Lecture No (12

International Realism Theory

Those in the tradition of international realism claim an ancient

pedigree, connected to its claim to a timeless insight. They find

their point of origin in the 19th Century dynamic-foreign policy

approach called realpolitik, but for its principles, they point

towards far flung figures like Thucydides, who wrote of how

'the strong do what they can, and the weak suffer what they

must', and Machiavelli, who advised the glory of the state over

moral scruples of the prince, and Hobbes, who gave a grim

depiction of the international system as the relations of

gladiators. Thinking like an international realist finds the

position that conflict and strife amongst warring states is

endemic where there is no overarching leviathan to suppress it.

The international realist emphasizes the problems of war, foreign policy, and security. This is because the international realist views international systems as realms of fear, uncertainty, and insecurity. For the international realist, what matters in the international system are the states, and the distribution or balance of power amongst them, because, as they see it, the strong will do what they can. Finding its origin in the practice of realpolitik, international realism was refined theoretically, most systematically by Waltz in neo-realist theory. This theory sees the international system as anarchic, where power shifts amongst the states. This is one way of

seeing things, of construing the problems and system, one

constellation of the why and what of IR. There has also been,

for instance, a gesture towards "African realism" with the

suggestion that realist power politics has a different and

qualified form in a post-colonial African context.

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