

**Ernst B. Haas, “Words can hurt you; or, who said what to whom about regimes,”  
IO. 36,2, Spring 1982, pp. 207-243**

purpose: elucidate how one’s conception of the evolution of the world biases one’s understanding of how states interact and what role international regimes play

summary: there really isn’t a conclusion, since the article is more or less a summary of various theories, but the general idea is that most theories have an excessively narrow view of how the world works

*evolutionary epistemology*: studying regimes, and political choices in general, is a way of understanding human interaction with nature and with culture

- post-modernism- there is no “reality” that we can study objectively, since we are all victims of our research paradigms and beliefs of causality that are perceptual shortcuts which (over-)simplify the world
- communication is the main vehicle by which we do this: concepts such as order, system, structure, etc., are embedded in some a priori assumptions we have of nature, culture, and man

basic definitions:

*regimes*: man-made social arrangements for managing conflict in an interdependent (non-random links among actors) world; regimes are peculiar to achieving some issue-specific goal

*order*: the benefits a regime can provide, e.g. equity, efficiency, survival, etc.

*system*: the entire sphere of human interaction, of which regimes are a subset and order is the goal

how to study regimes depends on how theorists see “reality” and what they think the problems in a given system are, i.e. what role regimes are supposed to serve

- two types of systems:
    - closed: underlying structure determines causation, and therefore there is little that man can do to change it, i.e. environment determines range of actions possible (top-down theories)
    - open: structure is dynamic, and man can change it, i.e. multiple equilibria in resolving problems (bottom-up theories)
  - two basic paradigms of the world: mechanical vs organic
    - *mechanical*: system is self-maintaining, and goal is to find a equilibrium solution to human problems, i.e. the world is a closed system,
    - *organic*: system is ever-changing, and equilibria situations are ever-evolving (the world changes constantly), i.e. the world is an open system
1. *organic*: actions we take are constrained by patterns beyond our will, i.e. mankind and the environment around it are always evolving, but the change is somewhat random since we never know what effects our actions have on our environment (systemic constraints) and vice versa
    - regimes are needed to promote cooperation so that the human species as whole can continue to propagate; evolutionary disequilibrium occurs because of human mismanagements
    - *eco-evolution*, *eco-reformism*, and *egalitarianism* are all along this vein, but none take politics as anything more than a way for humans to coexist in harmony with the environment, i.e. political interaction is not the epistemological focus at all; read pp. 220-229 for more details
  2. *mechanical*: interdependence among actors is becoming more complex, but there is no particular pattern or logic that dictates how the world will change (organic theories assume evolution); theories include liberalism, mercantilism, and mainstreamism
    - regimes reflect differential state power over resources; regimes are a mechanical response to market imperfections that confront states wishing to engage in trade
    - commonalities between theories: int’l system constrains / drives state behavior, either through investment flows, changes in distributions of power, economic cycles, etc.; regimes evolve to provide collective goods in the world, with strong regimes being those that provide the collective good most efficiently (best cost-benefit ratio)
    - *liberalism*: neoclassical economics, international relations should be based on finding divisions of labor that maximize aggregate world welfare;

- regimes help actors collaborate and establish equilibrium situations where resources are allocated efficiently, i.e. they solve problems of the imperfect market (232)
- *mercantilism*: states seek to maximize power-for-survival and establish stable balances of power ; the economic system should be manipulated to facilitate national survival, i.e. the efficient allocation of resources is a free market is not required;
  - regimes are only institutionalized patterns of hegemony that reflect calculations of long-run interests, subject to change depending on shifts in the distribution of power (234)
- *mainstream* views: regimes arise to solve problems of complex interdependence (liberal view) or to maximize hegemonic self-interest (mercantilist view), but since not all markets / regimes fail in the same manner, some input from the domestic level (the second image) must be important; the system constrains, but there is some room for individual actors to shape the international environment, i.e. there is no fixed national interest or optimal regime (235)
  - regimes are arrangements to reduce uncertainty engendered by market failure and declining hegemonic stability by providing and disseminating information (information not really defined)

Synthesis of views:

- mechanical theories better explain interaction at the international level as the world operates now, but the organic theories better deal with how the world is changing
  - organic: the world actually physically and cognitively changes around us (new technology, diminution of scarce resources, new knowledge concerning how the world around us works, etc.), and within this environment, humans must find a way to survive as a species; politics and regimes are only one arena in which new problems are solved
  - mechanical: actors' perceptions of reality result in policies that shape events, but these policies create a new reality which must be perceived all over again by actors
- how the world changes (organic theory's evolution concept) can be explained in some part by how regimes provide new information and change actors' preferences (second-image reversed), which is better explained by mechanical theories
- organic theory explains the history of the world and how regimes have changed with it; mechanical theory explains the incentives and constraints facing actors, both at the international and domestic levels, *within* a given system