Realist/Idealist Texts: Psychometry and Semantics[1]

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Realism/Idealism are major rhetorical tropes of international relations. This paper attempts to generate a thicker specification of their meanings. Canonical international relations texts were searched for prototypic Realist and Idealist items. Expert coders evaluated the items for goodness of fit along Realist an Idealist dimensions. The items fell into four groups. Group 1, *Realism but not Idealism*, contained items that coders scored high on Realism and low on Idealism. As one might expect, these items included positive references to "power," "sovereign," "nation," and "state" as well as "anarchical," "armed," "bad," "balance," "defense," "fear," "force," "interests," "military," "struggle," and "threat." Group 2, *Idealism but not Realism,* included positive references to a number of themes including "agency," "agreement," "disarmament," "environment," "government," "humankind," "institutions," "justice," "order," "organization," "peace," "reform," "security," "structure," "transformation," and "welfare." Items in Groups 1 and 2 clarify the separate subjective dimensions of Realism and Idealism. They can be used to measure Realist and Idealist attitudes in content analysis, psychological experiments, and survey research. Group 3, *Both Realism and Idealism,* contained items that were functional and pragmatic, blending positive, balanced, moderate references to both schools. Items in Group 3 suggest that Realism and Idealism need not be dialectically opposed antitheses, as they often are presented in the literature, but can be joined in a constructive synthesis. Group 4, *Neither Realism nor Idealism*, contained items that were not explicitly linked to general theoretical concepts, but were heavily embedded in ideology, such as anti-Communism, or in specific contexts such as the Middle East. Items in Group 4 raise questions about the general

applicability of international relations theory in concrete situations of foreign policy. The contexts of specific situations may contain their own powerful independent logics, activating local rather than global knowledge.

Rhetoric and Meaning

The Realist/Idealist debate runs through international relations discourse. Realist talk begins with the writings of Thucydides, Machiavelli, and Hobbes, flows through the work of Morgenthau, out to contemporary proponents such as Keohane and Waltz. Realism describes international relations in general terms but draws force from the 20th century Allied experience with Wilhelmian and Nazi Germany, Imperial Japan, and the Soviet Union. Keohane (1986, p.7) identifies three "key assumptions" of Realism:

(1)   states (or city-states) are the key units of action;

(2)   they seek power, either as an end in itself or as a means to other ends; and

(3) they behave in ways that are, by and large, rational, and comprehensible to outsiders in rational terms.

Whatever its relationship to international politics, Realism dominates intellectual and academic politics. Realist rhetoric is very much a part of the world that it constructs. Not only the state, but also the speakers, in the guise of theorists, contest for power with their "rhetorical brilliance" and the "power of their arguments." Realist rhetoric is the hegemonic conversation of international politics. Keohane (1986, p. 9) notes that "World War II elevated this realist perspective to the new orthodoxy in Anglo-American thinking on international

affairs" and that "during the postwar years, political realism swept the field in the United States."

Realism constructs and defines itself in its difference to Idealism, which term it has also constructed as its rhetorical opponent. Realism's political conquest validates its scientific claim to represent the real world. Realism thus subordinates its identified opposite with the label Idealism, successfully stigmatizing it as unrealistic and utopian (Hillam, 1980). The rhetorical playing field is not level. To make matters worse, those critical of Realism, or with a different world view, must accept the label imposed upon them if they are to enter the conversation at all. Anti-Realists may struggle to differentiate themselves rhetorically with labels like functionalism, human rights, or world order, but Realist hegemony ultimately defines the terms of the discourse.

Idealism, constructed in this way, begins in the sane sources as Realism. Idealists, like Realists, point to Thucydides as a foundational thinker, but they contest his identity. For Idealists, *The Peloponnesian Wars* is not a canonical primer but a primal tragedy. Thucydides shows how Realism contains the seeds of its own destruction, presenting an example of the terrible consequences that result when collective morality and ethics are ignored (White, 1984; Rawlings, 1981). Idealism traces its genealogy through such writers as Dante, Grotius, and Kant, through modern authors like Claude, Falk, Jacobson, and Mendlovitz. Idealism also draws inspiration from 20th century political leaders like Woodrow Wilson, Dag Hammarskjold, and Lester Pearson and from the struggles to create and develop first the League of Nations and then the United Nations. Idealism proposes to escape from an obsessive fixation on power. It suggests that the international system is not inevitably rigid and corrupt-there are elements which can adapt and change in a positive direction.

Realist and Idealist tropes are neat in a general, abstract sense but are not always easy to discern in concrete settings. For this reason, we sought to develop a set of items that would clarify the

rhetorical and theoretical meaning of international Realism/Idealism, as well as provide an instrument for psychological measurement of Realist/Idealist attitudes. The search for thicker semantic specification occurred in three stages. In the first stage, one of the co-authors selected 472 items from a set of canonical texts. Some of these were identified as Realist: Thucydides, (1982) [T]; Machiavelli (1981) [MA]; Morgenthau and Thompson (1985) [MT]. Others were Idealist: Jacobson (1984) [J]; Falk (1975) [F]; Mendlovitz (1975) [MZ]; Claude (1971) [FC]. A final set was chosen for its general theoretical importance: Mansbach and Vasquez (1981) [V] or methodological relevance Holsti and Rosenau (1984) [HR]. In the second stage, the other author and a collaborator separately scored each item based on their assessment of the degree to which it reflected a Realist or Idealist orientation. [Beer and Boynton (1995) contains a more extended contrast.] An item that completely reflected a Realist or an Idealist position received a score of +5 on that dimension. If they believed that the item was completely contrary to the Realist or Idealist position, it received a score of -5. An item that did not appear to reflect a Realist or Idealist position in any way received a score of 0. Subtracting the Idealist from the Realist raw score for each item gave a rough estimation of which items were considered to be the most *extreme* Realist and Idealist items. Items that received normalized scores of +-10 were considered to be the most extreme. Conversely, adding Idealist and Realist scores produced a measure of *balance.* Items that received scores of 0 were considered to be the most balanced. In the third stage, the authors then selected a subset of the most extreme and balanced 40 items, 25 Realist and 15 Idealist, from the original scored items. Ten additional Idealist items were added from Mendlovitz (1975) for a total of 50 items. These 50 items were administered to sixteen international relations/political science graduate students. The students were given copies of the 50 items and were verbally instructed as to the method whereby the items were to be scored.

Written instructions were also provided with each set of items. The students were given one week in which to score the items. Subsequently the 50 items were again ranked for extremeness and balance.

Four Configurations

The procedure described above yielded four separate configurations of items, located at the polar extremes of Figure 1.

Either/Or

At the ends of horizontal axis are the either/or positions. They include mirror image Idealist arid Realist positions.

Realism but not Idealism. Table 1 provides more detail on items presenting the most extreme and contrasting Realist positions. Machiavelli continues to be a rich inspiration. Both of the items included in the original large set of items made it to the short list. Hans Morgenthau also speaks clearly. Even though only 62 of the original 472 items came from Morgenthau and Thompson (1985), seven of the most extreme items came from this source. The underlinings in Table 1, inserted after coding, suggest major key words. First and most important among these is power. In the ten items below, there are twelve separate references to power. These include power standing relatively alone, as well as power embedded in such phrases as " power politics" or the "balance of power." Other key words include "sovereign," and "nation," as well as

"anarchical," "armed," "bad," "balance," "defense," "fear," "force," "interests," "military," "struggle," and "threat."

+10

Both Realism

And Idealism

B

A

L

A

N

C

E

Idealism   Realism

-10   but not ------------------------------ EXTREMENESS ------------------------ but not +10

Realism   Idealism

B

A

L

A

N

C

E

-10

Neither Realism

Nor Idealism

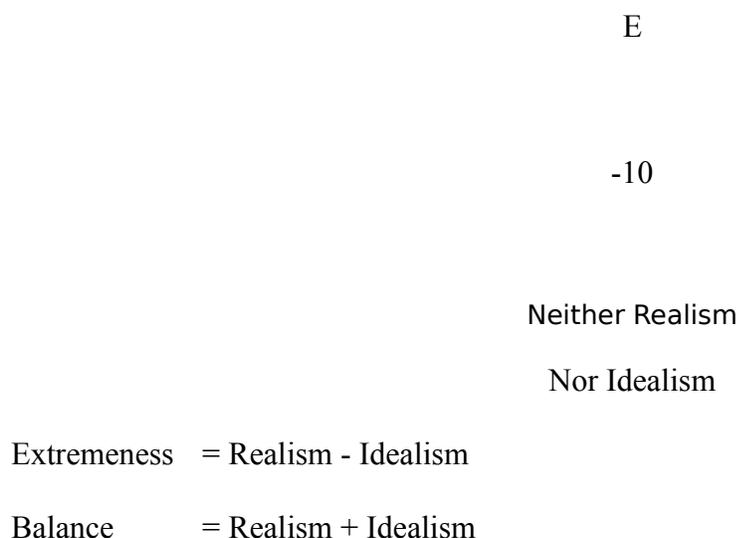Extremeness   = Realism - Idealism

Balance   = Realism + Idealism

Figure 1. Realism/Idealism Configurations.

   Idealism but not Realism. Table 2 gives examples of items most clearly exemplifying Idealism. World order scholars Falk and Mendlovitz dominate this list. Major key words from these texts include "agency," "agreement," "disarmament, "environment," "government," "guidance," "humankind," "institutions," "justice," "order," organization," "peace," "reform," "regulation," security," "structure," "transformation," and welfare." These items call for constraints and limitations on nation states. The strong rhetoric of a new world order foreshadows the rhetoric of President George Bush.

Anomalies

   The Realist and Idealist items discussed above were the major focus of our research. These were the "best" items, judged on Darwinian survival through the two rounds of selection. At the

same time, we can also glean useful insights from items that did less well. Usually such items are simply discarded without consideration. Nevertheless, they can be analytically recycled to provide further information.

Both Realism And Idealism. One such set of items was judged in the first round to exemplify both Realism and Idealism. The dominant sources are Claude and Jacobson, Holsti and Rosenau. The items do not discriminate between the two schools of rhetoric, but are pragmatic and functional, limiting and combining Realist and Idealist themes. They recognize the fundamental aspects of the Realist system based on state sovereignty and national interest. But they also see the dysfunctional consequences. They imply the necessity of weighing standard Realist concerns against those of international community and collective interests. There are suggestions of ethical, moral constraints on power and a need to justify and legitimate military force. At the same time, there are serious practical constraints on Idealism. International law, organization, and arms control are important, but in an instrumental way, and there are limits on their utility in a world where state actors retain substantial independent power resources. Domestic politics constrain the degree to which foreign policy can go in both Realist and Idealist directions.

Table 1

Items. Realism But Not Idealism

0.   E 10, B 0, R 5, I -5. (Ideal Type).

1.   E 9.375, B 0.25, R +4.8125, I -4.5625.   ". . . all politically active <u>nations</u> must be intent upon acquiring as much <u>power</u> as they can; that is, among other things, upon being as well <u>armed</u> as they can." (MT 425).

2.   E 9.1875, B 0.3125, R +4.75, 1 -4.4375.   ". . . <u>power</u> alone can limit <u>power</u>." (MT 189).

3.   E 9.125, B 0.625, R +4.875, I -4.25.   "The aspiration for <u>power </u>being the distinguishing element of international politics, as of all politics, international politics is of necessity <u>power politics</u>." (MT 37).

4.   E 9.0625, B 0.6875, R +4.875, I -4.1875.   ". . . the <u>struggle </u>for <u>power </u>is universal in time and space and is an undeniable fan of experience." (MT 38).

5.   E 8.9375, B 0.5625, R +4.75, I -4.1875.   "Both domestic and international politics are a <u>struggle</u> for <u>power</u> modified only by the different conditions under which this <u>struggle</u> takes place in the domestic and in the international spheres." (MT 39).

6.   E 8.75, B 0.50, R +4.625, I -4.125.   "International politics can be defined as a continuing effort to maintain and to increase the <u>power</u> of one's own <u>nation</u> and to keep in check or reduce the <u>power</u> of other <u>nations</u>." (MT 239).

7.   E 8.375, B 0.375t R +4.375, I -4.00.   "It is much more safe to be <u>feared</u> than to be loved." (V 29 quoting MA).

8. E 8.375, B 1.00, R +4.6875, I -3.6873. "In an <u>anarchical</u> international system, <u>military power</u> properly deployed has not lost its utility; there is no effective substitute for the ultimate <u>threat</u> to employ <u>force</u> in <u>defense</u> of vital <u>interests</u>." (HR 17).

9. E 8.06255, B 0.9375, R +4.50, I -3.5625. ". . . that the <u>balance of power</u> and policies aiming at its preservation are not only inevitable but are an essential stabilizing factor in a society of <u>sovereign nations;</u> and that the instability of the international <u>balance of power</u> is due not to the faultiness of the principle but to the particular conditions under which the principle must operate in a society of <u>sovereign nations</u>." (MT 187).

10. E 7.9375, B 0.5625, R +3.6875, I -415. ". . . but as men are naturally <u>bad</u>, and will not observe their faith towards you, you must, in the same way, not observe yours to them . . ." (V 30 quoting Machiavelli).

Note. Scores based on seventeen coders, third stage, 50 items.

Table 2

Items. Idealism But Not Realism

0. E –10, B 0, R –5, I 5. (Ideal Type).

1. E 9.5625, B 0.3125, a -4.625, I +4.9375 ". . . a new world <u>order</u> based on <u>peace</u> and <u>justice</u> is not only desirable and necessary but possible. . ." (F 1).

2.	E 8.8125, B 0.8125t R -4.009, I +4.8125	"We urgently need a spontaneous mass movement for world <u>order reform</u> that is committed to promoting the values of <u>peace</u>, economic <u>well-being</u>, <u>environmental</u> quality, and social and political <u>justice</u> . . ." (MZ 257).

3.	E 8.625, B 0.50, R -4.5625, I +4.0625	". . . world <u>peace</u> must in the long run radically transform all foreign politics into world domestic politics, thus requiring all powers, even the greatest, to renounce their sovereign right to wage war." (MZ 148).

4.	E 8.4375, B 0.3125, R -4.0625, I +4.375	". . . a <u>revolutionary</u> <u>transformation</u> of the global political system offers the only meaningful prospect for achieving world <u>order</u>." (C 413).

5.	E 8.125, B 0.25, R -3.9375, I +4.1875	". . . the creation of international <u>institutions</u> to deal with specialized functions represents the most fruitful approach to world <u>order reform</u>." (F 190).

6.	E 7.75, B 0.25, R -3.75, I +4.00	". . . the state must abdicate its traditional control over the elements of national power, accepting the responsibility to act or to refrain from acting in accordance with the stipulations of a multilateral <u>agreement</u> and the dictates of an international <u>agency</u>." (C 253).

7.	E 7.75, B 0.125, R -3.9375, I +3.8125	" . . . in order to satisfy the <u>value</u> requirements of the modern age, it is essential to focus upon the incapacity of a world <u>order</u> system constituted

primarily by sovereign states of unequal size and wealth. These value requirements can be met if, and only if, fundamental world order reform takes place in the form of rapid transition to a type of world order system that embodies an adequate central guidance capability." (F 80).

8.   E 7.6875, B 1.5625, R -3.0625, I +4.625 ". . . the guiding principle in politics must be world peace," (MZ, 147).

9.   E 7.6875, B 0.0625, R -3.875, I +3.8125 As a new world order system emerges, "events taking place on national territory but having significant effects on the world environment will have to be made subject to regulation via central guidance." (F 335).

10.   E 7.4375, B 0.1875, R -3.8125, I +3.625 "World government as a horizon of aspiration is bound to become relevant during the next three decades and will, in that sense, provide a world order 'enemy to the left' that might help create a political climate of support for major structural reform, even if not for the formal establishment of a world government," (F 184).

Note Scores based on seventeen coders, third stage, 50 items.

Neither Realism Nor Idealism

  A final set of items from Holsti and Rosenau reflect neither realism nor idealism. They do not deal with abstract, general concepts or theory. Instead they focus on specific geographical actors and contexts-Russia, China, Asia, Europe, the Middle East-or on ideology, Communism.

Conclusion

This paper is a small step toward a thicker semantics of international relations. Tables 1 and 2 suggest what Realism and Idealism mean by themselves and in terms of their differences with each other. At the same time, the items in Tables 1 and 2 may also be useful for other research interests. First, the items were derived from standard texts. The results reflect on their origins and may be used for content analysis of texts, as well as public documents in international relations and foreign policy.

Second, the short lists of Realist and Idealist items may be used in psychological laboratory experiments. Prior research has connected personality dimensions with cooperative/conflictual responses in simulated war crisis settings. When primed with war cues, subjects with dominant personality traits showed more conflictual behavior than subjects with submissive personality traits (Beer, Healy, Sinclair, and Bourne, 1987). Further attempts to examine the implications of general personality and value attributes (e.g., Goldberg, 1992; McCrae and John, 1992; Peabody and Goldberg, 1989; Bales and Cohen, 1979, p. 504) and their connections with attitudes toward international relations may be able to use a scale differentiating subjects along a Realism/Idealism dimension.

Finally, work on foreign policy and public opinion has emphasized dimensions of foreign policy attitudes such as internationalism and isolationism (Holsti & Rosenau 1984; Wittkopf, 1987). Little prior research, however, has explicitly attempted directly to connect public opinion with mainstream international relations theory. Realism and Idealism items might be used for such applications.

Tables 3 and 4 point to the possibilities and limits of Realism and Idealism today. Table 3 suggests that the rhetorics of Realism and Idealism need not necessarily remain isolated and opposed. They can usefully be combined in an integratively complex synthesis where participants are sensitive to the perspectives and concerns of both perspectives (cf. Balleck, 1992). A combination of Realism and Idealism may be particularly appropriate for the surviving superpower attempting to construct a new world order. Table 4 suggests that specific geographical and ideological referents activate mindsets that tend to wash way the cues and concerns of Realism and Idealism. The "power of power politics" (Vasquez (1981) may not be universally fungible. Ideological knowledge, geographical knowledge, or other forms of local knowledge (cf. Geertz, 1983) may provide powerful alternative schemata that simply override general international relations theory.

In light of such contextual dependence, one may wonder about the continued relevance of Realism/Idealism as the major discourse of world politics, framing and orienting the emerging international relations of the 21st century. Realist rhetorical hegemony is challenged and limited by opposing rhetorics. Some of this opposition comes from self-avowed Idealists. Yet most of it originates in the pluralistic diversity of the international system itself. In spite of its intellectual and academic dominance, Realism is further challenged and often dominated by the specificity, the "facticity" of real international life-worlds that may be more urgent and more real than Realism. Discourse may mold responses to situations, but situations also determine discourse.

Repeated use has made us familiar with the terms of the debate, but it has also contributed to semantic exhaustion. We should not wish to go so far as Fukuyama (1992) and proclaim the end of history and the irrelevance of power. Nevertheless, it would be foolish not to recognize that the driving political force-the great anti-totalitarian struggle of the 20th century, what Aron (1955) called the century of total war-may now be waning or

transformed. As the new century prepares to be born, the old dynamics may persist, but they will shape themselves in new ways. The rhetorics of Realism and Idealism, as we have known them, emerge out of a discourse situated in a other worlds (cf. Farrenkopf, 1991; Long, 1991). The-past still speaks to us and through us, but there is a pressing need to expand the conversation to include new speakers, new words-other voices, other rooms.

Table 3

Items: Both Realism and Idealism

0.   E 0.0, B 10.0, R 5.0, I 5.0. (Ideal Type).

1.   E 0.5, B 6.5, R +3.5, I +3.0 ". . . a <u>world order</u> solution is <u>unlikely</u> to emerge in this century by the abrupt substitution of one system for another." (F 219).

2.   E 0.5, B 5.5, R +3.0, I +2.3 "The American people lack the <u>patience</u> for <u>foreign policy</u> undertakings that offer little prospect for success in the short run." (HR 61).

3.   E 0.0, B 7.02, R +3.5, I +3.5 "It might be argued that the <u>obstacles</u> to <u>disarmament</u> are all, in the final analysis, political ones, and that the technical <u>problems</u> would disintegrate if their political foundations were removed." (C 299).

4.   E 0.0, B 7.0, R +3.5, I +3.5 ". . . as the Westphalian system of sovereign <u>states</u> is extended over the earth's territory, it will be virtually <u>impossible</u> for states to isolate themselves from outside influences." (J 385-86).

5.   E 0.0, B 5.0, R +2.5, I +2.5. "Collective <u>security</u> can command <u>little confidence</u> if it promises to become effective only after an aggressor has ravaged a country." (C 259).

6.   E 0.0, B 5.0, R +2.5, I +2.5 "The major consequences of the [Vietnam] War have been <u>domestic</u>, including a damaged American economy, a decline of trust in government and other major institutions, and a distorted set of national priorities." (HR 17).

7.   E -0.5, B 5.5, R +2.5, I +3.0 ". . . a workable system of collective <u>security</u> can hardly afford the exclusion or abstention of a major <u>power</u>." (C 257).

8.   E -1.0, B 5.0, R +2.0, I +3.0 ". . . there is not necessarily a wide gulf between the proponent of a <u>limited</u> world <u>government</u> and the advocate of a strengthened United Nations." (C 41).

9.   E -1.0, B 5.0, R +2.0, I +3.0 ". . . it is more of an embarrassment for a <u>state</u> to be condemned by an <u>organization</u> to which it belongs than by one with membership limited to the other side, and a <u>collective</u> condemnation carries more force than the worlds of a single individual or a single state." (J 157).

10.   E -1.0, B 5.0, R +2.0, I +3.0 ". . . decisions that are made within international organizations tend to be more open to public scrutiny than they would be if they were the result of traditional diplomacy." (J 125).

Table 4

Items: Neither Realism Nor Idealism

0. E 0, B -10, R –5, I -5. (Ideal Type).

1.   E 3.5, B -4.5, R -0.5, I -4.0 "The surest simple guide to U.S. interests n foreign policy is opposition to Communism." (HR 76).

2.   E 3.5, B -4.5, R -0.5, I -4.0 "Russian intentions toward Western Europe are essentially expansionist. So, too, are Chinese intentions in Asia." (HR 76).

3.   E 3.5, B -3.5, R 0.0, I -3.5 "Peace is indivisible. . . Thus any expansion of Communist influence must be resisted." (HR 76).

4.   E 3.5, B -3.5, R 0.0, I -3.5 "It is not in our interest to have better relations with the Soviet Union because we are getting less than we are giving to them." (HR 96).

5.   E 3.O, B -5.0, R -1.0, I -4.0 "American policy in the Middle East should place primary emphasis on maintaining the security of Israel." (HR 239).

6.   E 3.O, B -3.0, R 0.0, I -3.0 "The main source of unrest, disorder, subversion, and civil war in underdeveloped areas is <u>Communist</u> influence and support." (HR 76).

7.   E 0.5, B -8.5, R -4.0, I -4.5. "When force is used, <u>military</u> rather than political goals should determine its application." (HR 60).

8.   E -3.5, B -4.5, R -4.0, I -0.5 "American policy in the <u>Middle East</u> should place primary emphasis on obtaining a national homeland for the Pa1estinians." (HR 239).

9.   E -1.0, B -3.0, R -2.0, I -1.0 "American foreign policy should be based on the premise that the <u>Communist</u> 'bloc' is irreparably fragmented." (HR 59).

Note. Scores based on two coders, second stage, 472 items.

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