

Clarification of “Actor” and “Constraints on Actions” in International Relations for the Sake of a Parsimonious IR Theory

By Lawrence C. Chin, 15 July 2013

When I first entered the study of international relations, I thought I would undoubtedly be a realist, for I simply couldn't see how anyone could deny the obvious fact that the history of international relations is nothing other than a narrative of the struggle for power among nations. Then the impression of the impoverishment of the realists' descriptions of international relations became inescapable as I began studying the more sophisticated approaches of the English school and the constructivists. I have also become concerned with the criticisms articulated by ethics-oriented theorists that the realists fail to take into account the pervasiveness of ethical considerations in the decision-making of states (especially Western democracies) in the domain of international relations. Consider Jack Donnelly's verdict on realism: “Realism simply fails to explain most of international relations. Anarchy, egoism and the distribution of capabilities cannot explain the vast majority of what happens in such relations...

”¹; or “The proper questions are how regularly, in what domains and for what purposes does realism help us to understand or act in the world. My general answer is ‘a lot less often than most realists claim, but a lot more frequently than most anti-realists would like to allow’”². However this may be, realism attracts by virtue of its parsimoniousness: it explains, and predicts, everything by reference to a single variable, the struggle to survive within the condition of anarchy. As Jack Donnelly notes further in his verdict on realism: “to explain everything with a single variable is the theorist's utopia. It is important that we appreciate the attractions of Waltz's ability to say some very important things about international relations, more or less anywhere and anytime, based only on anarchy and the distribution of capabilities”³. This parsimony however is also the reason for realism's deficiency, so that its fundamental insight has to be supplemented with English school's emphasis on international society and constructivists' insights into interest formation, national identity, norms, and international institutions. In this paper I would like to propose a way to rescue realism's parsimony by making some fundamental revisions in certain theoretical concepts of international relations, notably, “actor” and “constraint on actions”.

Thus, I intend to show that the narrowness of realism's application is not due to its single-minded reduction of everything which a state does to power considerations, but to its erroneous conception of the “state” as the principal actor in international relations and its failure to analyze the actor's actions into *original intent* and *constraints on actions*. In my view, what the English school, the constructivists, and ethicists have pointed out merely refer to the real purposes of the actors in struggling for power – which emerges as soon as the misconception about who the “actor” is can be corrected – and the natural constraints which these actors unwillingly encounter in their pursuit of power over one another. By showing that international society, identity, norms, and interests in addition to power struggle naturally arise out of a proper analysis of the nature of the “actor” and the “constraint on action”, it is possible to lay the foundation for a revised

parsimonious theory which explains everything with more or less a single variable, an analytical account of the “actor” and its “actions”.

The first point is this. The actors in international relations should be restricted to “governments”. In other words, in defining the actors of international relations as “states”, the international relations theorists should restrict their conception of “state” to the government portion of a nation. The population of a state is not a component of the “actor” of international relations. For a government, the collective of its citizens are merely resources for exploitation, much like the natural resources within its national boundary. This does not simply mean that, whether in a democratic or dictatorial regime, the vast majority of the citizens have neither the time, nor the education, nor the intelligence, nor the motivation to understand what their government is doing. The liberalists are simply wrong in making the fantastic claim that liberal democracy allows citizens to participate meaningfully in the political process – the claim is especially outrageous in view of the obvious fact that the political processes of the state have today evolved to such degree of complexity as to be beyond the comprehension of everybody except for a few full-time experts. Even when we consider the few occasions where citizens’ collective actions (protests, etc.) have managed to influence their government’s policy in the domain of international relations, the phenomenon is better interpreted as “constraints” upon their government’s original plan for action. It will be wrong to interpret this as “citizens’ participation in international relations”. This should be obvious for anyone who bears in mind the usual sequence of government’s decision-making in foreign policy: it decides to send troops to this and that foreign land, for example; it then devises a reason (true or false) to persuade its people to go along with it – all in order to stifle people’s resistance, to eliminate “constraint”, in other words. (The government cannot ignore its people’s opposition – and thus it is “constraint” – because, even in the case of dictatorial regimes, consent of the governed is paramount.)

This brings me to my second point, that any particular action of the “actor” is *the original intent minus the constraints encountered in the implementation of the intent*. When a state (under the direction of its government) performs an action in the international society to maximize its power in the “pecking order”, it will encounter resistance put forth by its instrument (such as its population), by its environment (other states and the structure of the international society), and even by its very goal. As I shall demonstrate below, a finer recognition of a state’s action *as the modification of its original realpolitik design by constraints from various sources*, in combination with a clearer view of the goal of government (the “actor” in international relations), can allow the international theorist to incorporate into a parsimonious account the more complex phenomena which the English school and the constructivists are fond to analyze, such as the characteristic stability of the international society afforded not by the balance of power but by norms and other ideational structures, and the alignment of nations not explicable by the distribution of capabilities but only by national identity.

Here then is my third point, that the “government” – now understood as the true “actor in international relations” – is composed of a group of human beings. This group of human beings are *the real actor* in international relations not just by virtue of the fact that they are in control of the governmental apparatus of their nation, but also by virtue of the fact that they have the habit

of identifying their nation with themselves (or vice versa), thus projecting their personal identity as the national identity through their use of the governmental apparatus to achieve their aims – as if they were the “spirit” which has “taken possession of an organism” (the whole state). Although the primary, and perhaps the only, characteristic of their actions is struggle with other “organisms” of the same kind for power in the international society, the realists are wrong in considering them as “rational egoists” as if they were robots programmed to unconsciously perform one task within the constraints imposed on their actions from sources just mentioned. Tracing the “actor” in international relations to a group of *real* human beings has the advantage of letting us see that, as this group pursues power against other similarly constituted groups, each member of the group only does so from the framework of his or her prejudices, conception of the world, aesthetic preferences, understanding of the meaning of history, etc. For example, when explaining the behavior of Georgia and Poland the realists will run into great deficiency if they employ nothing else than the notion of “struggling with Russia for power”; there is no doubt that they are, but they are doing it largely because Sakaashvili and Kaczynski find “everything Russian” disgusting and boring and “everything American” refreshing and beautiful. What underlies the behavior of Poland and Georgia in international relations is in fact the personal taste and distaste of the real human beings who have taken possession of the two nations’ governmental apparatus.

Thus comes my fourth refinement: the “actors” in international relations (i.e. the group of elites in power in a nation) struggles for power and domination against their foreign adversaries not for the sake of the physical survival of their nation, but for the sake of the projection of their identity. If we understand each actor of international relations to be the group of real human beings who have taken control of their nation’s governmental apparatus, then we can easily accept the fact that this group’s primary goal in life is the realization of the identity they have chosen for their nation after they have ensured their own political survival. As soon as human psychology can be made into the “one principal variable” of an international relations theory, what the constructivists have so often noticed – the important roles which “identity” and “world views” play in the decision-making of states – can be assimilated into a simple theoretical framework as the natural derivatives of the nature of the “actor”, thus consolidating the parsimony of the theory.

We may use Putin as an example. He has identified himself with “Russia”; he has become the “spirit” that has taken possession of this large entity called “Russia”. He has a certain conception of the identity of this thing called “Russia”. It is a special being in the history of humanity: Orthodoxy, Eurasian, etc., characteristics which make it special and admirable apart from other similar beings such as “Europe”, “America”, and the “Middle Kingdom”. Since the end of Cold War, United States and NATO have been implementing Brzezinski’s suggestion in his *Grand Chessboard*: to shut off Russia’s other options in order to persuade it to become part of the European Union. While allowing the West to neutralize its historical strategic competitor, this would cause Russia to lose its historical identity, its specialness in world history. Putin’s whole goal in life is to prevent this. He tries hard to get hold of the governmental apparatus in Russia, and then makes Russia struggle for power with Europe and America. But this is not to ensure the *physical* survival of the Russian state or the Russian society or the Russian people, for the

Russian people and society can continue to survive as part of the European community. He makes Russia struggle for power only in order to make Russia realize the identity he has projected onto it, a world-power rooted in the Eurasian tradition which no other nations share and which makes Russia special and unique among nations of humanity. This is what others have perceived as “Putin’s dream to reconstitute the Soviet empire”, and what specialists have noted as Putin’s “Eurasianism”, or refusal to allow Russia to become “Western”. In other words, one does not need to fight to survive; one can survive also by surrendering to one’s adversaries. When one fights, it’s for other purposes than survival. This is where realism has faltered.

Nations struggle to maintain or attain a certain position in the hierarchy of international society, therefore, because they want this position as *confirmation* of their conception of themselves. The ontological foundation for nations’ struggle for power and positioning is therefore this specific characteristic of human nature by which a human being identifies himself or herself with, and projects himself or herself onto, a larger social collective to which he or she feels himself or herself to belong. We are all familiar with this ontological trait of being human, and we usually call it “patriotism”. Just as a human being wants to “be somebody” in society, so a nation, or the group of human beings who has taken possession of its governmental apparatus, wants to be something important, unique, and admirable in the society of nations and in human history. There thus comes into being “exceptionalism”, the most usual agenda among nations in the history of international relations. We have all heard of *exception française*. What motivates Putin to lead his Russia to struggle for power in international relations is nothing other than “Russian exceptionalism”. Similarly, what has motivated the neoconservatives in the Bush administration to lead America to expand American power in the world is, as we know, “American exceptionalism” (as codified in the “Project for New American Century”). What has motivated China to rise in the world in the past three decades is a form of “Chinese exceptionalism”. Think, why has Deng so intended on reform? To make China rise. Why? Because the Chinese people have been used to the conception of their nation as “Middle Kingdom”: China has always been a unique achievement in world history, the most civilized nation in the midst of uncultured barbarians. How has it fallen to the state where it is a mockery to nations and peoples of the world? It must rise again. This is in effect how Putin was motivated to “save Russia”. How has a great Russia, one of the two superpowers in the world, fallen to the status of “sick man of Europe” during the Yeltsin years? Is this not why Atatürk Kemal was motivated to “save Turkey”? Turkey must be a powerful, respected nation again in this world dominated by white men; only then can its former identity as the Ottoman empire not be disappointed. The same with de Gaulle’s attempt to recover *grandeur* for France after France’s disastrous defeat by the Nazis (Gaullism is about *état fort, politique de grandeur*). Nations struggle for power to rise in the society of nations because their leaders see their nations as unique and admirable and want other nations to see their nations in the same way in which they see their own nations. The struggle for power is not for the sake of physical survival; it is for the sake of projection of an identity, which means recognition, or “validations”, by other peoples.

This is of course not a great insight. When Thomas Hobbes, one of the fathers of realists, speaks of human interaction as being driven by competition, diffidence, and glory, the struggle for “glory” refers essentially to this struggle for others’ “validation” of the identity one has chosen

for oneself. It's just that the realists, of whichever brand, have never been analytically clear about the proportion of the various goals which nations strive after in their struggle with each other. There are of course other purposes in nations' struggle with each other than obtaining recognition. It is because the "actor" in international relations is essentially a group of like-minded human beings who have taken possession of the agency of their nation that this actor, the nation, can be considered as a "human being written large", dealing with others of its kind in the same way in which a human being deals with his fellow citizens on the microscopic scale within a society. Thus nations also struggle to dominate each other, take charge of another, and control the resources in their natural environment, just as individual human beings try to control each other and secure the resources necessary for their own survival, even at the expense of others. Thus, a nation often attempts to dominate other nations and control the natural resources in other nations' domain because such control ensures its physical survival and increases its range of options, and thus freedom of actions. But a nation flexes its muscle not just for these material considerations; the assertion of dominance includes in itself the desire to be admired for, traditionally, human beings, and so nations, have always admired the one among them who is physically the strongest. In other words, because the "actor" in international relations is traced back to real human beings, Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of human needs can also be applied to a nation's foreign policy objectives. Once China or Japan has achieved a certain degree of economic prosperity (the fulfillment of the lower needs relating to physical survival), it begins to focus its attention on engagement with international problems so as to attain a certain good standing in international society. Since the struggle for identity is essentially a struggle for others' admiration, it is at the very top of the hierarchy of needs. The disparate foreign policy objectives of a state can then be organized into a linear hierarchy that is a natural derivative of the nature of the "actor" (of "human nature").⁴ Thus, although nations have more than one objective in their struggle in international relations, this does not disturb the parsimony of the theoretical framework proposed here.

It is important to note that a nation, as a human being written large, differs from an individual human being on the microscopic scale in one essential respect. While a single human being attempts to control his or her fellow human beings and gain their recognition, morality and reciprocity develop not just to hold the human collective together in the pursuit of the common interest in survival, but also because each human being has a social need and desires the companionship of other human beings. A human being that is stranded on an island all by himself or herself will eventually commit suicide. A nation, however, does not feel "lonely". A nation can always envisage the elimination of all other nations – and many have attempted to do so – when it has developed the idea that the identity it has chosen for itself is the only valid one, the "end of history". Quite often, a state merely tolerates other states' existence. This is because the group of human beings who is in charge of the nation have already fulfilled their social needs through their families and association with each other. The hierarchy of needs that can be constructed for the "actor" of international relations will therefore differ from that for the individual human being in that the human social need is not always to be found.

The fact that the primary goal of nations is to seek recognition and validation of their identity also explains why many nations are not aggressively seeking to dominate other nations or

fighting off domination by major nations. Netherlands, Switzerland, or Thailand have no aspiration to become world-powers because world-power status is not part of the identity which the governing elites in these countries have chosen for their nations. Being recognized as having a liberal climate or exotic culture is, for the “patriots” in these countries, enough to justify their nations’ existence in world history so that they do not feel the need to have the ability to dominate other nations. They have no expectation for becoming a world power because they clearly cannot given their size, etc., and because, in many cases, they have never been world powers in the past any way. The past of having once been a great power often gives rise to patriots’ expectation for being a great power in the present and future. Similarly, the present success in the elevation of power status often so intoxicates the patriots that they begin dreaming of a permanent super power status for their country: thus, after the end of Cold War has left the United States to be the sole super power in the world, some patriots in this nation (e.g. Brzezinski and the neoconservatives) begin formulating a project of expanding American power even more, to become the last imperial power in world history. This is how the human need for validation and recognition could explain identity formation, and thus interest formation, which it has been the contribution of constructivists to emphasize. In the end, the realists’ description of nations in perennial anxiety over their survival and security only applies to governments whose personnel are physically threatened by powerful adversaries, such as the North Korean elites of the current time or the Nazis during the end of the Second World War.

I’m pointing out here how decisive the national identity of the governing elites is in the behavior of their nation. Of course small nations would also have to secure the natural resources necessary for their survival and would also enjoy the range of options and freedom of actions afforded by domination of other nations. But power struggle – domination over others – does not appear among their foreign policy agendas and they are content with securing vital resources through diffidence toward major powers because no ambition could materialize as a consequence of their governing elites’ conception of themselves.

By now it should be obvious how the reduction of the “actor” in international relations to a group of actual human beings with all their human limitations and the explicit understanding of “constraints” on their actions can allow a realism-like parsimonious framework to incorporate those more complex phenomena which the English school and the constructivists have noted to be unassimilable to a simple analytical framework, like “progress in international society” and the influence of norms, ideas, identity, ethics, and other ideational structures on the behavior of states. Although it is untrue that, in international relations, as the Athenians at Melos put it, “the strong do what they can, the weak suffer what they must”, I propose retaining the realist conception of international relations as a pecking order while using the characteristics of human nature and the conception of constraints on actions to explain the “progress in international society” such that “the strong are often constrained by the rights of even weak states”, that “power alone (at least physical, hard power) does not explain why one state does not harm another state”, and that “the logic of rights as well as the logic of power accounts for international behavior”.⁵

The realists' materialist approach could explain half of the progress of international society which the English school has emphasized – the fact that tremendous degree of order reigns in the condition of anarchy in international relations and that military conflicts are increasingly giving way to rule-based peaceful resolutions in states' relations with one another. There are two reasons on the material plane (i.e. in the domain of considerations of material benefits). First of all, it is because war between states with sufficient degree of military capability is becoming increasingly unfeasible insofar as, nuclear bombs aside, modern weapons are too advanced, and too fast. The entire military and economic capabilities and infrastructures of a nation can be expended in a few days in modern warfare. The cost is too high. A second material deterrent to war-making is economic interdependence. Liberalism is certainly correct in naming trade as a major antidote to war. Nations have discovered that the gain through peaceful trade outweighs the gain through military conflict, and that a nation has more to lose than to gain in making war on another nation with which it has constructed a relationship of economic interdependence. The advancement of weapon technology and economic interdependence can thus be considered as *constraints* on the indulgence by international relations actors in physical fight.

On the ideological plane the development of, ethics, norms, and international laws also signifies a *growth of constraints on actions*. The human mental universe is becoming increasingly complex, which has transformed admiration and recognition into an ever more convoluted matter. In Nietzsche's words, we no longer live in the era of "master morality"; we have now advanced into the era of "slave morality". In the era of "master morality" (the blond beast), our mental universe was simpler. We admired him who was physically the strongest. Everyone wanted to be Genghis Khan, although nobody wanted to be Genghis Khan's victim. Today, we admire him who is righteous, compassionate, and protective of the weak, because the New Testament revolution has succeeded. To be admired and glorified in today's climate, a nation has to be *both* strong and good. Our mental universe has evolved to such point that, while we may admire him who is good but weak, we will never admire him who is strong but bad. United States and Western democracies in general, therefore, while succeeding in being strong, strive to be good at the same time. When United States and Western democracies want to flex their muscle to dominate other nations and control the resources in foreign lands (the fulfillment of needs at the lower end of the hierarchy of needs), they find it increasingly difficult to do so without a "good reason" (reasons like "protecting the weak and helping the victims" rather than "I want your meat"). I do not intend here to get into the debate over whether the "good reasons" Western democracies have found for their muscle-flexing (such as during the Balkan wars, the invasion of Afghanistan, the Iraq war, or even peaceful interventions like the monitoring of elections in Ukraine, etc.) are "real" or simply made-up excuses. Certain mainstream international relations ethicists like Mark Amstutz⁶ would assert that the Western democracies "did mean it", while obstinate nations like China and Russia, conspiracy theorists, and even many realists would regard the "good reasons" as merely made-up pretexts under which to assert dominance and grab someone else's meat. I'm only making the point that Nietzsche is right in having noticed that our history has undergone a certain "transvaluation of values", that this transvaluation of values has fundamentally reshaped our mental universe, and that this more complex mental universe has ended up imposing *more constraints* on the international relations actor' traditional, "blond beast" desires to dominate others and increase the range of its options.

To cite from the 2001 report of International Commission for Intervention and State Sovereignty: “If there is a ‘national’ interest that is seen as respectable today it is the ‘national interest in being, and being seen to be, a good international citizen regularly willing to pitch into international tasks for motives that appear to be relatively selfless’.”⁷ This kind of constraints *inherent in the objective of seeking validation* are unsurmountable not just because to be admired is an end in itself, but also because it is a means for more power. Being admired as good brings tangible material benefits in the form of “soft power”. By being recognized as “good”, for example, United States is able to attract to itself a lot of foreign talents, who end up contributing to the growth of its physical (hard) power. We thus see that advancement in technology, increasing division of labor in world economy, and evolution of the human mental universe have resulted in a massive *proliferation of constraints* on the expression of the primitive instincts of the actors in international relations. This really explains why realism is faltering and why more sophisticated approaches like the English school and constructivism could have flourished.

I am thus suggesting that, as soon as we understand the international relations actor’s primary, most lofty, goal as “validation” and take into account the changes in the historical context in which the actor seeks such validation, we can see how the increasing influence of international ethics is the direct consequence of the human nature which underlies international relations – of that single variable, the actor with its hierarchy of needs, in a parsimonious analytical framework. In describing the methods by which moral norms are applied in global politics, Amstutz lists three manners: (1) the conscience of decision-makers; (2) the influence of domestic public opinion; and (3) the role of international reputation.⁸ In the manner of realism, we can eliminate the conscience of decision-makers as ever having played a role in the decision-making process of governments in international relations. I want to however point out that a government’s inability to exercise raw power without “good reasons” for fear of disapproval from its own citizens and from citizens around the world (for fear of damaging its international reputation) refers essentially to this “constraint on action” which the search for validation within the mental universe of “slave morality” necessarily engenders. Since the citizens have already projected an image of their nation as the “good guy”, their government’s immoral actions may cause the “consent of the governed” to crumble entirely; and, on the international plane, being admired as the “good guy” is the very goal of the government anyway.

When it comes to norms and identity – so emphasized by the constructivists – we can say this. The group of elites who have taken over their nation’s government and who are therefore the “actor” in international relations are themselves human beings who have grown up in their culture and therefore become subject to the operations of the mental universe which, manifested as “public opinion”, has become a constraint on traditional realpolitik. The mental universe of our current time, other than being run through by a “slave morality” (Christian ethics of love, inalienable human rights, wrongfulness of the exploitation of the weak, etc.), is essentially a world view by which we conceive a good meaning for the existence of ourselves and our nation in the universe. In the US, it is that we are a special people who “have made it” to the truth of freedom, democracy, and human rights. By virtue of Westernization of the whole globe, this sort of world view is increasingly infecting the rest of the world’s cultures and becoming *the* world view of the entire human race, supplanting or supplementing the world views which other

peoples of other cultures have developed for themselves. The world view of a people, which even the elites among them must share, has defined a field of intelligibility which has shrunk the range of what is possible to do to what is appropriate to do. The actors of international relations thus not only encounter constraints from ordinary citizens around the world; they even encounter the same constraints from within themselves. The two fields, what is possible and what is appropriate, have become identical. Doing what is inappropriate is embarrassing, and embarrassment has become a constraint on states' actions because their primary concern is with "identity" – other's recognition and validation. No states want to look abnormal, crazy, or bad. Here is then how we can assimilate the constructivists' insight into a clarified understanding of "actor": "... constructivists argue that non-material structures affect what actors see as the realm of possibility: how they think they should act, what the perceived limitations on their actions are and what strategies they can imagine, let alone entertain, to achieve their objectives... Finally, even if normative and ideational structures do not affect an actor's behavior by framing their imagination or by providing a linguistic or moral court of appeal, constructivists argue that they can place significant *constraints* on that actor's conduct. Realists have long argued that ideas simply function as rationalizations, as ways of masking actions really motivated by the crude desire for power. Constructivists point out, though, that institutionalized norms and ideas work as rationalizations only because they already have moral force in a given social context... where rationalists assume that actors are atomistic egoists, constructivists treat them as deeply social: not in the sense that they are 'party animals', but in the sense that their identities are constituted by the institutionalized norms, values and ideas of the social environment in which they act".⁹ If we understand the goal of the actor in international relations to be "validation-seeking", then we can see how natural it is for normative and ideational structures to become *constraints* on the actor's actions; the actor cannot just do whatever it *can* do; it must do only what it *should* do – because its ultimate goal (the fulfillment of the need at the top of the hierarchy of needs) is to obtain universal recognition of its identity as the "good guy".

I shall close my presentation with a final clarification on "world view" in which are constituted both the citizenry which functions as both resources and constraints for the government and the governing elites who are the real actor in international relations. The identity of the actor – for which it struggles in international relations – is the culmination point of its world view, in that the world view is the mechanism by which it is decided that the actor itself is good and those others who differ from it – those others whose world view declares the good guy to be someone else, namely those others themselves – are bad. To be "validated" means to make others accept that one's own world view is the correct one – that one has correctly identified oneself as the "good guy". The conflict between identities, and thus the conflict between world views, is the real reason for the enmity between states. What I have referred to earlier, the aesthetic preferences of the actor determining its foreign policy behavior, is just one aspect of this world view-identity determinant. Kaczynski and Sakaashvili have become disgusted with the old Soviet world view in which Russia is the good guy and have adopted the Western world view in which Western democracies are the good guy. They thus steer Poland and Georgia into becoming US allies and anti-Russian. It has been noted that the realist framework in terms of wish to survive and distribution of capabilities cannot explain why Canada is a friend to the United States and Cuba a foe. The relationship between United States and Cuba is characterized by enmity

because, while in United States' world view the United States is the good guy and Cuba and its allies the bad guy, in Cuba's world view the United States is the bad guy and Cuba and its allies the good guy. The relationship between United States and Canada is characterized by friendship because both countries share the same world view in which United States is the good guy, and Canada, by virtue of its similarity to United States, is also a good guy. This is how a state's identity determines its foreign policy. When nations seek validation of opposing world views and identities, enmity results. When they seek validation of identical world views and identities, friendship results. Seeking to be validated by nations around the world as the good guy, the US thus constantly goes to foreign countries to criticize their human rights records. While considerations of material benefits may be lurking in the depth of these humanitarian criticisms, the desire for world's validation is often sufficient.

In this paper I have attempted to show that it is possible to construct a parsimonious, realism-like, purely analytical framework which encompasses the disparate complex variables which the English school and the constructivists have identified in international relations. Within this limited space I cannot explain why I dismiss liberalism altogether as the most inaccurate description of international relations. Neither does space permit me to explore the question regarding the exact roles of NGOs, international institutions (from United Nations downwards), and transnational corporations in this parsimonious framework, or the question regarding this framework's ability to *predict* states' behavior in the future. I have restricted myself to focusing only on its descriptive range. If this theoretical framework passes review, I hope to explore these other questions in future communications.

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¹ Scott Burchill, Andrew Linklater, Richard Devetak, Jack Donnelly, Matthew Paterson, Christian Reus-Smit and Jacqui True, *Theories of International Relations*, 3rd edition, New York, Palgrave MacMillan; p. 53. Since in this paper I am attempting to sketch out an outline for a general theory of international relations, I shall rely on this standard textbook on international relations theories for references to the major theoretical trends like realism, the English school, and constructivism, skipping over the details that can only be found in the original works of the major proponents of each theoretical trend.

² Ibid., p. 54.

³ Ibid., p. 45.

⁴ This is not the "hierarchy of state goals" which John Mearsheimer has named in his classic, *The Tragedy of Great Power politics*, p. 46. Although Mearsheimer has recognized the same fact that a state has, in its foreign policy behavior, multiple objectives which can be organized into a hierarchy according to their importance, etc., his account remains confused, without analytic merit. In my take, the "hierarchy of state's needs" is an interlinked system ensuring survival as the most basic need, then economic health, and finally validation by other states. It is a highly organized system. Mearsheimer, for example, relegates the promotion of human rights to the aggregate of unimportant objectives subsumed in his "hierarchy of state goals", whereas, in my conception, as shall be seen below, the promotion of human rights takes up a most important place in a state's foreign policy repertoire insofar as it is a means by which it may obtain the "validation" it wants.

⁵ Scott Burchill et al, *ibid.*, p. 46.

⁶ Mark Amstutz, *International Ethics: Concepts, Theories, Cases in Global Politics*, 3rd edition, Lanham, Rowman and Littlefield, 2008.

⁷ Cited in David Chandler, “Culture Wars and International Intervention: An ‘Inside/Out’ View of the Decline of National Interest”, in *International Politics*, 41, 2004, p. 357.

⁸ Amstutz, *ibid.*, p. 19.

⁹ Christian Reus-Smit, “Constructivism”, in Burchill et al, *ibid.*, p. 198 – 199, emphasis added.