

POLITICAL SCIENCE'S CONCEPTIONS OF LIBERALISM AND IDEALISM

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Abstract

In many international relations (IR) textbooks, liberalism is often highlighted as a major theoretical perspective alongside realism and occasionally other less common approaches like global society, Marxism, constructivism, or feminism. This positioning suggests that liberalism is a primary opposing approach to the dominant principle of realism in IR. Realism is often contrasted with liberalism's more optimistic view of human nature. Realists generally view conflict as the norm in international relations, whereas liberals tend to be more hopeful about the possibilities for global peace and cooperation. Liberals emphasize the role of various international actors, both within and outside countries, in fostering interdependence and a global system based on laws. In contrast, realists focus on analyzing relations between nation-states within a self-governing system characterized by mutual distrust and suspicion

1.INTRODUCTION

The in-depth understanding of liberalism in the post-World War II era reflects its evolution as a philosophical framework. Idealism, an older and somewhat specific concept, played a crucial role in shaping contemporary liberal international relations theory. Following World War I, idealism gained popularity as an approach to studying international politics, although it was often criticized by realists as utopian or idealistic. However, in retrospect, it has been recognized as a significant theoretical tradition within international relations (IR). While both idealism and contemporary liberalism share roots in Enlightenment political thought, liberal IR theory is intellectually linked to the idealist subculture of the interwar period. This research article traces the intellectual origins of modern liberal IR theory to liberal philosophers who theorized about the state. It explores how liberal ideas of the state were

applied to international politics, their subsequent characterization as idealistic, and how intelligent individuals employ liberal-idealist strategies to advance global institutions and initiatives. The essay also examines the renaissance of liberal theory after the Cold War, highlighting the diverse strands of liberal thought that have emerged since World War II. Finally, the study concludes with a discussion of the key global issues and challenges that confront contemporary liberal IR theory.

2.THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF LIBERALISM AND IDEALISM

2.1 Liberalism and the ideas of the Enlightenment

The underlying principle of liberalism as a national political philosophy is the significance of individual freedom. Liberals advocate for limited or conditional powers that derive their legitimacy from the consent of the governed, where rulers are restrained from exerting force except through lawful means. Therefore, liberalism promotes the idea of a nation whose purpose is to eliminate barriers to freedom and safeguard citizens from persecution, even by the majority. To prevent governments from exceeding these limitations, it is essential to have institutional restraints, checks and balances, and individual rights, which are integral to the constitutional arrangements of most liberal-democratic societies today.

John Locke, an English philosopher, played a pivotal role in advancing the concept of limited government in his work published in 1689. He argued that in the state of nature, the pre-political condition of humanity before living under a governing authority, individuals possess "natural rights" to life, liberty, and property. While people can understand these laws through reason, even in the absence of a governing body, violators of natural law can be identified and punished by anyone who lives in accordance with the laws of nature, not just those whose rights have been violated. Locke proposed that rational individuals could establish a civil government to preserve and protect the freedoms people enjoyed in the state of nature. However, the challenge lies in ensuring that those who administer punishment are honest and impartial. Consequently, the idea of a liberal nation is defined in terms of political freedom, democracy, constitutionally guaranteed rights, and the right to private property.

Locke's ideas on the proper form of governments were widely adopted by other thinkers in the liberal tradition, who applied them to relationships between nations. Contemporary theorists like Emmerich de Vattel linked a distinctly Lockean analysis of international relations, in which states are bound by accepted natural laws (referred to as the "law of

nations" by Vattel). These laws obligate states to respect each other's rights without a governing authority to enforce them. Vattel used this framework to conceptualize what is now recognized as international law and collective security, both considered liberal principles within the global community.

Immanuel Kant, often regarded as one of the founding fathers of idealism, further developed the application of liberal concepts to all nations. Kant argued that republican states (i.e., liberal democracies) are inherently more peaceful and, as a result, can establish international laws to modify interstate behavior and promote conditions for peace. He built upon Locke's ideas of individual liberty, popular sovereignty, and the Enlightenment belief in human progress and perfectibility. The notion of democratic peace, also known as the Kantian understanding, posits that domestic politics and state institutions significantly influence a nation's international behavior and stands as a key contribution of liberal international relations theory. Kant also advocated for the formation of a global federation of democratic, nonviolent nations that would gradually expand over time, leading to a higher level of nonviolence in the world. Instead of advocating for global governance, Kant proposed a loose association of nations that would persist, prevent conflicts, and gradually increase its membership.

The idea that free and open societies should embrace an open market also originated from Locke's conception of personal property. This concept, advocated by liberal philosophers such as Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill, and Adam Smith, posits that free and open trade between nations has a harmonizing effect as it is mutually beneficial and increases societal well-being. The main idea is twofold: first, free trade offers a peaceful and environmentally friendly means of achieving wealth, which is a common interest of all states. Historical wars fought for economic gains proved to be costly and detrimental to society as a whole. Therefore, the unrestricted movement of goods, capital, and labor across borders can reduce tensions and foster communication, binding countries together through shared financial interests. This concept, referred to as "commercial pacifism" by Michael Doyle, highlights the belief that market-oriented cultures are fundamentally averse to war.

This discussion of global liberalism, stemming from Lockean liberalism during the Enlightenment, gives rise to unwavering beliefs about international relations, including a strong preference for a society of states governed by the rule of law, cooperation in international organizations to collectively enforce this law, the promotion of democracy and

liberal values as a means to achieve peace, and the pursuit of free exchange. By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, liberal Enlightenment theory had laid the foundation for what would later be known as idealism and established the groundwork for the development of international relations as a field of study.

2.2 Idealistic thinking and the 20-year crisis

3. LIBERAL NOTION OF TODAY

The overwhelming effect of World War I and the craving to understand, forestall, and eventually dispense with war prompted the development of the scholastic field of Global Relations (IR). During this time, liberal masterminds credited the war to oneself intrigued and careless activities of dictatorial rulers in exceptionally mobilized countries, as well as the obsolete arrangement of partnerships in light of an overall influence that had overwhelmed Europe for a really long time. These liberal masterminds serious areas of strength for had and clear thoughts on the most proficient method to forestall future devastating wars, which vigorously affected the creating field of IR. They looked to supplant the useless European overall influence with an instrument of worldwide regulation and aggregate insurance, as well as to change dictatorial legislatures towards additional popularity based rehearses.

Among the liberal masterminds of that period, Norman Angell stood apart with his book "The Incomparable Deception" (1913), where he contended that war was at this point not a reasonable and beneficial instrument for a country's international strategy. He battled that wars of success between industrialized countries had demonstrated purposeless, and the best reaction to hostility was through an aggregate arrangement of judgment inside a worldwide structure. Angell turned into an intense supporter for the Class of Countries after World War I, recommending that the tactical force of the world ought to be pooled through peaceful accord to lay out a typical rule of life and act as the police power of human progress.

Woodrow Wilson, the Leader of the US at that point, is frequently connected with interwar optimism and is credited as the draftsman of the Class of Countries. Wilson entered World War I with the liberal objective of establishing a protected climate for a majority rules government. He scrutinized the European overall influence framework and saw it as an obstruction to spreading liberal popularity based standards worldwide. Wilson's Fourteen Focuses illustrated his vision for another liberal starting point for worldwide governmental issues, underscoring the advancement of a majority rules system, individual drive, and the

conviction that majority rule governments wouldn't participate in struggle with each other. One more critical part of Wilson's vision was the foundation of a worldwide association in light of severe global regulations, which would supplant the imperfect overall influence framework that had neglected to forestall the war. The Class of Countries was made to encourage tranquil collaboration among state run administrations as an option in contrast to viciousness.

Wilson accepted that the warlike propensities of states and their chiefs could be controlled through a brilliantly planned worldwide establishment, as opposed to pragmatists who acknowledged the uncontrolled quest for power in a hazardous overall influence framework. This thought of Wilsonian optimism depended on the liberal postulation that levelheaded people could make establishments that would work on the human condition. Wilsonian optimism assumed a significant part in molding IR grant during the interwar period, zeroing in on forward-thinking liberal ideas of worldwide organizations, plans for a superior Class of Countries, the production of new global establishments, and the improvement of regulations overseeing highway conduct.

Be that as it may, as we probably are aware, the Class of Countries eventually fizzled, and the speculations advanced by figures like Wilson and Angell confronted solid resistance. The Association demonstrated feeble notwithstanding the Economic crisis of the early 20s, resulting protectionist measures, and the expansionist plans of Germany, Japan, and Italy. E.H. Carr's book "The Twenty Years' Emergency" (2001) is an outstanding investigate of interwar visionaries, testing the misrepresentations of liberal reasoning that overwhelmed conversations on worldwide relations during that period. Carr contended that liberal intelligent people had misconstrued history and the idea of worldwide relations, putting unreasonable accentuation on global regulation and profound quality while underestimating power elements. He excused their point of view as living in fantasy land and contended that irreconcilable circumstances among countries were unavoidable, in opposition to the visionaries' confidence as one. Carr battled that pragmatists, who arose during the 1950s with a more truth based and logical way to deal with concentrating on IR, embraced a structure that perceived the contention among perfect world and reality.

With the ascent of dictatorial and strategic states and the Association's inability to forestall World War II, Wilsonian optimism lost favor among IR researchers. Pragmatist thinking, which maintained a skeptical point of view of human instinct and underscored worldwide

relations as a battle for power inside an anarchic framework, acquired unmistakable quality. Be that as it may, liberal idea kept on affecting IR hypothesis and in the long run reappeared as a critical wellspring of study, developing in light of the difficulties presented by authenticity.

3.1 Liberalisation in postwar society

Realism gained prominence in the context of a bipolar world ruled by two powerful hegemonic powers and marked by a state of security dilemma, which posed challenges to the explanatory power of liberal theory in understanding international politics. However, liberal values continued to play a significant role as global actors grappled with pressing questions about the future of the global political and economic system in the aftermath of World War II. The postwar system was designed as an international order that fostered international collaboration to ensure peace, economic development, and human rights. This commitment to liberal values was reflected in the founding agreements of several post-World War II international organizations, including the United Nations (UN), the European Union (EU), and the Bretton Woods institutions.

While these organizations did not solve all the world's problems, they promoted interstate cooperation and instilled hope among liberal IR scholars regarding the importance of international organizations in world politics. This also provided a new array of organizations, institutions, regimes, procedures, and interactions for scholars to study within the framework of liberal IR.

Despite the emergence of new multinational corporations during the postwar period, the global security environment was still dominated by power politics and nonviolent conflicts. However, the Bretton Woods institutions and the UN, particularly within the Western world, offered glimpses of hope for those seeking global cooperation in a challenging and bipolar system. These pivotal organizations were established to oversee the financial affairs of nations, promote free trade, and contribute to the spread of free market economics.

The dominance of idealism during the interwar period gave way to realism, particularly among U.S. scholars, coinciding with the rise of behavioralism in political science. This shift led IR scholars to consider the power dynamics of the postwar era, especially the hostility between the United States and the Soviet Union. Behavioralism, characterized by more rigorous methodologies and a focus on observable records and measurable data, influenced

the development of both realism and liberalism. Realism, known as neorealism, was championed by Kenneth Waltz (1979), who focused on the structure of the global system composed of unitary states. Neorealism sought to make scientific statements about global politics and argued that the anarchical nature of the system inherently fostered conflict due to states' rational pursuit of power.

On the other hand, liberal theorists Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye responded to the behavioralist project by developing a unique approach. They drew inspiration from early functionalist research on European integration, exploring how cooperation in one area could spill over into other areas. They formulated a new liberal or neoliberal approach that emphasized complex interdependence, highlighting the various ways states are interconnected, including transnational links between agencies. This new perspective sought to explain different instances of cooperation among democratic states. Neoliberals argued that additional significant players in global relations contributed to interdependence among nations, resulting in reduced conflict compared to the neorealist view of global politics.

In this interconnected world, international organizations and institutions have emerged as influential players that promote cooperation through information sharing and providing forums for conflict resolution. A wave of neoliberal international relations research has focused on the role of transnational organizations and regimes in shaping state behavior. Robert Keohane's book "After Hegemony" (1984) significantly influenced thinking on these topics. Keohane acknowledges some core tenets of neorealism but challenges its claim that power dynamics inevitably lead to conflict. He argues that even self-interested and rational states may be motivated to join regimes because they help overcome barriers to achieving mutually beneficial outcomes. International institutions, according to Keohane, promote interstate cooperation by addressing issues associated with international anarchy, such as distrust and uncertainty, and reducing transaction costs. In essence, regimes develop because actors in international politics perceive that they assist in reaching agreements that would otherwise be difficult or impossible to achieve.

3.2. The Conservative Revival after the cold war

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War brought significant changes to domestic and international politics, presenting both challenges and opportunities for liberalism and realism. Francis Fukuyama's influential article "The end of history?" in 1989

argued for the intellectual victory of liberal ideology over alternative political theories, asserting liberalism's optimistic vision and its triumph in the post-Cold War era. Fukuyama claimed that the spread of liberal capitalism, demonstrated by democratic transitions in regions such as Africa, East Asia, Latin America, and Eastern Europe, represented the culmination of liberal ideas and institutions. He revived the belief that the promotion of liberal-democratic standards is crucial for achieving a peaceful global order, discussing the consolidation of democracy within states and the relationship between democracy, market economics, and peace.

The period following the Cold War also witnessed significant developments in liberal thought, particularly regarding human rights. The proliferation of human rights standards, treaties, and organizations became a prominent focus, accompanied by intense debates surrounding humanitarian action. While human rights originated as a Western liberal concept, its appeal transcended Western societies, gaining traction even in non-Western nations like Japan and South Korea. Global norms often reflect the values of powerful actors in the international system. Hence, the discussion regarding human rights in international politics shifted from whether they should be acknowledged to the implementation, enforcement, and response when nations violate these rights.

Another key advancement in liberal thought during the post-Cold War period was the rapid globalization of the international economy. Financial neoliberalism, characterized by global market capitalism and liberal trade laws, emphasized the unrestricted play of market forces and minimal state intervention in economic affairs. In the field of liberal international relations, scholars examined the implications of these characteristics within the framework of the nation-state system. They explored phenomena such as the rise of digital currencies, the ability of multinational corporations to bypass state jurisdiction, the diminishing significance of national barriers in economic activities, and how these factors influence states' behavior on a global scale. Various free-trade organizations, including the WTO, EU, NAFTA, IMF, and global banks, emerged during this time, guided by the principles of open trade and the belief in its effectiveness and pacifying effects.

4. CONCLUSION

The conclusion of the Cold War, the ongoing process of globalization, and the rise of international terrorism have brought renewed urgency to the traditional concerns of liberal studies. Trade and the global economy remain significant topics for investigation, particularly in relation to the impact of global organizations, both established and emerging. Understanding how institutions like the WTO, the Bretton Woods institutions, free-trade agencies, the EU, and NAFTA have contributed to the recent financial crisis or can provide solutions following the global economic collapse in 2008 is crucial. Studies on international banking networks and other global economic institutions need improvement, as transnational relationships and integration practices become more prevalent, especially in Western Europe.

Additionally, the debate surrounding the democratic peace theory has resurfaced since the 2003 Iraq War, demanding further research on how democracy leads to peace and whether and under what circumstances forceful regime change to promote democracy and peace is justifiable. The role of international organizations in international security has become a pressing concern as NATO transitions from its Cold War role to an entity focused on democratic expansion and addressing terrorist and insurgent challenges in places like Afghanistan. The African Union and other recent institutions are also being studied to determine how they can collaborate with the United Nations in resolving crises on the African continent, such as those in Darfur, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The collective effort to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, particularly in light of potential nuclear threats from Iran and North Korea, is an especially critical issue.

Moreover, the attention given by governments to non-state terrorism and the resources allocated to combating it underscore the need for further research on the dangers posed by non-state armed groups, including international terror networks like al-Qaeda and regional organizations like Hezbollah. How can nations effectively cooperate to counter this threat? What is the relationship between terrorism and liberal democracy? The rise of Islamic militancy, which is strongly anti-liberal, raises questions about the impact on liberal states and the international order they have dominated. Some argue that this has led to deterritorialization in international politics and a decline in sovereign states, while others contend that it has resulted in increased state power, manifested in the enactment of civil liberties laws, enhanced surveillance and detention capabilities, and greater military spending.

The liberal approach to international relations, as presented in this research paper, is inherently optimistic, emphasizing the role of international institutions, transnational relationships, domestic (liberal) political institutions, and non-state actors in shaping global politics. Despite criticism, the notion of progress in human affairs remains central to liberal studies. While liberalism began as a broad philosophical statement about human progress and perfectibility, it is now predominantly understood as an analytical endeavor that explores the possibilities for global peace, cooperation, and improving the human condition. Recent years have witnessed significant changes that challenge this optimistic vision, and the task for liberal IR scholars is to gain a better understanding of these transformations, their causes, and their effects, in the hope of developing strategies to overcome them.

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