

Faculti Summary

<https://faculti.net/an-unwritten-future-realism-and-uncertainty-in-world-politics/>

The speaker discusses their motivation for writing a book on realism in international relations, primarily driven by intellectual curiosity. They seek to reclaim a broader understanding of realism, which they believe has been largely dominated by structural realism or neorealism, often conflated with realism itself. The speaker criticizes hyper-rationalist theories in international relations, which they feel make flawed assumptions about rationality, similar to those that contributed to the global financial crisis.

The book argues for classical realism, emphasizing that it offers a more comprehensive approach to understanding world politics by factoring in choices, history, and purpose, rather than solely focusing on the distribution of power between states as structural realism does. Classical realism posits that as states become more powerful, they tend to want more, and the historical context significantly shapes their preferences and actions.

The speaker also critiques the practical limitations of realism in guiding foreign policy, noting that realism is more adept at advising against certain actions than providing a singular, effective policy approach. While they acknowledge the complexity and difficulty of applying classical realism, they contend that it allows for a more nuanced understanding of state behavior and the international system compared to the oversimplified view of structural realism.

Finally, they differentiate between structural and classical realism in analyzing the US's position in international politics, arguing that understanding domestic political dysfunction is crucial for assessing the US's ability to exercise its power, despite its enormous structural capabilities. The overall focus is on the necessity of integrating politics, history, and purpose into the study of international relations.