

Moravcsik and Legro, Week 13:

-Current problem in IR theory is that realism is increasingly incoherent. The fidelity of current realists to the core realist tenets of Carr, Morgenthau, and Waltz is questionable. Increasingly they bring in non-realist assumptions. That's not bad, per se, but it is bad when they

1. do not recognize that those assumptions have contradictory, in some cases, micro foundations, in comparison with realism
2. still call themselves realist and do not say that they are doing synthetic realist

-this is bad because it makes the realist paradigm incoherent; coherent paradigms are important in IR for several reasons

1. you can't tell which theory can best explain a particular issue or set of issues unless you can distinguish between them
2. it obscures recent work in the liberal and institutionalist field that provides powerful explanations for change in the international system, etc
3. if research within a paradigm relies on assumptions drawn from outside the paradigm yet credits the paradigm for explaining an outcome, how does that advance the field?
4. paradigms must be distinct

-the problem is that if a realist uses assumptions from another theoretical paradigm, they are no less part of that paradigm than they are realist AND if there really isn't anything distinctive about realism, if it can be expanded to include all rationalist theories, then we need to re-examine why we are calling things realist

-Other competing paradigms are:

1. liberalism
2. institutionalism
3. epistemic: ideas matter, not constructivist, based on the concept that ideas are key to how states define and pursue their goals

3 core assumptions of realism:

- actors are rational, unitary political units in anarchy
- state preferences are fixed and uniformly conflictual goals
- material capabilities are key for evaluating power/influence, etc

However, recent realists really only use the first core assumption, but then use 2 other ones

- states seek to realize their preferences ranging from territorial integrity to expanding influence
- force is primary when discussing int'l politics

problem is that these things are NOT unique to realism; stressing the importance of variation in preferences in politics or economics, or talking about the importance of identity- those 'belong' in a sense to the other paradigms, or at the very least are as much

a part of those paradigms as they are of realism AND they contradict the second and third core realist assumption

-deconstructing realism and reconstructing it on the basis of its 3 core assumptions are key to clear demarcations in international politics; those clear demarcations will make synthesis easier- which is good

-2 stage method: in world politics where states are dominant actors, the domestic and transnational state-society relations of preference and belief formation can be analytically separated from the strategic logic of interstate interaction; theories that account for the distribution and intensity of preferences are distinct from theories of bargaining and collective action

-2 stage method is good AND it's important not to privilege realism, analyzing it first and other stuff after that, because it means we may end up placing explanatory power where it does not belong and not fully grasping the important of other criticisms.