



# irth<sup>o</sup>theory:realism

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P. T. Jackson

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# ○ ● ● theory

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- a *way of seeing* the world
- necessarily partial: highlights some things, leaves others out
- never just empirical observations

# ○ ● ● realisttradition

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- Thucydides: history of power dynamics between polities
- Hobbes: “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short”
- *Realpolitik*: great power struggles for dominance
- key concept: *power politics*

# ○ ● ● basictenets

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- world politics remains *fundamentally* the same over time
- physical survival of the polity outweighs other concerns
- anarchy makes international political life dangerous

# ○ ● ● fundamental continuity

- the *fundamentals* remain the same, but the details change very often
- each situation has to be analyzed separately
- lessons can be learned from the past

# ○ ● ● physical survival

- survival of the leader for many political realists
- survival of the political community for IR realists
- “physical” = “military”

# ○ ● ● realistlogic

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If the political community does not survive physically as an autonomous community, nothing else matters because nothing else can be done. Hence, physical survival *must* take precedence over everything else.

# ○ ● ● economics and culture

- realism and economics: acquire resources; preserve autonomy
- realism and culture: defend identity; promote positive image abroad
- *use economics and culture to promote power-political ends*



# ○ ● ● objective dangers

- anarchy between sovereign states produces a “self-help” environment
- states that do not look after their own security are “selected out”
- ignoring the lessons of anarchy is a perilous undertaking

# ○ ● ● balancing

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- states react to the power of other states
- often strive to balance capabilities:
  - internally by strengthening
  - externally via alliances

# ○ ● ● alliances

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- even allies shouldn't be trusted
- Czechoslovakia 1938: no one comes to your aid unless they themselves benefit
- treaties and such are not guarantees

# ○ ● ● prisoner's dilemma

- two prisoners are caught
- DA only has enough information to convict each on a minor charge
- offers the same deal to each: rat on your partner and you can go free
- hopes that each will turn in the other, so that she can convict both

# gamematrix

payoffs: r, c  
(ordinal)

	C	D
C	2, 2	4, 1
D	1, 4	3, 3

1) defeat opponent  
2) cooperate with  
opponent

3) armed standoff  
4) defeat by  
opponent

# ○ ● ● pessimism?

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- realism's mood is certainly *grim*
  - anti-utopian
  - anti-idealist
- non-realists would call this pessimism
- ...but realists, of course, call it *realistic*