations. It continues to be influential in shaping the behavior of states and in shaping the international system. Realism has been used to explain a wide range of political and social phenomena, and it is likely to continue to be an important force in international relations for many years to come.
International Relations and Scientific Progress contends that a theory focusing on the structure of the international system explains a wider and more interesting range of events in world politics than other theories. Such theorizing appears to be out of favor as the result of the apparent failure by structural realism, the most prominent system-level theory, over the last two decades, on any number of fronts—most notably an inability to anticipate the ending of the Cold War and its aftermath. This new book is put forward as the most comprehensive and innovative theoretical work on paradigms in international relations since the publication of Theory of International Politics, which created structural realism, more than two decades ago. With appropriate revisions, however, structural realism has the potential to reclaim its primacy. The first part of International Relations and Scientific Progress assesses the meaning of progress in the discipline of international relations, a process that culminates in the creation of a new concept, the scientific research enterprise. The second part reviews structural realism within that context and identifies a lack of research that links power-based indicators to international conflict, crisis, and war. This part of the book makes the case for an elaboration of structural realism by showing that a system-level theory based on structure has great unrealized explanatory potential. By comparison, the current overwhelmingly research-oriented agenda on state dyads ignores power limitations on understanding that are not currently appreciated. Part Three sums up the work and explores new directions, most notably an empirical testing of an elaborated version of structural realism that focuses on both continuity and change in the international system.

The Power of Power Politics

John A. Vasquez 1983