

Theory and the Levels of Analysis

Theory and Its Functions

➤ **“Not be frightened by the word theory”**

➤ **Definitions of theory:**

❑ A theory is a proposition, or set of propositions, that tries to analyze, explain or predict something. An international relations theory, then, is defined as a set of principles and guidelines used to analyze both world events and relations between states.

2

Theory and Its Functions

➤ **“Not be frightened by the word theory”**

➤ **Definitions of theory:**

❑ Theory is nothing but systematic reflection on phenomena, designed to explain them and to show how they are related to each other in a meaningful, intelligent pattern, instead of being merely random items in an incoherent universe.

3

Theory and Its Functions

➤ **Law and theory**

➤ **Waltz identifies two kinds of definitions of theory**

❑ The first definition is that, “theories are collections or sets of laws pertaining to a particular behavior or phenomenon.”

- This definition overlooks the differences between theory and law.

4

Theory and Its Functions

➤ **Differences between theory and law:**

❑ Law is an inherent relationship between phenomena, behaviors, or variables.

- EG: “if a, then b”; sunrise and sunset.

❑ Theory is not just about the inherent relations between variables, but about why the relations exist and repeat.

- EG: sunrise and sunset
- The earth revolves both round the sun and on its own axis.

5

Theory and Its Functions

❑ The second definition is that, “theories explain laws.”

❑ Law is constant, absolute, and true, but theory is not.

- EG: sunrise and sunset
- The theory of the sun revolving round the earth (the earth-centric theory)
- The theory of the earth revolving round the sun (the heliocentric theory)

6

Theory and Its Functions

➤ What is theory?

- ❑ A theory is a set of propositions and concepts that seeks to explain phenomena by specifying the relationships among the concepts.
- ❑ A theory is a set of generalized statements about political, social, or economic activities that seek to describe and explain those activities.

7

Why bother about theories?

- Theories are instruments to analyse the world around us.
- We see ourselves confronted with a host of questions about international relations.
- How to answer them?
- That is where IR theories come in.

8

What do theories do?

- They organize the world in a certain way.
- They indicate what is more or less important.
- They allow us to ponder important questions.
- They help us to order our knowledge about important problems and do that in a way that stimulates us to find answers to those very problems.

9

A wonder medicine?

- Theories are helpful, but certainly do not solve all our problems.
- They do not tell us which theory to choose.
- We can try to develop criteria for the selection of theories (epistemology) but these are always controversial up to some point.
- Whenever we use a theory we need to be aware of its assumptions (and thus its limitations).
- The course aims to help you in developing this ability.

10

Theory and Its Functions

➤ Functions of theory

- ❑ Description
- ❑ Explanation (core function)
- ❑ Prediction
 - EG: earthcentric vs. heliocentric theory
 - sunrise and sunset
 - revolution of four seasons
 - periodically changing faces of the moon

11

What is this thing called “theory”?

- Speculation
- Abstraction, generalization and making connections
- System of empirically tested hypotheses (empirical theory)
- A system of generalizations (laws) obtained through empirical observation (positivism)

12

What is this thing called “theory”?

- Theories explain general tendencies, that is recurring conjunctions between variables generated by underlying mechanisms (scientific realism)
- An image of how the world should be (normative theory)
- A critique of the present order, while at the same time, offering a perspective of change and emancipation (radical and critical theory, Marx, Wallerstein, Cox)

13

Theory and Its Functions

➤ The making of theory

- ❑ Theory is not something to be discovered but something to be invented.

- EG: the fall of apple
→ the law of nature
→ Newton's theory of gravitation

14

Theory and Its Functions

❑ Major methods of theory making:

- Induction (e.g. apple)
- Deduction (e.g. crow)
→ All crows are black.
(theoretical major premise) (assumption)
→ The bird outside the building is a crow.
(empirical minor premise)
→ That bird is black.
(conclusion) (hypothesis)

15

Evaluating theories

- Understanding of a given process or problem
- Explanatory power
- Anticipation of future developments (prediction?)
- Consistency and coherence
- Scope and depth
- The level of critical self-reflection and intellectual engagement with competing theories

16

Some rules of thumb for judging theories

- A sound theory is/has
 - ❑ Consistent
 - ❑ Lucid
 - ❑ Explicit
 - ❑ Scope
 - ❑ Depth

17

Theory and Its Functions

➤ The testing of theory

- ① State the theory being tested.
- ② Infer hypotheses from it.
- ③ Subject the hypotheses to experimental tests.
- ④ In taking steps two and three, use the definitions of terms found in the theory being tested.
- ⑤ Eliminate or control perturbing variables not included in the theory under test.
- ⑥ Devise a number of distinct and demanding tests.
- ⑦ If a test is not passed, ask whether the theory flunks completely, needs repair and restatement, or requires a narrowing of the scope of its explanatory claims.

18

Theory and Its Functions

➤ The testing of theory

- ❑ First, a theory cannot be tested directly; to test a theory is to test the hypotheses that are derived from a theory.
- ❑ Second, no theory can ever be proved true. You can only decide its variability and applicability.

19

Thinking Theoretically

- You need to be clear as to whether what kind of theory you are dealing with (causal, constitutive, normative).
- You need to understand what an underlying mechanism is. Scientific analysis is in essence about processes and phenomena that are not directly observable.

20

Thinking Theoretically

- When you study a given phenomenon or process you need to always ask yourself of what it is an instance, the larger pattern or process it belongs to.
- You must be ready to appreciate and accept the need to sacrifice detailed descriptions for broad observations. Theory is about more than mere description.

21

Thinking Theoretically

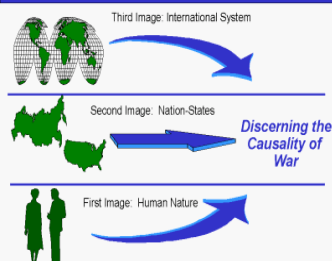
- You must be tolerant of ambiguity, concerned about probabilities, and distrustful of absolutes.
- You must be playful about international phenomena.
- You must be genuinely puzzled by international phenomena.
- You must be constantly ready to be proven wrong.

22

The Levels of Analysis



Waltz's *Man, The State and War* (1954)



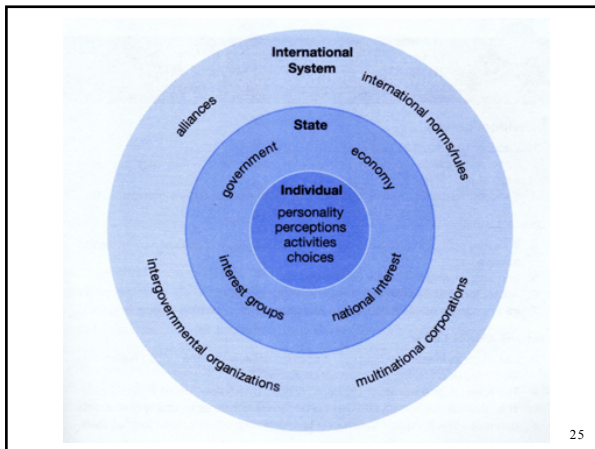
23

The Levels of Analysis

- ❑ Kenneth Waltz
- ❑ David Singer

- ❑ 3 levels: individual, state, and system.
- ❑ 6 levels: individual, roles, government, society, international relations, and the world system.

24



25

The Levels of Analysis

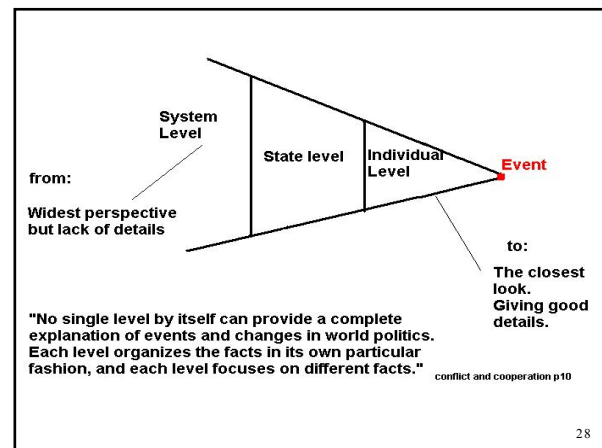
- ❑ **Individual:** Human characteristics—perceptions, images, knowledge, psychology.
- ❑ **State:** How states make decisions; economic power; military power; domestic factors.
- ❑ **System:** Interactions of states and non-state actors at the international level that affect conflict and cooperation.

26

The Levels of Analysis

- ❑ The levels of Analysis is a TOOL to help us in our examination of international relations.
- ❑ Each level has a different view of an event. They cannot be used separately, they are complementary, but each level has its own and unique value.

27



28

Evaluating the three Levels of Analysis

- **The individual level:**
 - ❑ The closest understanding with terrific details, but lacking broader views.
- **The state level:**
 - ❑ A comprehensive explanation of different state behaviors, with neither specific details nor overarching frameworks.
- **The system level:**
 - ❑ The widest perspective, with little detail of the individual parts.

29

Evaluating the three Levels of Analysis

- ❑ All three levels of analysis are not exclusive but complementary.
- Waltz: "The third image describes the framework of world politics, but without the first and second images, there can be no knowledge of the forces that determine policy; the first and second images describe the forces in world politics, but without the third image it is impossible to assess their importance or predict their results."

30

Case Study

❑ The 1991 Gulf War

❑ The 2003 Iraq War

31

Major Events of the 1991 Gulf War

Aug 2, 1990	Iraq invades and occupies Kuwait.
Aug 6, 1990	UN Security Council passes resolutions.
Aug 6-7, 1990	Buildup of US, British, and allied Arab troops begins in Saudi Arabia.
Nov 29, 1990	UN authorizes use of force against Iraq, sets January 15, 1991, as deadline for Iraqi withdrawal.
Jan 12, 1991	US Congress passes resolution to use force.
Jan 15, 1991	UN deadline passes without Iraqi withdrawal.
Jan 16, 1991	Allied forces begin bombing Iraq.
Feb 24, 1991	Allied ground troops begin assault on Iraqi troops in Kuwait; Iraqi soldiers surrender in droves.
Feb 28, 1991	Cease-fire accepted by both sides.
Apr 3, 1991	UN resolution establishes plan for finding and dismantling Iraq's weapons of mass destruction.

32

The 1991 Gulf War

➤ Why Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990?

❑ Possible explanations by level of analysis

❑ Individual level

- Saddam was aggressive and insecure.
- Saddam surrounded himself with advisers and military personnel who were afraid of him.
- Saddam miscalculated what the responses of other states would be.

33

The 1991 Gulf War

❑ State level

- With Iraq split along religious and ethnic cleavages, war against Kuwait served to unite Iraq.
- Iraq was striving to counter its enemy Iran.
- Authoritarian states like Iraq always act aggressively.
- Iraq needed more oil resources to pay debts and to develop its economy.

34

The 1991 Gulf War

❑ International system level

- Based on its inaction in the past, it seemed unlikely that the UN would agree on taking coercive action against Iraq.
- The Arab League will never condemn actions by a fellow Arabic state.
- The international community was preoccupied with other events and so it was perceived that it would not respond to an act committed against a small state.

35

Major Events of the 2003 Iraq War

Sep 11, 2001	Terrorist attacks against the US.
Oct 7, 2001	US waged a war against the Taliban regime that harbors Al Qaeda terrorists in Afghanistan.
Nov 14, 2001	US announces the end of Taliban in Afghanistan.
Jan 29, 2002	President Bush labels Iraq, Iran, and North Korea an "axis of evil" threatening world peace.
Oct 2, 2002	US Congress authorizes to use force against Iraq.
Oct 8, 2002	UN resolution holds Iraq in material breach of previous resolutions.
Mar 2003	US stops trying to fashion a UN resolution authorizing use of military force.
Mar 17, 2003	US issues a 48-hour ultimatum for Saddam.
Mar 19, 2003	Attacks are launched against Iraq.
Apr 9, 2003	Iraqi regime falls.

36

The 2003 Iraq War

➤ Why US invaded Iraq in 2003?

❑ Possible explanations by level of analysis

❑ Individual level

- Saddam was an evil leader who committed atrocities against his own people and defied the West.
- Saddam was irrational, otherwise he would have yielded.
- Bush and his advisers have targeted Saddam and Iraq since the late 1990s.

37

The 2003 Iraq War

❑ State level

- US must protect its national security from Iraq's WMD threat.
- Iraq is another target after Taliban in the war on terrorism.
- US must be assured of a stable oil supply.
- US must not permit rogue states or terrorist groups access to WMD.
- It is in the US national interest to build a progressive Arab regime in the region.

38

The 2003 Iraq War

❑ International system level

- UN resolutions condemning Iraq had to be enforced.
- A unipolar international system is uniquely capable of responding to perceived threats to the stability.
- There is an international moral imperative for humanitarian intervention – to oust evil leaders and install democratic regimes.

39

In Sum

➤ Seeing the world through theoretical lenses

➤ Four general theoretical paradigms:

- ❑ The realist paradigm
- ❑ The liberal paradigm
- ❑ The radical paradigm
- ❑ The paradigm of constructivism

40

In Sum

➤ Seeing the world by focusing on the levels of analysis

➤ Three levels of analysis:

- ❑ The individual level
- ❑ The state level
- ❑ The international system level

41