

Fischer's article is a response to the critiques of critical theorists of realism in general and a response to the Ruggie article more specifically. In a nutshell, Fischer provides secondary source documentation of feudal discourse and the extent to which this discourse mapped onto the actions of the relevant social groups of the time to make the claim that adherence to the reigning norms of the day was almost entirely superficial. In reality, argues Fischer, while "professing adherence to legal institutions as vassalage, fief, feud, and peer court, [medieval social groups] really strove for extraterritorial control, protected themselves by military means, subjugated each other, balanced against power" and so on. Fischer organizes his empirical material by focusing on unity (universal Christian empire), functional cooperation (the extent to which social actors abided normatively prescribed roles), heteronomy and community (the constraining or not-so-constraining influence of vassalage), and just conflict resolution (feuds, peer courts, and papal intervention in dynastic disputes). With regard to these topics, he finds (in order): 1) "kings, counts, and the lords regularly appointed bishops and priests according to their own interests, and the boundaries of parishes were generally adjusted to those of the castellanies;" 2) "knights subjugated and pillaged the other groups, forcing them to provide their own defense;" 3) "vassalage and fief agreements functioned as normative fig leaves...legitimizing relationships more realistically described as alliances, non-aggression pacts, and spheres of influence;" 4) feud obviously depended upon superior force, peer courts transferred self-help to the courtroom, and papal authority depended on the distribution of power capabilities rather than spiritual leverage. His conclusion is obviously that the violent, self-help depiction of the medieval world that he presents demonstrates that the critical theory critique fails in its most crucial historical case, thus establishing that "international relations will remain in what ought to be called the real state of nature."