

Neorealism and Neoliberalism: A Critical Examination of the Concepts and their Critics

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The debate between neorealism and neoliberalism marks a significant discussion and dominates the arena of International Relations for many theorists that aim to reconcile the two approaches. Neorealism could be argued as an elucidation of Kenneth Waltz's seminal theory of International Politics which aimed to put realist institutionalism on the structure of the international system through a scientific framework that constraints the rational actors such as conflict and power that are subject to the underlying conditions of anarchy in the international political system. In contrast, neoliberalism maintains a more coherent reformulation in an interdependent system where states seek efficiency to develop explanatory models for the management of collective problems ranging from the centrality of states to the underlying condition of international anarchy (Doyle, 1983). Thus, it could be argued that neoliberalism becomes either inherently "patriotic" or unself-consciously peace-loving where international systems are governed by liberal principles such as the balance of power and national security. Following the outline regarding the critical examination of both approaches, this essay examines the framework of the Neo-Neo debate and discusses the fundamental concepts of both institutionalism and their contributions to theoretical advancements within the field of International Relations.

Neorealism and Neoliberalism

Neorealism attempts to reflect human nature as a meaningful variable in the international system of politics that strengthens the theoretical parsimony where states according to neorealism's point of departure are "unitary rational agents" which intends a systemic structure that defines structural imperatives of international politics. Neoliberalism agrees with the epistemological stance taken by neorealist institutionalism while breaking with the stance of idealism in taking little or no attention to the role of ideas. Neoliberalism institutionalism, therefore, relies on positivist inquiries to build on rational-actor models within International Relations scholarship. Doyle, in this regard, attempts to reflect the purportedly scientific approach of liberalism in his essay "Kant, Liberalism, and Foreign Affairs" that a republican is a political society that solves the problem of combining social order, autonomy, and individualism as it is the mean by which states are "organized well" to tame the aims and ambitions of aggressive individuals and also to meet the foreign threats within a republic (Doyle, 1983). Immanuel Kant (1795) further adds the notion of the "republican constitution" in a state for the law of equality and freedom for the members of the society in the essay "Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch" that favorable prospects for the desired consequence can be achieved through

“perpetual peace” which emphasizes the consent of the citizens more than anything in the state. He confirms that a government must have a republican mode in its representative form because a state without republicanism is arbitrary and despotic (Kant, 1795).

Moreover, Morgenthau (1978) in an excerpt named “Six Principles of Political Realism” from *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* states that realism believes in the objectivity of the international laws of politics illuminated by evidence and reason and therefore neorealists are seen to focus on states as positional drawing on the security measures of the republic through mutual interdependence between states. He derives that states act as “dominant actors” in international relations and are primarily concerned with the cooperative arrangements within republicanism to ensure their benefits and considerations outweigh that of others through the increase in linkages and interconnectedness. On the other hand, neoliberals put greater emphasis on economic and environmental issues to ensure how a state benefits overall as compared to the neorealists’ approach who believe how a state benefits while considering absolute gains as compared to the others. Neoliberals argue that economic interdependence in the state ensures that neither side can politically take advantage of the other in a republic while exploiting their economic relationship. Whereas, for realist institutionalism, states are cautious about the gains of others while being in the relationship of mutual interdependence and thus survival within the anarchic system in a republican state is paramount because the balance of mutual gains and power is difficult to achieve in world’s politics according to neorealism approach. On one hand, neorealists believe that institutions of the states offer the diminutive opportunity for holding strong correlation and stability in politics as institutions reflect the distribution of power and relative gains in the political realm. On the other hand, neoliberals purport that a republic offers a strong correlation between institutions, peace of the state, and economic cooperation removing the problem of uncertainty in the world of politics (Morgenthau, 1978). Baldwin (1993) cites Krasner who criticizes the neoliberal school of thought for envisaging interests and intentions of the state for economic interdependence more than relative capabilities which neorealists reflect on through placing too much emphasis on security and independence.

Common Assumptions and Concepts of Neoliberal and Neorealist Institutionalism

Both institutionalism whether it is neoliberal or neorealist share some common assumptions as well as different analytical premises. Both approaches to International Relations view states as basic actors while trying to explain the behavior of the state as republics with reference to the ramification of the material structure of the international world of politics. Neoliberal as well as neorealism reflects the common agreement while being concerned with absolute gains or relative gains that the government of a republican state acts within the rational choice framework in the international anarchy. For neoliberals and neorealists, anarchy is the “rosetta stone” that shapes the future of world politics however neorealists exaggerate the significance of anarchy more than neoliberals at the expense

of mutual interdependence. The former approach to International Relations focuses on the economy whereas the latter one shares its prime focus on security (Baldwin, 1993). In abstract terms, neoliberalism argues that conflict and anarchy occur in the world of politics because of the prospects for cooperation whereas neorealism stresses that anarchy is constrained by the absence of order in a republic.

Doyle (1983) criticizes the lack of a clear definition of the term anarchy in reference to both approaches to International Relations as he identifies two underlying meanings for the term that is lack of government or lack of order. In terms of the first meaning of the anarchy that relates to “lack of government” in the republic, Doyle seems to employ that there is no monopoly within the international system on the absence of the central authority and the legitimate use of force to enforce contracts implied by a lack of government. In relation to the second meaning of the term “anarchy”, both neoliberalism and neorealist institutionalism gloss over the fact that it is almost difficult to predict the complete framework of the lack of order which defines institutions and rules within a state in the international system. However, both neoliberalism and neorealism scarcely clarify what they intend to purport when they stress anarchy as an explicate feature within the world of politics. Thus, anarchy is the significant point of contention for which the neo-neo debate does not find the defining answer that underlies the international system (Doyle, 1983).

Bottom Lines

In conclusion, neorealism and neoliberalism are the two significant manifestations and views of the same institutionalism approach that assume great emphasis on states as the main actors which are responsible for holding the stability and mutual interdependence within international anarchy that shapes state institutions’ behavior. The method both approaches use to study the world of politics within the realm of International Relations shares similar ontology and epistemology that are analogous. The term neo-neo in this regard refers to all to the synthesis of the approaches that look at world politics through a distinctive lens through the emergence of neoliberal and neorealist institutionalism. Both of the approaches share similar as well as distinctive worldviews to look into the world of politics as neorealist institutionalism focuses primarily on high politics whereas the neoliberal approach of International Relations focuses on low world politics. Neoliberal and neorealist institutionalism both purport through their similar as well as comparable ontology and epistemology that states are interest-maximizing actors through mutual interdependence as they both share a state-centric empirical focus where states are unitary in the political realm reflecting that there is no common authority in the republicanism.

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