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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **1. Symbiotic Realism and the Interlocking Dimensions of an Interconnected World**

Hans Morgenthau once wrote that:

[I]nternational relations is something not to be taken for granted, but something to be understood and to be changed and, more particularly, to be changed beyond the present limits of its political structure and organization. Here lies indeed the ultimate theoretical and practical justification for our interest in a theory of international relations.<sup>1</sup>

The field of International Relations (IR) today contains several general frameworks that seek to explain the workings of international relations and, to varying degrees, to contribute to efforts to move beyond the apparent confines of the current system. These approaches provide a variety of visions of the world, the most familiar of which is the realist view.

It is realism that has set the boundaries of the discipline, which has meant that IR has traditionally been concerned with the study of the interrelationships between states. The conception of the world offered by realists is easy to grasp. Rational, calculating, and egoistic states are the most important actors in a nonhierarchical international system. States' survival strategies are based on amassing power and forming alliances against any state that threatens to upset the existing balance of power. Power politics is the name of the game and the game is zero-sum. That is, one state's gain is another state's loss. Moreover, under conditions of scarcity and international anarchy, morality is regarded as a statesperson's folly.

We are under no illusion that morality and peace are possible without an overarching central and just authority or a benevolent hegemon. Given the powerful and innate survival instincts and drivers of behavior, philosophers through the ages have recognized that some

kind of central authority to prevent/arbitrate conflict and guarantee justice, security, peace, and prosperity is necessary. IR scholars are some of the most recent actors to attempt to grapple with these issues and to offer counsel to states in their relations with others.

Yet, as the discipline's dominant paradigm, realism emphasizes only some of the aspects of human nature that might motivate state behavior. Most realists assume that fear, reputation, and self interest constitute the strongest motivating factors behind the actions of states. These impulses are thought to exist *a priori*. In other words, before contact with other states. Interaction with other states is thus not expected to alter significantly a state's preferences, interests, or posture *vis-à-vis* their counterparts. Moreover, other possible motivating factors, such as the desire for justice, compassion, or legal responsibility, are assumed to be less important drivers of state behavior. An extremely narrow conception of human nature, therefore, underpins the realist world view.

What is clearly missing from the realist paradigm are the substrates of human nature that require some concept of the perceptual frameworks and norms that inform relations between actors. We maintain that insights from neurobiology provide a more complete understanding of both human beings and states and their relations. Neurobiological conceptions of human nature are much broader than those of realism. A person's ego, for example, is not understood simply as the driver of domination and the pursuit of power, but also as the driver of a number of other traits, including the need for a positive identity and a sense of belonging. If such factors are taken into account, our understanding of human behavior, as well as the behavior of states, is substantially altered.

Realism's state-centrism also leads to a conception of the global system that is too narrow, resulting in the neglect of numerous non-state actors that help to account for the dynamics and relations inside the global system. Moreover, limiting the study of IR to the distribution of material capabilities between states neglects other types of power and motivators of action that constitute identities other than that of the rational, egoistic sovereign state – such as ethnic and gender identities. In our view, the conception of the global system must be widened and, moreover, an idealist dimension must be added to its ontology (i.e., what exists).

In addition, relations between states have been significantly altered by globalization. Today, states can no longer adequately ad-

dress the challenges to security that they face in isolation from one another. One state's security now depends on cooperation with other states, rather than an individual state's strategies for accruing power. This is due to the intensification of the cross-border threats to security such as environmental degradation, which typically develop over time, as well as increased connectivity, which can result in events on the other side of the world having an instantaneous impact on a state's security.

Another aspect inadequately dealt with by realists that we wish to address is the issue of scarcity. Within the realist paradigm, a state's power is partly determined by its control of resources. Since resources are scarce and no world government exists to ensure the fair distribution of those that exist, constant competition for resources may be expected. Conflicts of interest are, therefore, bound to develop as states attempt to win control of a greater amount of resources relative to other states.<sup>2</sup> We propose a re-examination of the central relevance of scarcity to today's inter-state relations and conflicts because of the unlimited potential for current and future technological innovation to achieve abundance.

With these shortcomings in mind, our aim is to propose a new and more comprehensive framework for understanding global politics, which we term *Symbiotic Realism*. *Symbiotic Realism* may be described as a theory of relations in a globally anarchic world of instant connectivity and interdependence. It aims to go beyond the state-centrism of realism, integrating a number of actors that have thus far been either underemphasized or ignored by the realist paradigm. It also attempts to provide a more complex understanding of the workings of the global system by identifying four interlocking dynamics, namely the predilections of human nature, global anarchy, interdependence, and instant connectivity.

The actors we believe must be considered, given the substrates of human nature, the condition of global anarchy, and globalization, are: (1) the individual; (2) the state; (3) large collective identities; (4) international organizations (multilateral institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs)); (5) transnational corporations (TNCs); (6) the environment; (7) women; (8) natural resources; and (9) information and communications technology (ICT). All are important and help to (re)produce the global order while, at the same time, being affected by it. Even in approaches that attempt to depart from the state-centrism of realism, it is often not clear where some or all of

these actors fit. The biosphere (the environment and natural resources) is a particularly important addition, given that it is not usually thought of as an actor *per se*. We believe that it should be classified as a “reactive actor” since it is reacting to human activities in such a way as to call into question current levels of civilization and to transform aspects of the global system, for example, through global climate change. This type of agency is a non-conscious form of agency that originates from the Earth’s “deep structure.”

We attempt to provide a more adequate framework with which to conceive relations between these actors in a rapidly changing global environment. While many approaches make a conscious effort to incorporate the role of cognitive-normative frameworks, the way in which an idealist dimension is dealt with is often found wanting. Some approaches are more helpful than others in capturing the way in which various identities are shaped by and help to shape the global system. For example, postmodern feminists, and postmodernists in general, are more capable of dealing with questions of gender, ethnicity, and civilizational identities, because perceptions and the construction of meaning are brought to the fore. Yet, while there is certainly a need to deconstruct meanings embedded in language in order to comprehend the world, there is also a need to be able to reconstruct that world. Moreover, in our view, there are some things that are given in nature – most notably human nature – and this is something that postmodernists deny. In our view, a middle ground has to be reached.

*Symbiotic Realism* has a dual ontology in which resources may be thought of as those given by nature, such as water and minerals, as well as what Anthony Giddens refers to as “authoritative resources” that are produced through human interaction and come about when power “flows smoothly” in the reproduction of the global system.<sup>3</sup> Conceiving of resources in this way enables *Symbiotic Realism* to “see” how intersubjective meanings help to constitute material power. Adopting a dual ontology helps us to capture the substrates of human nature more adequately. We concede that human beings are, indeed, motivated by the satisfaction of human needs, ego, and fear. Yet, there are also ways in which intersubjective meanings structure facets of ego that require an idealist ontology. We need to be sensitive to the ways in which a person’s specific cultural, gender, and class identities, for instance, shape the way in which they experience the same thing or, in other words, to be able to acknowledge that there are many “truths.”

Moreover, some aspects of a state's power may come from their capacity to lead through consent rather than coercion, which necessarily involves cognitive and normative schemes as well as material phenomena. This implies a type of hegemony. *Symbiotic Realism's* sensitivity to perceptual schemes and norms enables it to explain, as traditional realists cannot, why the United States (US) can lead without having to confront alliances of European states that attempt to balance against it. It can also suggest ways to avoid resistance to its overwhelmingly superior position in the global system.

A dual ontology also enables *Symbiotic Realism* to capture the sense in which large collective identities, whether sub-state or supra-state, are fluid rather than fixed entities that are continually adapting to changing environments. Globalization is a key dimension that is helping to rapidly alter people's environment. As a result of advances in technology, people can now be instantly connected with each other and images can be transmitted in no time across the globe, often with serious consequences. Human mobility has also intensified as people migrate to find work in other countries and travel with increasing ease from place to place. What this means is that large collective identities are rubbing up against other large collective identities much more than was the case previously. This can cause members of these entities to feel threatened, disoriented, or marginalized. Large collective identities are, therefore, significant to the dynamics of the global system. The neurobiological predilections of human nature, indeed, indicate that the well-being of human beings depends in part on the possession of a positive identity and a sense of belonging. They also tell us that cultural arrogance and exceptionalism, which taken together may increase insecurity and the likelihood of conflict, are equally possible.

*Symbiotic Realism* not only aims to understand the dynamics of the global system, but also contains a normative dimension. Whereas empirical approaches aim to describe how things are, normative theory concentrates on how things ought to be, suggesting moral norms, standards, and rules that should govern society in order to allow it to reach its full potential. Here, we propose a more adequate structure for the governance of today's highly complex global system. The governance structure that we set out takes into account the predilections of human nature as we have defined them, global anarchy, intensified interdependence, and instant interconnectivity. At the individual level we propose a domestic governance structure that includes, but goes beyond, traditional liberal rights. Our conception of human

nature suggests that the security of individuals also implies freedom from want and fear. While the state has traditionally been charged with providing for people's basic needs and security, globalization and global anarchy have led to the state's partial withdrawal from these tasks. Policy frameworks are urgently required that are able to address these issues in the context of a globalizing economy, since fear and want risk provoking aggression, and the pursuit of power, as well as greed and selfishness, make it more difficult for human beings to act morally.

*Symbiotic Realism* makes clear that the realist perception of competitive state relations, in which states are primarily concerned with relative gains in a self-help system, does not stand up to scrutiny. Our conception of human nature tells us that perceptions are as important as material capabilities as motivators of state behavior. Moreover, given increased interdependence, states can engage in symbiotic relations, that is, they can take part in a relationship of mutual dependence that allows one state to gain more than another without deleterious effects. This has several implications for realists. First, it means that absolute gains are possible and that the "game" of international relations is not necessarily zero-sum. Second, it implies that even when a state is accruing a disproportionate amount of power (i.e., material capabilities), there is no reason to assume that other states will form alliances in an attempt to balance against it. Third, it implies that a responsible hegemon should accommodate the interests of other states and avoid threatening behavior or, as a number of neo-realist scholars have recently suggested, engage in a type of "offshore balancing."

In a world in which human mobility is increasing and communications have enabled images to appear simultaneously in multiple areas of the globe, it is essential that human beings feel respected and valued, and that excesses, such as cultural arrogance, are guarded against. Today, we face the collective challenge of successfully managing relations between the cultural groups within societies and promoting at the very least peaceful coexistence between civilizations. *Symbiotic Realism* argues that synergy should be the guiding principle in the search for better ways to manage culturally pluralistic societies and relations between civilizations. Transcultural synergy refers to a situation in which a plurality of cultures and civilizations has a net effect that is greater than that predicted on the basis of knowledge of the likely effects of individual cultures and civilizations. Indeed, it is possible that each large collective identity can provide the stimulus to

other collective identities that face similar challenges presented by the same tendencies of human nature and the same contexts of global anarchy and globalization.

We tend to share the view taken by realism that multilateral organizations are all too frequently weakened by their impartiality as a result of their dominance by the major powers, particularly those of the West, which reduces their effectiveness and credibility, that is, in order to play a constructive and credible role in the global system, they must behave as liberal IR theorists conceive them to be – impartially. This requires that the advantages of the dominant powers be eliminated in order to allow negotiations to represent, protect, and promote the needs and concerns of all the parties concerned with a particular issue. Multilateral institutions also have a potentially greater role to play in conflict prevention through “soft” power instruments such as peacebuilding and reconstruction. Such efforts should also draw on the experience of NGOs and perhaps the corporate sphere.

One of the principal problems illustrated by the role of transnational corporations is the way in which state-based regulation is being rapidly outpaced by the forces of globalization, and the subsequent need for a supranational governance structure that is capable of making TNCs more transparent and holding them more accountable to states and the public. In order to reduce “regulatory arbitrage” (i.e., playing one national regulatory regime off against another) and a “race to the bottom” in terms of standards, we suggest increased harmonization of regulation and the establishment of supranational bodies with which to monitor the activities of TNCs and enforce greater transparency.

In an effort to reduce gender inequalities that negatively affect women, we argue that liberal political rights should also be accompanied by the protection and promotion of biological and gender-specific rights. Yet, activism has to be respectful and to take place within a framework of dialogue which must also be informed by humility and an awareness of cultural sensitivities. Ultimately, improvements in women’s lives will depend on the emergence of endogenous convictions, as well as actors, and processes that are sensitive to different historical and cultural contexts.

We divide the biosphere into two separate “actors:” the environment and natural resources. Some of the problems identified as hindering environmental protection and promoting a waste of resources are the conflicting interests often brought to bear in domestic

political and electoral systems – the most influential of which are those of big business and industry due, in part, to the role of money in some electoral systems – and the concerns of politicians about being re-elected. In order to reduce environmental degradation and promote sustainable forms of development, the role played by money in politics would have to be reduced. There would also be a need to make corporations environmentally responsible through supranational regulatory efforts in a more harmonized system of regulation, and for more complete and more accurate scientific information.

As is mentioned above, one of the key assumptions of realism is the condition of scarcity. States, at least in part, are assumed to behave competitively because of scarcity. This, however, overlooks the fact that scarcity is important only insofar as substitutes cannot be found to perform the same functions as natural resources. Therefore, as long as substitutes can be made available and currently non-extractable resources are able to be extracted, scarcity does not have to imply competition. Nevertheless, this will come at a cost and it may take more time than anticipated. We need not only to invest in technological innovation, but also to find ways to make new technologies available and access to substitutes affordable.

Given ICT's ability to influence the dynamics of the global system, it requires greater regulation. This should, however, be achieved without reducing access to information that may also have a positive impact in terms of increasing awareness and data storage.