

Introduction

Exploring the Realist Image of Man

This book discovers and examines important psychological assumptions and arguments that underlie the so-called realist approach to the study of international relations and foreign policy.¹ In these fields of study, the realist approach is considered “paradigmatic.” A “paradigm” is “a larger frame of understanding, shared by a wider community of scientists, that organizes smaller-scale theories and inquiries.”² One might say that a paradigm provides a “common sense” that informs those individual attempts at explanation which fall within its frame of understanding. These individual attempts at explanation are what we call “theories.”

A theory may be described as a “deductively connected set of laws.”³ It consists of a number of related statements that link causes to effects to provide an explanation for, and sometimes a prediction of, a particular phenomenon.⁴ For example, a theory that tries to explain why nations go to war might identify a number of possible reasons and argue that some of these are more important than others under specific conditions. By doing so, it would not only explain why war might break out but also give us some idea when it would be more and when it would be less likely to occur.

Being part of the same paradigm, all realist theories, no matter what they try to explain, share certain characteristics. However, it is not always fully clear what those shared characteristics are, and the nature of the paradigm as a whole is thus somewhat elusive. This book will examine a particular defining aspect of the realist paradigm: the realist psychology. More specifically, it will focus on realist views concerning human motivation, the psychological driving forces for action. To be able to examine these views, this book takes a closer look at a range of individual realist theories and makes explicit the psychological beliefs on which they are based.⁵

As Graham Allison has explained, “[T]he purpose in raising loose, implicit conceptual models to an explicit level is to reveal the basic logic of an analyst’s activity.”⁶ When we examine a basic characteristic of the realist paradigm, we gain insight into the logic of realist theories, which share this characteristic. By identifying what individual realist theories have in common, we also learn something about realist theory in general and thus develop a clearer understanding of the nature of the paradigm as a whole. To identify those theories which help define the realist paradigm, we need to begin by explaining what we mean when we speak of realism.

As Cornelia Navari has put it, the term

realism was first used in philosophical discourse to denote the doctrine that universals exist outside the mind. . . . In political theory, however, the term has come to be

reserved for the theorists of *raison d'état* or *Realpolitik*. It denotes a school which holds that there are real forces operating in the world beyond our immediate perceptions of them, that these forces are revealed by the historical process and that the able political practitioner takes account of these forces and incorporates them into his political conceptions and his political acts.⁷

Political realism may be contrasted with a number of alternative worldviews or paradigms. As a political worldview, it is traditionally opposed to idealism. As a paradigm of international relations and foreign policy, it is more commonly contrasted today with liberalism or pluralism, with constructivism, or with globalism.⁸ Compared with these other approaches, political realism is arguably the dominant paradigm in the fields of study of international relations and foreign policy today. According to Joseph Nye, “[T]he conventional wisdom in the professional study of international relations since 1945 has awarded the ‘realists’ a clear victory over the ‘idealists,’”⁹ particularly in the United States. Comparing realism with the main competing theoretical approaches, scholars in the field today frequently conclude with Stephen Walt that “realism remains the most compelling general framework for international relations.”¹⁰

The realist paradigm has been evolving through the centuries, with roots as far back as the famous “Athenian thesis” presented in Thucydides’ *History of the Peloponnesian War*.¹¹ There are different kinds of realist theories, and realists may even develop explanations and predictions that contradict one another. However, it is possible to identify core elements, the criteria that make an argument “realist,” as opposed to something else. According to Benjamin Frankel, for example, “[T]he theories in the realist family . . . do have a common center of philosophical gravity: they are all grounded in an understanding of international relations, and politics more generally, as a constant struggle for, and conflict over, power and security.”¹² This understanding is based on beliefs that are shared by realist theorists.

As John Vasquez has explained, when we speak of the “realist paradigm,” we really speak of “the shared fundamental assumptions various realist theorists make about the world.”¹³ Assumptions can be defined as “postulates relied on as part of a theory’s foundation, which the theory itself does not account for or explain.”¹⁴ A number of these postulates of realism are routinely acknowledged by realist theorists. Realists have, for example, traditionally claimed that nation–states are the relevant actors in the field of international relations. These nation–states are seen as unitary in the sense that the policies they produce may be regarded as the authoritative decisions of indivisible entities. Nation–states are also rational in the sense that their responses to international events are based “upon . . . cool and clearheaded means-end calculation[s]” designed to maximize their self-interest.¹⁵

An understanding of the motives of nation–states—that is, of their basic goals and of the underlying reasons for their decisions—requires the analyst to determine how the national self-interest may be defined in any given case. To avoid the need to actually examine the particular interests of individual states at different times, realist theories traditionally employ the strong simplifying assumption that one goal all

states strive to maximize at all times is power. In defense of this assumption, realists commonly point out that power is a necessary means needed to achieve all other possible goals a state might have. In addition, a nation's power relative to other nations is considered crucial in the pursuit of the most basic and important of these goals. That goal is the survival of the nation-state as an independent entity.¹⁶

In the words of neorealist Kenneth Waltz, all states "at a minimum, seek their own preservation."¹⁷ Offensive realist John Mearsheimer agrees that "the most basic motive driving states is survival."¹⁸ He explains that this, however, makes it necessary for "states in the international system [to] aim to maximize their relative power positions over other states."¹⁹ This is why states "at a maximum, drive for universal domination."²⁰ It appears thus that, even if a state possesses no desire to expand and no imperialistic ambitions—that is, even if it is motivated purely defensively, by a desire to survive as an independent nation—its rational strategy would be to attempt to become as powerful as possible. This is how it becomes reasonable to view power not merely as a means to other ends but rather as the end itself and thus the most important motive driving state behavior.

According to realists, this characterization of international relations as a constant struggle for power is supported by the observation of political reality. Its reliance on the rationality assumption allows realism to employ the so-called rational calculus to judge the preferences, or goals, of states based on their observed behavior: Whatever interest a state appears to be maximizing must be identical to what it has chosen as its goal.²¹ Thus, behavior such as the participation in an arms race or an attack on another state is easily interpreted by realists to support the belief that states try to maximize power. However, it is not logically necessary to perceive such actions as part of a proactive strategy motivated by a lust for power and domination. It is, in fact, just as plausible to view them as part of a reactive strategy, as responses to a more basic motive, which is the emotion of fear. Whereas power, even if viewed as an end in itself, remains an attribute that is instrumental to the pursuit of other goals, the emotion of fear is the natural, perhaps inescapable response to threats to one's survival. In other words, fear is what drives actors to attempt to protect themselves; to accomplish this they strive to become powerful. A complete account of the motivational assumptions of realism requires us to pay attention not only to the rationality assumption and the motives of survival and power but also to the role played by the motive of fear, which has been a cornerstone concept in the works of important realist theorists such as Thomas Hobbes.²²

This book will show that assumptions about the motives of political actors, which represent beliefs about individual psychology, form the ontological foundation of all realist theories, even those which, like the structural systemic realism of Waltz, attempt to avoid all concern with how individual actors come to make their policy choices.²³ The fact that realists have traditionally been primarily concerned with the behavior of nation-states rather than individual policy makers has served to obscure the role these beliefs play in supporting realist arguments.²⁴ In particular, the relationships between the central motivating forces of fear, self-interest, and the desire for

power have not been systematically specified by realist theory. Neither has the degree of influence that the operation of these motives, as compared to that of constraints imposed by the environment, is expected to have on foreign policy decisions.²⁵

The assumptions that characterize the realist paradigm include a particular view of human nature from which realist theorists develop expectations about the likely behavior of states. The assumption of rationality concerns the characteristics of the human thought process and thus may be called a “cognitive” assumption.²⁶ By comparison, motivational assumptions concern the forces that stimulate human action. Motives are commonly understood to be activators of behavior. In fact, in the words of psychologist K. B. Madsen, “[I]t is not possible to understand, explain or predict human behavior without some knowledge of ‘motivation’—the ‘driving force’ behind behavior.”²⁷

There are many theories of motivation, and parts of many learning and other psychological theories also deal with the basic motives that underlie human behavior.²⁸ However, despite the diversity of views on motivation, we can identify a consensus on its basic characteristics. Motivation is commonly treated as a part of the human organism, or human nature. It interacts with environmental factors insofar as the environment can facilitate or restrict the operation of motives and insofar as it provides stimuli for what psychologists refer to as “motive arousal.” Motives are aroused by internal or external stimuli, such as hunger or provocation, and determine how human beings will react to such stimuli. Motive arousal may be explained as a function of three main variables: motive dispositions, or needs, such as physical drives; characteristics of the incentive, that is, the opportunities that present themselves to fulfill these needs; and expectations of the attainability of goals, or the difficulty and likelihood of taking advantage of those opportunities. Thus, motives are related to, yet at least conceptually distinguishable from, needs, incentives, and goals. It is useful to conceptualize the process of motivation as has been suggested by Russell Geen: Actors are always simultaneously confronted with their own needs and with external situations that affect what is achievable.²⁹ Both need and situation determine which behavioral incentives the actor will perceive.³⁰ The actor then defines his goals accordingly and will take action to achieve these goals.

The assumptions that realism makes about the nature of human motivation are less easy to identify than some of the more commonly acknowledged postulates of the paradigm. Realist theories emphasize different aspects of the same realist view of human nature for different purposes, which allows them to achieve plausibility under a variety of circumstances.³¹ They also frequently fail to spell out the specific psychological assumptions that underlie their individual arguments. As a consequence, the overall idea of the realist psychology that emerges from the literature is fragmented, incomplete, and may even contain contradictions. There exists no evidence for a scholarly consensus on a precise and comprehensive definition of the realist view of human nature, nor an analysis of its role.³²

This is a surprising state of affairs, given the facts that realist motivational assumptions, if analyzed in their entirety, do form a coherent view of human nature,

and that they have remained stable enough over many centuries to give realist thought the status of a coherent scientific paradigm. Even more puzzling is the widespread acceptance of the realists' choice to ignore other possibly relevant motives for state action than the ones emphasized by their paradigm. After all, as will be made clear in this book, realists attribute political decisions to a very narrow range of such motives. The assumption of one particular view of human nature as opposed to any other must be expected to have consequences for the resulting interpretations of human (and state) behavior. Especially given the degree of influence that the realist paradigm possesses in the real world, it seems necessary to ask what the consequences of the realist view of human nature may be. It is puzzling that such questions are only infrequently raised and even less frequently answered.

The specific questions I will address in this book arise out of the related puzzles I have just described. My central premise is that ideas have the power to shape human reality through affecting our interpretations of our observations and thereby influencing our reactions to them. My goal is to examine the nature, function, and effects of that particular set of ideas that is represented by the motivational assumptions of realism. To achieve this goal, I raise the following questions:

1. What is the *nature* of the motivational assumptions of realism?
2. What is the *function* of these assumptions in realist theory? What role do they play, and how are they used?
3. What are the *effects* of using these particular assumptions in this way on (a) the insights produced by realist scholarship and (b) the policies that are informed by realist scholarship?

Main Arguments

The central claim made in this book is that realist motivational assumptions function differently than is commonly argued by realists and that they have more sinister effects. Specifically, I take issue with the following view: Realists claim that the motivational assumptions which underlie their paradigm serve as basic building blocks for theories and models used to explain and predict political phenomena. In this way, these assumptions fulfill the necessary function of axioms on which realist arguments can come to rest. In addition, to call oneself a "realist," in the study of politics just as in common usage, is to make the claim that one sees the world as it really is, rather than through the rose-tinted glasses of idealism or through the distorting lens of an ideology.³³ It is to make the claim that one is "objective" in one's interpretation of observable phenomena. Thus, in the words of Steven Forde, "[D]rawing on analyses of human nature, on arguments about the necessary structure of international relations, and on laws of political behavior derived from both these sources, realists have quite frequently posed as the clear-eyed apostles of objective reason, confronting the deluded idealism or self-righteous moralism of their fellow men."³⁴

Realists do not commonly claim that the assumptions they use to simplify and represent the complex reality of human motivation are 100 percent correct. However,

they consider them to be a close enough approximation to this reality to provide their theories and models with a defensible axiomatic basis for the development of plausible explanations and reasonably accurate predictions. They do commonly claim that their view of human motivation is supported by observation of human behavior, and they frequently use cases of foreign or international policy making to illustrate the behavior that supposedly results from such motivation as well as the apparent ease with which such behavior can be explained by realist theories. When a particular realist study has delivered a widely accepted explanation or an accurate prediction of a political event, this is considered evidence for the accuracy of the assumptions it employs. Its explanatory and predictive power is commonly cited as the explanation of why realism is and deserves to be the dominant paradigm in the study and practice of international relations and foreign policy. It is also the reason why realist motivational assumptions are so seldom questioned.

The reason, then, why realism chooses to employ the particular motivational assumptions it does is supposedly that these assumptions sum up the reality of human motivation in a way that is at once an acceptable simplification of empirical reality and a sound axiomatic basis for theories that are logically coherent and possess explanatory and predictive power. Realists obviously do not believe their motivational assumptions to have a distorting effect on their interpretations of political phenomena. They naturally do not believe that policies developed based on realist arguments suffer from any harmful bias.³⁵ Nor do they believe that the realist paradigm fails to meet standard criteria for the proper conduct of science.

This book disputes the view of the function and effects of realist motivational assumptions that I have just sketched. I argue that instead of playing a scientifically defensible role in a quest for a more accurate understanding of reality realist motivational assumptions serve to justify realist arguments and to help solidify the dominant status of the paradigm in a scientifically “illegitimate” manner. The motivational assumptions employed by realists not only represent a simplification of reality; they are, in fact, biased in favor of the particular view of reality that corresponds to the ideological preferences shared by realist theorists and policy makers. It is true that these assumptions do, in fact, occasionally produce plausible explanations and accurate predictions, but they do so only in cases in which they perchance adequately capture the motivation of the particular actors observed.³⁶ This cannot legitimately be viewed as an indication for their general validity. In addition, it is quite likely that the interpretive bias introduced by realist motivational assumptions into scholarship may translate into a policy-making bias with potentially harmful effects.³⁷ This can happen in several ways: first, through the academic education of policy makers; second, through the active involvement of realist scholars in political decision making;³⁸ and, third, and most important, through the incorporation of paradigmatic assumptions and arguments into political “common sense.”

I argue that realist motivational assumptions function as the axiomatic basis for an argumentative strategy that works backwards to set up a seductive circular logic: Realists share a particular view of how the world functions. They employ par-

ticular motivational assumptions because those assumptions support this view of the world. Using those assumptions as the basis for their explanations of international events, they derive interpretations of such events that confirm their initial views. This confirmation, in turn, is viewed to justify the use of their basic assumptions.

Such a tautology does not need to be consciously pursued by any scholar to characterize the paradigm, but it would have to be consciously countered to be overcome. The realist paradigm, by continually evolving through attempts to explain the international events observed at any given time, has achieved both a widespread acceptance of its core assumptions and a position of dominance in the study of international affairs. It has also arguably achieved the status of common sense in influential sectors of the policy-making establishments of many nations.³⁹ As Robert Keohane has observed, in the United States, “[F]or the most part, discussions of foreign policy have been carried on, since 1945, in the language of political realism—that is, the language of power and interests rather than ideals or norms.”⁴⁰ This book will show that realism has not achieved this status by following the logic of science but rather by subverting it.⁴¹

I argue that realism functions as a self-fulfilling prophesy by favoring such interpretations of political events that serve to confirm the assumptions initially adopted. Thus, the empirical validity of realist assumptions becomes difficult to judge. Realist theory, caught up in this circularity, becomes irrefutable.⁴² It is quite plausible that the paradigm may have become dominant by virtue of this lack of refutability, rather than by virtue of its superior “realism.”

Realism has become the “normal science” of international relations and foreign policy.⁴³ Thus, if we follow Thomas Kuhn, its status could only be weakened by the discovery of facts that contradict its central hypotheses. According to Imre Lakatos, its theories can reign as the state of the art until replaced by others that are shown to possess superior explanatory power.⁴⁴ The problem here is the following: First, the existence of facts that contradict central hypotheses of realist theory may simply not be acknowledged by staunch realists.⁴⁵ Instead, they may be more likely to adopt ad hoc assumptions or adjust their own arguments in an ad hoc fashion to protect their theory from refutation.⁴⁶ They do so, in the words of Karl Popper, “only at the price of destroying, or at least lowering, its scientific status” by rendering it irrefutable.⁴⁷ Second, as a further consequence, it becomes virtually impossible for rival theories to demonstrate superior explanatory power. After all, realism seems to explain everything, or at the very least as much as any of its rivals could.⁴⁸

The motivational assumptions of realism play a crucial role in this strategy: First, they are usually not made explicit, which makes possible their ad hoc modification and gives realist arguments increased flexibility and an unfair advantage over rival theories with explicit images of human nature. This is why it is important for the sake of progress in the discipline to establish a general and maximally consensual definition of what realist motivational assumptions actually are. Second, realist motivational

assumptions contain a bias in favor of that particular view of human nature which is consistent with the realist worldview as a whole. As a consequence, they function to support realist arguments *ex post facto* by favoring such interpretations of political events that are consistent with the same bias. This is why it is important to analyze the role played by these assumptions in realist theory. Finally, the circularity of the realist logic serves to uphold the traditional choice and usage of realist motivational assumptions. The obvious entrenchment of these assumptions in the discipline, which is a consequence of this tendency, increases the necessity to examine the effects of this choice and usage.

Of course it is possible to defend the use of realism as a theoretical approach to the study of international relations; however, any such defense must include a recognition of the motivational assumptions employed, of the role they play in the theory, as well as of their consequences for the findings and recommendations that result from the study. Realists are justified in employing particular motivational assumptions to the extent to which they are able to defend them as empirically accurate.⁴⁹ While it is often said that descriptive accuracy is not the only criterion by which theoretical assumptions may be judged, if we attempt to judge the value of realist motivational assumptions instead by their scientific merit (that is, by the contribution they make to models and theories that serve to advance our knowledge of international politics), we run into the problem that the realist paradigm in its current vogue state is impossible to refute. The quality of its assumptions, embedded as they are in the logic of the paradigm, is difficult to assess in isolation. To achieve greater *a priori* explanatory and predictive power, realists would likely have to modify their motivational assumptions to make them more broadly representative of the actual panoply of human motives. Doing so would mean sacrificing parsimony. It might also in effect mean abandoning long-cherished paradigmatic confines. However, it would reduce the temptation experienced by realists to interpret events to fit their assumptions, and it could only improve the usefulness of their theories.

Approach and Layout of This Book

In this book I attempt to answer three questions. The first concerns the nature of realist motivational assumptions. The second concerns their function, that is, the role these assumptions play and the way they are used in realist theory. The third concerns the effects of realist motivational assumptions on both the insights produced by realist scholarship and the policies that are informed by such insights.

In the first part of this book, I take what might be called a historical-hermeneutic approach to answering these questions:⁵⁰ Tracing the evolution of the realist paradigm from the fifth century B.C. to the present day, I analyze the use of motivational assumptions by various paramount thinkers of the realist tradition, including Thucydides, Niccolò Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes, Hans Morgenthau, and Kenneth Waltz. In so doing, I rely on my own analysis of primary texts as well as on a range of commentary and criticism. This in-depth analysis of the development of the realist psychology, summarized in Table 1.1, is necessary to develop comprehensive and

Table 1.1
The Evolution of the Realist Psychology

Theoretical variant	Author*	Works examined	Main contributions
Athenian justifications of power politics—first indications of the realist psychology	Thucydides	<i>History of the Peloponnesian War</i>	Realist interpretation of the three basic motives of fear, honor, and profit; stress on the needs for power and security; universalism; determinism; irrelevance of morality in interstate relations: <i>We have been forced to advance our dominion to what it is, out of the nature of the thing itself; as chiefly for fear, next for honour, and lastly for profit. (70) . . . We have therein done nothing to be wondered at nor beside the manner of men. (70) . . . Having computed the commodity, you now fall to allegation of equity; a thing which no man that had the occasion to achieve anything by strength, ever so far preferred as to divert him from his profit. (70–71)</i>
Classical Ideological Realism	Niccolo Machiavelli	<i>The Prince; Discourses on Livy</i>	Stress on the universal wickedness of human nature; advocacy of the manipulation of fear as a policy tool: <i>This can generally be said about men: that they are ungrateful, fickle, dissimulators, apt to flee peril, covetous of gain; . . . and men are less reticent to offend one who makes himself loved than one who makes himself feared. (The Prince, 62)</i>
Classical Paradigmatic Realism	Thomas Hobbes	<i>Leviathan; Behemoth; De Cive</i>	Resurrection of the realist interpretation of the three basic motives of fear, honor, and profit; fear as the primary motive; stress on the destructive irrationality of human nature and the amorality of human congress; prescription of rational fear and self-interest as political solutions: The state of nature is characterized by <i>continual feare and danger of violent death (Leviathan, 89)</i> ; the cause of this fear consists partly in the <i>naturall equality of men and partly in their mutuall will of hurting (De Cive, 45)</i> ; to this warre of every man against every man, this also is consequent; that nothing can be Unjust (<i>Leviathan, 90</i>); the <i>Originall of all great, and lasting Societies, consisted not in the mutuall good will men had towards each other, but in the mutuall fear they had of each other (De Cive, 44)</i> .
Classical Twentieth-Century Realism	Hans J. Morgenthau	<i>Scientific Man vs. Power Politics; Politics among Nations</i>	Traditional realist image of human nature as the axiomatic foundation for the development of realist policy prescriptions; anti-idealist pessimism; advocacy of a politics of prudence: <i>Politics . . . is governed by objective laws that have their roots in human nature (Politics among Nations, 4)</i> ; the <i>sinfulness of man is . . . not . . . an accidental disturbance of the world sure to be overcome by a gradual development toward the good but . . . an inescapable necessity (Scientific Man vs. Power Politics, 204)</i> ; a tendency to dominate, the <i>aspiration for power over man, is the essence of politics (Politics among Nations, 31, and Scientific Man, 45)</i> .

(continued)

Table 1.1 (continued)
The Evolution of the Realist Psychology

Theoretical Variant	Author*	Works Examined	Main Contributions
Classical Twentieth-Century Realism	Reinhold Niebuhr	<i>Moral Man and Immoral Society; The Structure of Nations and Empires; Christian Realism</i>	Neo-Augustinian evil-in-man premises; the wickedness of human nature asserts itself especially in relations between groups; stress on the destructive power of the motives of irrational fear and pride.
Classical Twentieth-Century Realism	Edward H. Carr	<i>The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939</i>	Anti-utopian criticism of the idea of a <i>natural harmony of interests</i> (89); critical view of normative approaches: <i>power goes far to create the morality convenient to itself</i> (236).
Neorealism	Kenneth Waltz	<i>Man, the State, and War; Theory of International Politics</i>	Traditional realist image of man as implicit first-image foundation for systemic international relations theory: <i>The root of all evil is man, and thus he is himself the root of the specific evil, war. (Man, the State, and War, 3) . . . Struggles for preference arise in competitive situations and force is introduced in the absence of an authority that can limit the means used by the competitors (Man, the State, and War, 35).</i>

* See Appendix for brief biographical information on the authors of classical realism studied in this book.

defensible answers to the three questions raised above. Such answers, in turn, are the necessary basis for the critique of realist motivational assumptions, which is the key purpose of this book.

The second chapter begins the historical analysis by examining the origins of the realist view of motivation through a close reading of Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*. It identifies the central tenets of the realist view of human nature, in general, and motivation, in particular, as they are presented by Thucydides. It then compares the elements of the realist psychology found in the *History* with elements of the alternative views that are also presented by the historian. This approach allows us to bring into focus those enduring motivational assumptions that have characterized the paradigm since the known beginnings of political theorizing.

The third chapter analyzes the highly influential contributions of Machiavelli and Hobbes to the further development of realist motivational assumptions. In so doing, it discusses the impact of modern rationalism and scientism on the realist psychology. It also examines the role played by the realist psychology in the development of modern views on the methodology of political science.⁵¹

The fourth chapter examines the work of representative realist scholars of the twentieth century to bring up to date the historical analysis of the development of the

realist view of human nature. It includes treatments of both the “classical” realist and the structural, or neorealist, schools of international relations theory as well as of important contemporary developments in realist scholarship. It also briefly analyzes the impact of rational choice and game theory on the development of the realist psychology. The fifth chapter summarizes the conclusions of the historical analysis and provides answers to the three central questions raised above.

Based on these answers, the second part of the book presents a critique of the use of motivational assumptions in realist theory, relying also on a transdisciplinary survey of research into the nature of basic human motivation and into the effects of theoretical assumptions on decision-making processes as well as on a range of studies of realist policy-making biases. It argues, first, that realist motivational assumptions constitute an incomplete representation of the basic elements of human motivation and that they carry a bias in favor of a particular and pessimistic view of human nature. Second, it suggests that this bias has the potential of systematically affecting realist scholarly findings as well as policies in ways that we may find undesirable. Third, it claims that a necessary critical revision of realist motivational assumptions is impeded by the tendency of the realist paradigm to function as a self-fulfilling prophecy. It suggests ways in which the use of restrictive motivational assumptions may support the perpetuation of the pessimistic bias that pervades realist political theory and praxis and thus fulfill a crucial role in justifying the “politics of distrust,” which realism presents and excuses as inevitable.

The first part of my critique, developed in chapter 6, involves the claim that realist motivational assumptions constitute an incomplete representation of the basic elements of human motivation and that they carry a bias in favor of a particular and highly pessimistic view of human nature. There is ample evidence in the psychological as well as political-psychological literature to the effect that realist motivational assumptions are in fact unrealistic, that is, that the actual range of motives underlying human behavior differs substantially from the realist image of man. Of particular relevance here are the findings of David McClelland on the elements and operation of motivation as well as studies by David Winter and others that attempt to link motivation to specific foreign policy decisions.⁵² Those studies, alongside many others, show that to actually explain and predict political behavior a broader range of motives than those acknowledged by realism has to be taken into account. This broader range of motives may include, for example, the desire for affiliation or community as well as the operation of altruism.⁵³ Such motives have traditionally been disregarded by realism, which, as a consequence, has adopted a dim view of human nature and a pessimistic outlook on possibilities for international peace and cooperation.⁵⁴

The second part of the critique involves the suggestion that the empirical bias contained in realist motivational assumptions has the potential of systematically affecting realist scholarly findings as well as policies in ways we may find undesirable. Chapter 7 explains how the bias in the psychological assumptions underlying realist theory can translate into a bias in the findings that result from the application of that theory. In short, biased assumptions translate into particular explanations and expectations. Both

scientific hypotheses and policy recommendations are developed based on such expectations. Occurrence of the expected results is taken as proof of the correctness of the assumptions used, and even results that contradict the researcher's expectations can be "explained away," rather than lead to a revision of incorrect assumptions.

Chapter 7 further argues that the bias introduced into policy making as a result of the dominant status of the realist paradigm is potentially harmful in its real-world effects. Several case studies and comprehensive analyses of foreign policy making, such as the one conducted by Yaacov Vertzberger, have demonstrated and explained the harmful effects of motivational biases in international politics.⁵⁵ Other work, such as that of Ralph White, analyzes more directly the operation of some of the particular biases contained in realism, finding that the realist emphasis on the motives of fear and power at its worst supports "paranoid" tendencies in foreign policy decision making.⁵⁶ Scholars writing in this area commonly argue that biased general assumptions about the motives of other actors cause decision makers to make erroneous judgments about the reasons behind the particular decisions made by those actors. Such erroneous judgments may then lead to conflict-stimulating reactions that may have been avoided given fuller, more accurate information about the other actors' motives.

The third part of my critique, developed in chapter 8, involves the argument that a necessary critical revision of realist motivational assumptions is impeded by the tendency of the realist paradigm to function as a self-fulfilling prophesy. I suggest ways in which the use of restrictive motivational assumptions may support the perpetuation of the pessimistic bias that pervades realist political theory and praxis and thus fulfill a crucial role in justifying the "politics of distrust," which realism presents and excuses as inevitable. One body of literature relevant for this argument consists of critiques of the rationality assumption in particular. Representative here is Mark Petracca, who suspects that "public policy fashioned on the assumption of self-interested behavior may beget precisely such behavior when implemented."⁵⁷ In addition, a few scholars have levied similar criticism at the realist paradigm as a whole. Adopting a line of argument well established in European peace research since the 1960s, they fear with Ernst-Otto Czempiel that "realism as a strategy recommends a behavior, the implementation of which serves to confirm realism as a theory."⁵⁸

I argue that it is the realist view of human nature, in general, and of motivation (and rationality), in particular, that supports the self-fulfilling tendency of the realist paradigm: It encourages distorted judgments of the motives of other actors and thereby creates incentives to respond to others' behavior in exactly the ways predicted by the paradigmatic worldview. The fact that realism functions as a self-fulfilling prophesy in the real world contributes to the ease with which the paradigm dodges scientific refutation: The more widely accepted realist arguments become, the less it appears necessary to question the ad hoc adjustments that are employed to save the theory (and its assumptions) from refutation. The less such adjustments are questioned, the more widely accepted the paradigm becomes. To explain how realism escapes from refutation, I rely on the arguments of Karl Popper and later theorists of science who have examined the process of scientific advancement.⁵⁹ (See table 1.2)

Table 1.2
Three Stages of Critique

Empirical Critique	The realist image of man is incomplete and biased in favor of divisive, competitive, and destructive aspects of human nature. Realism concentrates on the motive of fear and the goals of power and security and emphasizes rational self-interested behavior, neglecting other important motivational and cognitive elements of human psychology, in particular the motivational complexes revolving around the goals of achievement and affiliation, whose relevance is stressed by psychologists and political psychologists alike.
Political Critique	The bias contained in the realist image of man translates into a bias in realist scholarly findings which, in turn, negatively affects the real world of foreign policy making. The realist image of human nature diminishes chances for peaceful coexistence, international cooperation, and transnational institution building. At its worst, the realist emphasis on the motive of fear and the goal of power supports paranoid tendencies in foreign policy decision making, which increases the probability of international violence.
Epistemological Critique	A necessary critical revision of the realist psychology is impeded by the paradigm's tendency to function as a self-fulfilling prophesy. The use of restrictive motivational assumptions supports the perpetuation of the pessimistic bias that pervades realist political theory and praxis, and fulfills a crucial role in justifying the "politics of distrust," which realism presents and excuses as inevitable. Lack of explicitness and consistency in applying its psychological assumptions helps realist theory "dodge" refutation in ways that threaten the degeneration of its research programs.

The concluding chapter moves beyond the analysis and critique that constitute the bulk of this work to identify some of the wider implications of the arguments made in this book. It attempts to locate these implications within the context of major scholarly divisions in the field of international relations theory. First, it briefly discusses possible realist responses to the findings of this study and examines options for the future development of realist theory. Second, it explores how a transcendence of theoretical divisions might help to ameliorate the problem of biased motivational assumptions in the study and conduct of international affairs. A comparison of three major schools of international relations theory—realism, liberalism, and constructivism—reveals that each of these schools coheres around one of the three basic motive categories: power, achievement, and affiliation. It is suggested that new integrative frameworks for the study of international political behavior should incorporate all three of these motive categories to avoid the type of bias that has been identified in realist theory. Finally, the concluding chapter argues that the search for such new frameworks stands to gain from disregarding entrenched epistemological divisions in the discipline, which only serve to uphold theoretical biases. It closes with a number of related theoretical and methodological suggestions for the future development of international relations theory.

I conclude that the nature and use of its motivational assumptions diminish the value of the realist paradigm to the extent that it should be rejected as a complete and

legitimate theoretical approach to the study of international relations and foreign policy. Both the psychological literature on human motivation and rival theoretical approaches to the study of international relations have made important contributions to a more appropriate understanding of motivation that could serve as the foundation for new theories. Specifically, I argue that the insights of both liberal and constructivist approaches should complement realist motivational assumptions to provide a more complete account of human motivation.⁶⁰ Such a revised account would serve to counter the potentially dangerous dominance of the realist paradigm in the study and practice of foreign policy and international relations.

Why Is This Study Important?

One needs only to be superficially familiar with the theory of international relations and foreign policy to realize that within both these subdisciplines of political science a vast body of literature dealing with various aspects of realism has accumulated over the years. Critiques of realism abound,⁶¹ ranging from narrow and focused refutations of particular realist studies or their findings to sweeping rejections of the merit of the paradigm as a whole.⁶² There also exists a vast array of realist defenses.⁶³

It is difficult to divide this body of literature into subsections dealing with well-defined issues, such as the realist view of human nature or motivation. Rather, issue areas overlap, which makes it difficult to assess the proverbial “state of the discipline” with respect to any particular issue or to judge the progress achieved in its study. Contemporary scholarship seems far from achieving a consensus on many fundamental points, including the view of human motivation that informs various theories of international relations or foreign policy, not to mention the view of human motivation that should. This book makes an attempt to address these gaps in the literature. It is specifically designed to make the following contributions.

First, it aims to identify the nature of the motivational assumptions of realism. This is necessary because there exists no explicit consensus on the nature of these assumptions, either among realist scholars or outside the realist paradigm. This state of affairs has contributed to the abuse of such assumptions: The lack of clarity on what these assumptions should be and how they should be consistently employed allows realists too much flexibility in the formulation of their theories as well as in the interpretation of their findings. It also makes the ontological foundations of realism too difficult to criticize, contributing to the lack of refutability from which the paradigm suffers.

The second contribution this book makes is to show that rather than representing a harmless simplification of reality for the purposes of theory testing realist motivational assumptions contain a bias that translates into realist findings and policies. If it is true that this bias can affect policy making in undesirable ways, an awareness of the nature and operation of this bias becomes necessary as the first step toward its removal.

The third contribution of this book is to show that realist motivational assumptions, once again rather than being harmless axioms, function to uphold the elevated status of the paradigm in whose services they are employed. This explication of the role realist motivational assumptions truly play within realist theory is necessary for an understanding of the tendency of realist theory to function as a self-fulfilling prophesy. An awareness of this tendency, in turn, is necessary to understand why the problematic tendencies discussed here have been so difficult to fight.

Moving beyond investigation, this book also attempts to make a suggestion on how these problematic tendencies might be overcome. It does so by showing how a broader view of human motivation could serve to deliver more complete explanations of political behavior, while at the same time reducing the risk of biased interpretation. Reducing the risk of bias is necessary for the sake of scientific advancement. More important, given the nature of the realist bias, it is necessary for the sake of practical progress in the conduct of international affairs.