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국제학석사학위논문

**In Defense of Classical Realism as a
Normative International Political Theory:
Implications for South Korea's Foreign Policies**

국제정치규범이론으로서의
고전적 현실주의 연구
- 한국 대외 정책에 대한 시사점

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박진영

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**In Defense of Classical Realism as a
Normative International Political Theory:
Implications for South Korea's Foreign Policies**

Thesis by

Jin Young Park

Graduate Program in International Area Studies
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**Graduate School of International Studies
International Area Studies Major
Seoul National University**

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Abstract

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Although classical realism has a relatively long history as an international politics theory (and/or international relations theory), it has often been and is still widely misunderstood in several aspects. In particular, this thesis highlights the problems of i) overlooking the difference between classical realism and neorealism, especially due to the lack of attention to their metatheories, and ii) discounting the normative side of classical realism. The primary reason why these two misunderstandings are problematized here is because whilst realism continues to be the most widely accepted IR theory, its misunderstandings have resulted in substantive consequences, namely the marginalization of normative concerns in the international politics. Therefore, the thesis aims to vindicate classical realism as a normative international political theory by clarifying the common misunderstandings in the light of its metatheories. By exposing the metatheoretical differences between classical realism and neorealism, the thesis argues that, at their roots, they have more dissimilarities than similarities and that arguing in defense of classical realism as a normative theory is relevant and essential in the contemporary international relations and its discourse. Such relevance will be discussed in light of the implications the topic could have for South Korea's foreign policies.

Keywords: Classical realism, Metatheory, Normative theory, Reinhold Niebuhr, Hans Morgenthau

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Table 1. Metatheories of Classical Realism and Neo-Realism

I. Introduction

1. Study Background

Most knowledge is often on a floating sand; as time goes by, they come to lose their relevance either in entirety or in partiality. In other words, constant social developments and changes, or the ways in which they develop and are framed render certain principles, theories, and arguments obsolete. Nevertheless, more often than not, ideas have immense consequences; although they may lose their original soundness and legitimacy after a certain span of time, they leave consequential effects in the reality.

In the international relations (IR) academia, this has particularly been so. In the course of their development as an academic discipline, IR and its mainstream theories – realism, liberalism and idealism – have each been constantly revised and have rivaled against each other in order to give account for the rapidly changing reality of the international relations and to address a wide variety of challenges of the international society. For instance, major IR theories such as realism and liberalism have each begot “new” lines of thought, namely neo-realism and neo-liberalism, or new theories such as constructivism were created. Simultaneously, alongside such revisions of the theories were other forms of academic movements in places where the IR discipline was “imported” i.e. attempts to create new theories or revise the conventional West-born theories to explain their own peculiarities.

Unfortunately, in the process of such a rigorous development – coupled by the unique characteristic of the IR as being an essentially interdisciplinary field – the original contents and contexts to which they have been formulated have been misread, misunderstood and misinterpreted. For instance, many IR students, scholars and policymakers refer to the core concepts and arguments of the theories such as balance of power, without having had a sufficient and precise understanding of the entire contextual, historical, and philosophical underpinnings. And the misreading,

misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the theories have had substantive effects in the reality as the field of IR has been set on a very particular path as a discipline, “characterized by a proximity to power that few disciplines ever enjoyed” (Guilhot 2008, 301).

As a matter of fact, amongst all other IR theories, perhaps realism has been most closely attached to power and arguably the most widely accepted IR theory. Nonetheless, there were constant ebbs and flows in the process of its theorization and development. That is, in times when the dynamics of international politics tallied most with the major arguments of realism e.g. struggle for power and security dilemma, it was regarded as the one with the most explanatory power. Conversely, when the currents of the international society seemed rather detached from the alleged realist framework e.g. increase in inter-state cooperation, the realist school gained less attention.

In fact, criticisms against realism was less on the theorization and the rationale of the tenets *per se*, but more on the policy recommendations and strategies prescribed by the (self-acclaimed) realists. However, such a rhetoric is not without problems because one of the most oft-neglected part in the discourse is the meta-theoretical underpinnings and the historical background that have shaped and formed the theory. Furthermore, since the realist ideas are already “codified” and reduced into a few key jargons and concepts, the original texts of the classical realists are more cited than read. For instance, without being fully aware of the meta-theoretical differences between classical realism and neorealism, many students, academics and statesmen who allegedly ground their opinions and foreign policy prescriptions on ‘realism’ often end up being inconsistent in their arguments.

2. Purpose of Research

Based upon this problematization, this thesis aims to first and foremost continue the recent efforts to reconstruct and revisit classical realism, particularly by

distinguishing it from neorealism. Second, it makes an appeal of classical realism as a normative theory and argues that there is a significant relevance and necessity in the vindicating project especially in the contemporary contexts. To these ends, the research questions the thesis raises are as such: how is classical realism understood or misunderstood? How *should* it be understood in the contemporary, and why?

The following section will introduce previous literature that shares the same concern of classical realism being misunderstood hence trying to revisit them by attending to the original texts. Chapter three will discuss the differences between classical realism and neorealism in the light of the metatheories of each. Chapter four will then make an appeal of classical realism as a normative theory by clarifying some of the major tenets of classical realism concerning the moral and the normative. In chapter five, it will elaborate upon the due relevance and importance of arguing in defense of classical realism as a normative international political theory in the light of the implications it could have for South Korea's contemporary foreign policies. This study is a part of (chapters one to four), and an extension to the author's thesis written for Peking University.

II. Literature Review

Political realism, particularly within the IR academia, is most commonly and widely understood as a power politics or *realpolitik* theory, as a conservative or skeptic, as being amoral or immoral, as employing positivist methodologies and most of all, as merely an antithesis to liberalism. Such general and simplified interpretation of realism has resulted in a growing literature to reconstruct and refurbish classical realism in accordance with its original contexts.

The revival of interest in the original thinkers increased especially after the end of the Cold War – most notably with Alexander Wendt’s constructivist theories – and more so in the post-9/11 era. At the backdrop of these projects was the attempt to rediscover a normative international theory as much of normative discussions have been hitherto more or less marginalized. Moreover, the resurgence of global security concerns called for a normative discussion to fill in the ethical and normative vacuum. In the space available here, it is obviously impossible to provide a detailed summary of either the original texts of the classical realists or of the vast amount of literature on this project. Thus, what follows is only a fraction of the literature, yet it suffices to affirm the due relevance of continuing the discussion on the matter.

Yosef Lapid is well known to have embarked on the post-positivist debate or the so-called “Third Debate” in the IR theory discourse (Lapid 1989). His work is a reflection of the growing skepticism and pessimism towards the alleged promises of empiricist-positivist ontology, epistemology and axiology. Lapid’s work is pivotal in this enterprise of refurbishing classical realism as its call to deviate from ahistorical and scientific methodologies and the search for objective “laws” in politics – which have dominated a significant portion of the previous century’s intellectual environment – tallies with the spirit and the metatheories of classical realism in embracing reflexive, critical modes of thought.

Richard K. Ashley, writing a few years earlier than Lapid did, shares the same concern with other critics of positivism, rationalism and structuralism,

especially of the intensive scientification in studying and perceiving international relations (Ashley 1981; 1984). Precisely because neorealism has served as the ideological, intellectual descendent to the positivist and structuralist movements of behavioral science in the domain of international relations, Ashley pinpoints to the fallacies of the structuralist, neorealist promises hence repudiating neorealism in light of classical realists such as Morgenthau.

Michael Smith pinpoints to the Weberian roots and the emphasis on the “ethics of responsibility” as the common denominators among the classical realists along the lines of E.H. Carr, Reinhold Niebuhr, Hans J. Morgenthau, George Kennan, and Henry Kissinger (Smith 1986). Smith contends that the Weberian ethics are intricately embedded in their realist theories and arguments, rendering their postulations to have a normative side. That is, states’ defending of their foreign policy positions in terms of national interests must have an ethical dimension in which statesmen would have to tolerate evil in their responsible service to the state. Yet, although monumental in bringing the normative tradition discussion to the fore, Smith’s focus on the ‘inconsistencies’ of political realism seems to imply that he does not consider realism as a coherent theory. Likewise, Murray also criticizes Smith’s reluctance “to appreciate the underlying values which inform it [the Weberian ethics of responsibility], such that his moral position is ultimately represented as inadequate” (Murray 1996, 82).

Michael C. Williams frankly writes in the introduction of *The Realist Tradition and the Limits of International Relations* that an in-depth survey of the works of Thomas Hobbes, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Hans J. Morgenthau rendered him to “suspect that the positions of key thinkers in the Realist canon not only bore remarkably little resemblance to their roles within standard renditions of the Realist tradition in IR, but that they often stood in direct opposition to the claims attributed to them” (Williams 2005). In what he calls as ‘wilful realism’, Williams argues that the original realist tradition is quite contrary to how it is conventionally

perceived, namely its *skepticism* towards the firm belief on reason and science, emphasis on the *relationality* and subjectivity of the self and political order or the others. William contends that realism actually regards power politics not simply as a realm of inevitable struggle for power, but also as one of limits which aims at minimizing its destructive potential (*Ibid.*, 5-7). As Smith (1989) does, Williams also singles out the Weberian ethics of responsibility as a central common thread amongst classical realists, of which concept was more or less left unnoticed and marginalized.

Similarly, Joel Rosenthal, in *Righteous Realists: Political Realism, Responsible Power, and American Culture in the Nuclear Age*, vindicates the classical realists – Hans Morgenthau, Reinhold Niebuhr, Walter Lippman, Dean Acheson, and George Kennan – as moralists and realism as “the entity to which they reconciled morality and power” (Rosenthal 1991). Rosenthal’s discussion was very timely and issue-specific in that he reintroduced the idea of “responsible power” in relation to the nuclear weapon issues. By elucidating the continuities amongst the five classical realists, Rosenthal contends that “realism was more than a theory: it was an expression of a set of beliefs...a product of a particular time and place – a set of values, a web of assumptions, an array of process of moral reasoning, and a collection of views about America’s role in the world” (*Ibid.*, xviii-xix). Nonetheless, Rosenthal’s discussion was limited to the territorial borders of post-WWII America and to the ideational discussions within the American society.

Alastair J.H. Murray also specifies his project to “reinterpreting”, “rearticulating”, and “re-evaluating” realism – as distinct from its subdivisions such as neorealism – and like others in the literature, problematizes the distorted understandings of realism as being silent on the normative discussions (Murray 1997). Thus, his work intensively focuses on correcting the many realist concepts and values that rendered realism to be perceived as being amoral by starting off from providing detailed accounts of the foundational thinkers. Murray concludes with a bold proposal of arguing for realism as a middle ground theory between the

conservative, rationalist orthodoxy and the progressive reflectivist turn. Nevertheless, Murray's proposal settles at merely defending realism as the normative international theory and does not move on to expound on what *kinds* of contributions it could make in the real.

Duncan Bell and other contributors to *Political Thought and International Relations* aim to criticize the common misunderstanding of perceiving classical realism as a crude *realpolitik* and amoral/immoral theory (Bell 2009). As provided in the book, the philosophical and ideological traditions of classical realism is traced back to a few different lines of thoughts: one group through the lens of Hans Morgenthau, E.H. Carr and Reinhold Niebuhr and the other through Martin Heidegger, Hannah Arendt and Leo Strauss. In reinterpreting classical realism in such alternative ways, it posits that – despite subtle divisions in how realism is understood – realism as a political thought “has shaped, and can shape, political theorizing about international relations” (*Ibid.*, 1).

Chaesung Chun attends to the main classical realist thinkers such as E. H. Carr, Niebuhr and Morgenthau and illuminates the metatheoretical and philosophical underpinnings of classical realism (Chun 1999a; 1999b; 2001; 2012;). Sharing the common concern in the literature of marginalizing, if not neglecting the importance and necessity of shedding light on to the metatheories of the IR theories, Chun and Park argue that the conflicts among macro- or grand theories in the IR theory academia should be addressed or moderated via their metatheories. That is, at the heart of the theoretical conflicts is essentially the value conflicts of the theorists which can only be verified in light of the metatheories (Chun and Park 2002, 12). By excavating the metatheories of classical realism, Chun highlights that the classical realists' postulations are grounded in epistemological skepticism and their attention to practice and morality. Furthermore, the discussions are especially noteworthy in bringing the literature relatively more common in the Western IR discourse to the non-West, namely to the South Korean international relations and its academia.

Nicholas Guilhot continues this academic lineage by highlighting the politico-theological roots and the effects émigré thinkers such as Morgenthau and the Rockefeller Foundation have had on formulating the ideological, metatheoretical foundations of classical realism (Guilhot 2017). Guilhot shares the central concern that not only the literature, but also the original thinkers had: the skepticism or attack on science, which was *de facto* claimed against liberalism, rationalism and positivism. Hence his works and other essays included in *After the Enlightenment* place political realism in the continuum of the “counter Enlightenment” tradition. Particularly, Guilhot problematizes the fatal effect of applying cybernetics theory on political problems in general and on realism in particular, for transforming theological-moral background of realism into a scientific and systemic enterprise.

In sum, although each author has a different focus, a common thread that runs through the literature is the concern that classical realism has been severely misunderstood simply as a *realpolitik* and an amoral/immoral IR theory. They equally bemoan the biased understanding of realism, which has been strictly based upon selective readings from the original texts hence resulted in distortion, misinterpretation and even ignorance of the complex metatheoretical and philosophical underpinnings. As a result, critics against realism have also based their arguments on the misinterpreted ideas and distorted interpretations that the realists themselves have formed. Consequently, as has been argued in the literature and will be thus argued in the thesis, the conventional understanding of realism fails to grasp the essence of classical realism; at the heart of classical realism is to excavate the metaphysics, or the unseen, of international politics, criticize the liberal and idealist theories to objectify, control and predict what is inherently untheorizable and yet suggest a normative middle ground to juxtapose the real and the ideal.

Therefore, the thesis aims to develop upon this literature by delineating on the metatheories of classical realism vis-à-vis neorealism and highlight the factors and arguments that render it a normative international theory. Furthermore, it builds

up on the existing discourse by connecting the discussion to the contemporary international politics, specifically on what kinds of implications it would have for South Korea's contemporary foreign policies.

III. Classical Realism vs. Neorealism

1. Background

Before elaborating upon the metatheories of classical realism and neorealism, here it will be argued that the historiography of realism – the ways in which it has developed, matured and expanded – had a significant impact in not only conflating classical realism and neorealism, but also in persisting the confusion. In the current IR theory discourse, realism is often presented and positioned merely as an antithesis to liberalism hence classical realism and neorealism are readily grouped together as one school. As Bell contends, part of the reason lies in the disciplinary formation of IR theories. That is, “we are often presented with highly distorted accounts of disciplinary history” (Bell 2008, 12).

More specifically, when discussing about the history and historiography of IR theories in IR classes, textbooks and in the academia in general, the position of realism is fixated as a counterpart to liberalism especially in the light of the “Great Debates” dialectic. Consequently, the conventional historiography of the IR theories is readily recounted as follows: the schisms between “idealism and realism” from the late 1920s to the early 1930s; between “realism and behavioralism” or “traditionalism and scientism” from the late 1950s to the 1960s; and between “neorealism and neoliberalism” or “reflectivist and rationalist” from the 1980s to the 1990s. Such a story “has been so deeply ingrained in the minds of students and scholars that there almost seems to be no alternative way of understanding the early history of the field” (Schmidt 2002, 3).

Since the “Great Debates” rendition is so simple a frame to describe the complex theoretical debates, the dynamic and complex theoretical conflicts which are often relayed via a simple table of compare and contrast between and among the mainstream theories. Thus, as Schmidt argues, “this particular construction of the field’s history tends to have the effect of making the present debate a matter that all serious students of IR must focus on while relegating previous debates to obscurity”

(*Ibid.*, 4). Consequently, vast difference in the metatheories between the conflicting mega-theories was significantly marginalized. As Ashley posits, “every great scholarly movement has its own lore” and “the solidarity of a movement depends upon the members’ abilities to recount this lore and locate their every practice in its terms” (Ashley 1984, 230). Yet, the recounting of the realist theory has been poorly carried out in the course of realism’s development and expansion.

In fact, despite its many critics and its ups and downs in the discourse history, realism has been at the epicenter of the “Great Debates”, evidently proving its enduring status as the dominant IR theory. Nonetheless, the problem of distortion became even deeper and more vexing as it was “exported” from the West, especially from the United States, to the non-Western states. In the majority of the states where the contemporary IR discipline was “imported”, not only have the metatheoretical and philosophical roots of the IR theories gone unnoticed, but there also was a further problem when the already-distorted strain of thoughts was adopted without much filtration. Not only did it incur problems in the development of IR theories in general, but also in that of the budding IR scholarship of the non-West.

Today, most of the contemporary IR discourse in the non-West was highly influenced by the Western scholarship. The process of adopting and learning from the West came as a natural as it was “not contested that Western IR was the first in the field as a self-conscious academic discipline attempting to understand and theorize about the dynamics of world politics” (Buzan and Acharya 2009, 7). Particularly, as most of the states which “imported” the IR discipline were nascent independent states, of whose highest and utmost concern was ‘survival’, realism – which allegedly holds the banners of ‘power politics’ and ‘survival’ high – had the most explanatory power.

Consequently, since the developing states or the newly independent states’ ‘survival’ as a nation state and its engagement with the international society occurred in tandem with their importing of IR studies, philosophical questioning and critical

analysis of the key concepts were rarely carried out. Therefore, this adoption process was not simply an intellectual learning process; it had significant political ramifications. For instance, in the case of Korea, where the tenets of realism were vividly played out in the post-WWII¹ and post-Cold War periods even before they were taught in classrooms, it is to no surprise that the realist's power politics theory was uncritically accepted and was highly persuasive in the 1960s' Korean academia because it was able to explain Korea's political reality of being excessively dominated by great power politics the tenets of realism were physically "felt" even before they were taught as a theory (Oh 2003, 339).

Furthermore, the historiography of IR, and realism in particular, faced more vexing challenges when the "importing" states embarked on an entirely new academic movement to create IR theories that would fit with and explain their peculiarities which set them apart from their Western counterparts. Initially starting from Wight's general inquiry on why there is no international theory (Wight 1960) and Stanley Hoffman's problematizing of the orthodox IR theories as an "American Social Science" (Hoffman 1977), criticisms were raised against the parochial nature of Western IR theories. Then, Buzan and Acharya's follow-up to Wight focused specifically on why there is no non-Western international relations theory. While Wight's primary concern was the absence of an authentically international theory, Buzan and Acharya focused on the absence of a non-Western IR theory.

Under the premise that "almost all of it [IR theory] is produced by and for the West, and rests on an assumption that Western history is world history", their main puzzle was "that the almost exclusively Western sources of international relations theory conspicuously fail to correspond to the now global distribution of its subjects" (Buzan and Acharya 2009, 288). However, this thesis argues on top of the problems of uncritically adopting the Western-oriented theories and of being absent

¹ The Korean War (1950-53) is often referred to as "the proxy war", or "the forgotten war", which illustrates how the great power politics were vividly materialized in the Korean Peninsula as a "hot" war even during the Cold War period.

with a non-Western oriented IR theory, another problem that has gone unnoticed is the persistence of the misunderstandings of original theories in the hectic process of exporting and importing the theories.

In fact, the thesis argues that although both the uncritical adoption of West-oriented theories and the absence of non-Western-oriented IR theories are rightly problematic, another problem that should equally be emphasized is the persistence of the misunderstandings of original theories that has been missed out even in this *problématique*. That is, in the process of uncritically adopting IR theories, especially with an imbalanced focus on realism, the recurring theme in the IR theory discourse in the non-West was to emphasize Hoffman's problematization of "American social science" and to create a localized IR theory. Consequently, for the sake of expediency, explanation, and analysis, the philosophical, historical and metatheoretical discussions at the root of the macro theories were continuously being marginalized. In other words, the current IR theory discourse especially in the non-West is imbalanced towards its efforts to (re)create IR theories with local and peculiar characteristics.

In short, the near-absence of sufficient discussions on the metatheories in the discourse history of IR due to the highly simplified version of the "Great Debates" dialectic and the persistence thereof resulted in painting distorted pictures of the theories, particularly of realism. Therefore, in order to strike a balance in the discourse and to vindicate realism from its continued misunderstandings, the following section will discuss and delineate on the metatheories of classical realism and neorealism to show the stark contrast between the two.

2. Metatheories of Classical Realism and Neorealism

First, one of the most common misunderstandings in the IR theory discourse is that classical realism and neorealism are more similar to each other than they differ. In fact, neorealism is readily acclaimed as an heir to classical realism, that despite

the stark differences between the two, they are readily grouped together as one school of realism. Such a hasty categorization is problematic because it renders the realist assumptions and arguments logically inconsistent as a whole. Simultaneously, due to the theory's close affinity to power and effect on foreign policies, the misunderstanding is highly prone to create dissonance in diplomatic and foreign policy prescriptions.

Murray contends that today, conventional wisdom of realism has often been misguided by “artificial composites of realism” constructed by the realist critics and the works of those who label themselves as ‘realists’ (Murray 1997, 2). Consequently, circulation and dissipation of the grand narrative of realism based on the “artificial composites” have resulted in including Waltz’s neorealism promulgated in his *Man, the State, and War* (1959) and *Theory of International Relations* (1979) within the entire school of realism. That is, without distinguishing classical realism and neorealism in relaying the realist theories. In fact, Waltz virtually epitomizes the beginning of neorealism’s break away from realism’s tradition and its fundamental concerns. To this account, Murray bemoans that “...while neorealism has masqueraded as a reformulation of realist insights on more rigorous, scientific grounds, the disjunction between realism and neorealism is, in fact, far more significant than any continuities” (*Ibid.*, 3).

Similarly, Bessner and Guilhot argue that realism has “waltzed off” when neorealism “placed stress on the international system as the *explanans* for international relations, whereas classical realism also focused on decisional and domestic political factors” (Bessner and Guilhot 2015, 88). Waltz’s categorization of the three “images” of the causes of war – first being the human nature and behavior, second, domestic state regimes and third, international system – and especially his emphasis on the structural analysis essentially signaled the end of the foundational premises that classical realists upheld. In other words, in its efforts to *reform* realism

by developing a *systemic* theory, a *scientifically falsifiable/ verifiable* and a handy *framework* for analysis, neorealism essentially broke away from the realist traditions.

Jonathon Kirshner also explains several differences between classical realism and other IR schools. First, it differs from other major theories such as liberalism and Marxism as the latter employs reductionist materialist approaches. Second, it is distinct from its “realist cousins” such as structural realism (neorealism) and neoclassical realism on several accounts: i) although structures matter, they do not play decisive roles; ii) the nexus between domestic and international politics is high, whereby the former is essential to understanding state behavior; iii) security is not the one and only goal of the great powers and they are intrinsically opportunistic; and iv) “international politics – the choices made by states – are uncertain, contingent, and consequential” (Kirshner 2015, 156). Despite these stark differences, Kirshner writes that however remarkable neorealist’s approach was, “its extraordinary influence, as well as its emphasis — indeed its insistence — on the systemic level of analysis (a consideration of states as like units differentiated only by their relative capabilities) has skewed, unhelpfully, realist analysis” (Kirshner 2010, 56).

Then, what are the original realist traditions and foundations that neorealism actually departed from? Excavating the roots, in other words, the project of disentangling the conflation of classical realism with neorealism can be done by distinguishing the metatheoretical differences between the two. A metatheory literally refers to a theory of theory (Kurki and Wight 2013, 15), aimed at discovering the ‘facts of the matter’. As Lapid writes, “excursions into metatheory are notoriously controversial in the social sciences” (Lapid 1989, 235). To some, the task is essential because “those who try to ignore philosophy only succeed in reinventing it” (Lapid 1989, 235-6; Bunge 1983, 270). To others, the search for metatheories for a social scientist is “likely to come at the expense of actual research” (Lapid 1989, 236).

In any event, following the reflectivist, post-positivist trends of the late twentieth century, especially in the IR theoretical discourse, the thesis dictates that the misunderstandings of realism can be best clarified in light of the metatheories. This is primarily because a metatheory forms the fundamental foundation and origin of each theory's conceptual, philosophical, and logical premise and assumption (Eun 2015, 131); "metatheory is the indispensable foundation of competent scholarly activity, and vital for ensuring the adequacy of the explanatory accounts which are developed" (Neufeld 1993, 54). In other words, the essence of the discord between classical realism and neorealism lies not in their postulations *per se*, but in their fundamentally incompatible premises and assumptions, that is, their metatheories. Also, the general trend of theorizing in the IR theory discourse to simply aim at explaining and analyzing the physical or the natural world calls for metaphysical clarification and explanation.

The metatheories that philosophers of social science and IR theorists generally deal with are ontology, epistemology, and axiology/ethical theory. Ontology (the Greek word for being is *onto*) questions the *nature* of being and reality e.g. "what are the basic units that compose the world?" Epistemology is a study of knowledge (the Greek word for knowledge is *epistēmē*), inquiring about what constitutes as knowledge, calling forth the researchers to ask themselves "how do we know what we know". Finally, axiology (the Greek word for value or worth is *axios*) concerns the role of values and ethics.

Borrowing from Chun's summary of the metatheories of classical realism and neorealism, ontologically, classical realism assumes human nature as the essence of the reality, while neorealism takes a structure- or system-based approach. Epistemologically, classical realism is based on interpretivism or epistemological skepticism and neorealism on positivism. Finally, in terms of axiology, classical realism is a critical theory and neorealism a problem-solving theory (Chun 2012, 217). Moreover, another criterion to distinguish classical realism and neorealism is

their stance on rationalism: neorealism is grounded on ontological, epistemological and ethical rationalism, while classical realism is an outspoken critic against rationalism (Chun 1999, 59). Since the common understandings of realism are void of these metatheoretical divisions (Lapid 1989; Neufeld 1993), following is an explanation on the ontology, epistemology and axiology of classical realism and neorealism, respectively (Table 1).

	Classical Realism	Neo-Realism
Ontology	Human nature-based	Structure- or system-based
Epistemology	Interpretivist or epistemologically skeptic	Positivist
Axiology	Critical theory	Problem-solving theory

Table 1. Metatheories of Classical Realism and Neo-Realism

2.1. Ontology

Classical realists assume human nature and behavior as the nature of being, while neorealists take systems- and structure-oriented approaches. In order to understand where the ontological division originates from, taking a look at the formative/ historical background of each line of thought is in order.

2.1.1. Classical Realism

When commenting on the realists' understanding of human nature, a few well-known quotes from prominent realists such as Hobbes and Morgenthau are often recited. For instance, common description of the state of nature is cited from Hobbes: "the condition of man...is a condition of war of all against all"; from Morgenthau, the first sentence in his six principles of political realism is most frequently cited: "political realism believes that politics, like society in general, is governed by objective laws that have their roots in human nature" (Morgenthau 1985, 4).

Consequently, typical realist definition of human nature seems to revolve around such few selected quotes. In fact, an oft-neglected background to which classical realists base their perception of human nature is (political) theology. As an illustration of such a root, Guilhot (2010) brings to the fore the resonance of religious and theological metaphors in the IR literature, such as the Leviathan and *katechon*, and highlights the influence of Christian realists such as Niebuhr or Carl Schmitt, a Catholic, in founding classical realism. They have had a significant influence in establishing the basis of classical realist ideas grounded on theological and moral considerations (Guilhot 2010, 224).

Especially, Niebuhr, the founding father of Christian realism and who Kennan referred to as “the father of us all”, has greatly affected other classical realist thinkers and statesmen. Morgenthau also paid tribute to Niebuhr, calling him as “the greatest living political philosopher in America” (Morgenthau 1962, 109). Most recently, the revival of interest in Niebuhr was ignited by Barack Obama’s praise of Niebuhr (Brooks 2007). As a theologian and an international politics scholar, Niebuhr first and foremost tried to view, define and interpret international politics in light of the theologically defined human nature.

According to Niebuhr, understanding any political phenomena cannot be successful or appropriate apart from having a clear picture of the human nature. Most fundamentally, it is crucial to understand that there is a perennial tension between *nature* and *spirit* inherent in all men. Nature refers to the natural creatureliness of men, which is finite and limited, while spirit refers to the spiritual dimension in the image of God. This dualism of man’s nature, along with “human freedom and the consequent degree of discrete and unique individuality”, is what distinguishes humans from other creatures (Niebuhr 1941, 59). Morgenthau also acknowledges this multidimensionality of men’s nature. By pointing out that the modern age’s excessive faith in “the philosophy of rationalism has essentially misunderstood the nature of man, the nature of the social world, and the nature of reason itself”,

Morgenthau contends it is fundamental to understand that man's nature is composed of biological, rational and spiritual dimensions (Morgenthau 1946, 5).

However, there is a perennial tension between the natural and the spiritual due to the very factor of freedom which renders humans to forget their creatureliness and make choices only to maximize their self-love (or egotism) and interests. This is the essence of what Christian realists like Niebuhr refer to as the original sin; forgetting his creatureliness in relation to God, man came to think that he is infinite (like God) (Niebuhr 1941, 16-17). In Niebuhr's words, "[h]is inclination to abuse his freedom, to overestimate his power and significance and to become everything is understood as the primal sin" (*Ibid.*, 8). Stemming from the acceptance of the original sin inherent in all men, Niebuhr identifies two distinct elements of human nature: the will to live and the will to power. The former yields to basic needs in relation to survival and the latter pertains to desires other than mere survival, of which *desire* is always prone to be in conflict with that of other fellow men.

Similarly, in *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics* Morgenthau closely echoes Niebuhr's understanding of human nature. Morgenthau contends that "human nature was characterized by two principal drives, a simple selfishness which equates to the will to live, but also, and more seriously, by *animus dominandi* [the desire for power]" (Murray 1996, 92). The former is related to the essential needs for human survival such as "food, shelter, security, and the means by which they are obtained, such as money, jobs, marriage, and the like." The latter, however, "concerns itself not with the individual's survival, but with his position among his fellows once his survival has been secured" (Morgenthau 1946, 193). Therefore, while the will to live can be satisfied within limits, the will to power has none, and "it is this ubiquity of the desire for power which, besides and beyond any particular selfishness or other evilness of purpose, constitutes the ubiquity of evil in human nature" (Morgenthau 1946, 194).

Likewise, both Niebuhr and Morgenthau accept the reality of the will to live and the lust for power – particularly the destructiveness of the latter – and the

perennial tension that exists between the natural and the spiritual. In fact, such a theological orientation dates further back to the history of political theology of St. Augustine of Hippo. Niebuhr and Morgenthau constantly closely resemble Augustine's theory and articulations on human nature provided in the *City of God*.

According to Augustine, man's original nature was supposedly capable of fulfilling God's transcendental moral law, but the same nature gave him the freedom to disobey it. In Augustine's depiction of the two kinds of cities, those who choose to dwell in the *city of man* are governed by the desires of the flesh, while those who choose to live in the *city of God* live by the spiritual standards. However, the tension between the two is perennially insoluble that rather than abandoning the apparent reality and contradiction, Augustine maintains that man should accept the imperfection with all due humility and do one's best to approximate the moral imperatives that the spiritual yearns for (Augustine 4, 853-5).

Likewise, classical realists' fundamental assumption of all political phenomena is deeply rooted in their understanding of human nature. In fact, although classical realists do prioritize this human nature-based assessment, they do not entirely neglect the relevance of structural and systems approach. Nevertheless, human nature forms the basis of understanding all political phenomena, be it domestic or international; at the state level, as nations are massive collections of egotistic individuals, that like selfish men, the nations have the same quest for survival, prestige and influence (Thompson 1955, 10). Taking the proverbial reality of the selfishness of nations as a fact, George Washington dictated that "nations were not to be trusted beyond their own national interests" (Niebuhr 1940, 84). Likewise, in the international society, or at the system level, all nations seek to exert and realize their own national interests, especially when "emotive qualifiers such as nationalism come into play" (Murray 1996, 6).

When excavating the historical, theological and philosophical roots of Niebuhr and Morgenthau's ontological basis on human nature, it might at first seem

legitimate to perceive classical realism as a pessimistic, hopeless, and interest-oriented theory. However, such an understanding does little or no justice to them because it is precisely to this egotistic, self-interest-based human nature that the realist foreign policy prescriptions and theories such as balance of power find the most fitting connection. That is, rather than turning a blind eye towards this baffling paradox of human nature, it is precisely the self-knowledge of this tension that calls for practice and the politics of *limits* to work with the forces and to accept the contradictions. A detailed explanation on this account will be provided in the next chapter.

2.1.2. Neorealism

On the other hand, neorealism regards structure or system as the primary level of analysis in explaining the nature of international relations. Seeing the decreasing legitimacy of classical realism in explaining economic crises and the many changes in the international society, early neorealists such as Waltz made an “appeal to the objective structures, which are said to dispose and limit practices among states (most especially, the anarchic structure of the modern states system)” by lifting the subjectivist, “normatively laden metaphysics of fallen man” (Ashley 1984, 233). Thus, the main question neorealism asks is, “how do changes of the system affect the expected frequency of war?” (Waltz 1988, 620) For instance, when Waltz extended the question to explaining the cause of the Cold War proper, he sought for *what*, not who, started the war. Hence his answer pertaining to the question was that “wars, hot and cold, originate in the structure of the international system” and that they will “last as long as that structure endures” (*Ibid.*, 628).

The first and foremost lore of neorealism is structuralism, that is, to find structural relations, or the causal connections that give *form* to the dynamics of hegemonic rise and decline (Ashley 1984, 232). Waltz clearly writes as such:

Neorealism contends that international politics can be understood only if the effects of structure are added to the unit-level explanations of traditional realism. By

emphasizing how structures affect actions and outcomes, neorealism rejects the assumption that man's innate lust for power constitutes a sufficient cause of war in the absence of any other. It reconceives the causal link between interacting units and international outcomes...Causes at the level of units interact with those at the level of structure, and, because they do so, explanation at the unit level alone is bound to be misleading. If an approach that allows the consideration of both unit-level and structural-level causes, then it can cope with both the changes and the continuities that occur in a system (Waltz 1988, 617-8).

In other words, ontologically, neorealism denies the relevance and the legitimacy of the human nature-oriented approach of classical realism especially in explaining the cause of war and seeking for solutions in such an approach to establish peace and security. The primary reason why Waltz and other neorealists regard it misleading to take the unit-level human nature as the independent variable in explaining the causes of wars and conflicts is because it is simply regarded as a general, universal trait found in all men regardless of time, space and circumstances (Chun 2012, 55-56).

Since they focus on the structures within the bounds of the international system and of the forces at the international, a clear distinction exists between domestic and international politics. This is particularly so since states are regarded as the unitary actors and as the constituents of the international system. On the contrary, classical realists posit that – because the human factor is always there – “the difference between domestic and international politics...is one of *degree* and not of kind” (Morgenthau 1985, 52).

Moreover, the structuralist approach is distinct from the human nature-oriented approach in that it aims to explain changes and dynamics in the context of the model of structure. Therefore, always holding the structure as a constant, changes are explained via objective constructs, as opposed to individualist, subjectivist factors. By this token, neorealism is a totalistic, or holistic theory. That is, Waltz and other neorealists focus not on the effects of individual human factors or on the variances of foreign policy behaviors, but on “uncovering the objective structures

that determine the significance of practice within the context of an overall system” (Ashley 1984, 236).

The structuralists contend that the ‘structure’ whole is independent of, and prior to the atomic elements – namely human nature – that constitute the whole. Therefore, despite the many contingencies of the social reality, structuralists or neorealists posit that the contingencies can be explained through “a limited number of typical patterns” (Morgenthau 1946, 150). In the realm of international relations, the international political system gains predominance over its constituents such as the states and humans hence the isomorphisms and contingencies are explained and perceived in light of the systemic whole.

This “structuralist turn” in the realist school was an academic venture to “redeem” classical realism through a progressive, scientific logic. In fact, it was part of the newly rising scientism and positivism in the social sciences, of which intellectual history dates even further back to the genealogy of Galileo or Newton to “mathematicise the nature”. The following section on the epistemology of neorealism will expound on this link.

In any event, the illustration of the ontologies of classical realism and neorealism shows that the two utterly disagree on what constitutes the fundamental nature of society in general and international politics in particular. The divergence on ontology, which serves to be the starting point of the fundamental assumptions, essentially creates an irreconcilable gap between classical realism and neorealism.

2.2. Epistemology

Second, epistemologically, classical realism is based on epistemologically skeptical, or interpretative approaches and neorealism on positivism and positivist methodologies. As a matter of fact, classical realists are essentially critical against the scientific or positivist turn in the social sciences which form the metaphysical and metatheoretical roots of both idealism and liberalism.

2.2.1. *Classical Realism*

The existing literatures to refurbish classical realism accentuate this epistemological difference by providing in-depth interpretations of the original works of classical realists such as Carr, Morgenthau, Niebuhr, Butterfield and Kennan (Smith 1986; Rosenthal 1991; Murray 1997; Bell 2008; Scheuerman 2009; Chun 2012). Detailed accounts on each thinker provide sufficient evidence to demonstrate the mutual concern and pessimism the classical realists had over the prevalence of liberal policies and on the employing of positivist and scientific methodologies in the academia. Their excavations aim to do justice to the original thinkers as the “conventional wisdom not only ascribes this positivist dominance to the ‘discipline’s’ origins in the realist conception of international relations, but holds realism responsible, in its continuing development...” (Murray 1997, 2).

As classical realists contend, the positivist approach in social studies (and international politics in particular) is problematic because it attempts to describe, and even prescribe to the issues and problems of a society via a limited number of factors. This is the so-called problem of reductionism. In the words of Morgenthau, “the first lesson the student of international politics must learn and never forget is that the complexities of international affairs make simple solutions and trustworthy prophecies impossible” (Morgenthau 1985, 23). However, positivist methodologies became a common practice in the contemporary international politics and are widely employed with the ‘realist’ labels.

Of course, applying quantitative methods and searching for causal mechanisms and/or correlation relationships between a few key factors are not without benefits; if the detected cause A of a problem B proves to have been the primary cause for the problem, then relevant prescriptions and policies could be implemented to tackle the issue. In fact, this is *only* on the proviso of a hypothetically controlled experiment; it is intrinsically impossible to reduce every complexity and contingency of our society into a few definitive factors and causes.

Yet, under such an assumption or setting, the problem of single cause arises; “any single cause in the social sphere can entail an indefinite number of different effects, and the same effect can spring from an indefinite number of different causes. It is impossible to foresee with any degree of certainty which effects will be brought about by this particular cause, nor is it possible to state in retrospect with any degree of certainty what particular cause has produced the effect” (Morgenthau 1946, 127).

Metaphorically calling “the reliance of the age upon scientific solutions instead of upon political action” as “the chimera of the natural sciences”, Morgenthau clearly expresses his qualm against the liberal, positivist, and scientific views and approaches toward the society in general, and particularly in international politics. A short metaphor that he cites from Stephen Leacock succinctly illustrates Morgenthau’s uneasiness with the certainty of the age on the certainty of reason and science. At the funeral of ‘Dead Certainty’, ‘Science’, ‘Philosophy’, and ‘Theology’ talk amongst each other:

“‘Incomprehensible,’ murmurs Theology reverently.
“‘What was that word?’ asks Science.
“‘Incomprehensible; I often use it in my litanies.’
“‘Ah yes,’ murmurs science, with almost equal reverence, ‘incomprehensible!’
“‘The comprehensibility of comprehension,’ begins Philosophy, staring straight in front of him.
“‘Poor fellow,’ says Theology, ‘he’s wandering again; better lead him home.’
“‘I haven’t the least idea where he lives,’ says Science.
“‘Just below me,’ says Theology. ‘We’re both above you.’” (*Ibid.*, 132-3)

Further emphasizing that ‘Scientist Philosophy’, ‘Modern Philosophical Theory’, and ‘Social Sciences’ did not even know that the funeral took place – because “for them certainty is very much alive” – Morgenthau strongly posits that the attempt for social science to emulate natural science with any degree of certainty is impossible; that unlike many political scientists’ belief that they are “able to predict social events with a high degree of certainty”, the best they can do is to indicate the *probability* to which certain trends and conditions will materialize (*Ibid.*, 136-8). In other words, epistemologically, classical realism opposes to providing

predictions with any degree of certainty. Therefore, the common practice of forecasting in the theoretical discourse is supposed to be inconsistent with the core assumptions and the dictates of classical realism.

Niebuhr also warns against the confidence of modern social sciences in the ideas of causation and prediction. That is, such a confidence ignores “the complexity of causation and the intervention of contingent factors in history, including the human agent” (Thompson 1955, 171). Niebuhr maintains that any new thing in both nature and history is “only one of an infinite number of possibilities” (*Ibid.*), which partially enables tracing back to a series of causes in retrospect, but still renders predicting with any degree of surety impossible.

In fact, at the root of Morgenthau and other classical realists’ concern with the positivist methodologies and approaches to social and political issues is their deep concern over the age’s firm belief in the rationality of reason. In Thompson’s words, “the idea of progress and of perfectibility of man” has become “the lodestar of contemporary social science” (Thompson 1955, 170). Hence Morgenthau calls it the “tragedy of scientific man” in *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics*, which Murray describes as a work that is “dedicated to an attack on positivist attempts to generate a science of the social realm akin to the natural sciences” (Murray 1997, 73). In expressing his skepticism towards the rationality of reason, Morgenthau writes:

Reason, far from allowing its own inherent impulses, is driven toward its goals by the irrational forces the ends of which it serves...Where reason reigns, it does so owing to irrational forces pressing for this extension of its reign...Reason is like light which by its own inner force can move nowhere. It must be carried in order to move. It is carried by irrational forces of interest and emotion to where those forces want it to move, regardless of what the inner logic of abstract reason would require (Morgenthau 1946, 154-5).

Likewise, because of the irrationality of rationalism, classical realists are epistemologically skeptical of applying scientific methods and positivist approaches to the domain of social issues and judgments. Therefore, in highlighting the infinity of casual sequences and correlations in our society, Niebuhr embraces the need to

undertake an interpretivist approach; “no one can give a scientifically conclusive account, for instance, of the fall of the Roman Empire, or of the reason for the rise of Nazism in Germany...which would compel the rejection of a competing or contrasting interpretation. The conclusions arrived at are partly determined by the principle of interpretation with which the inquiry is begun” (Brown 1986, 210-1).

Similarly, a number of figures who classical realists bear much resemblance, namely E. H. Carr, also take an interpretivist approach whereby they try to understand certain concepts, theories and phenomenon within the *historical contexts*. Highly influenced by Niebuhr and Carr, Morgenthau upholds hermeneutics approach when he says that interpreters should

retrace and anticipate, as it were, the steps a statesman – past, present, or future – has taken or will take on the political scene...look over his shoulder when he writes his dispatches...listen in on his conversation with other statesmen; read and anticipate his very thoughts (Morgenthau 1985, 5).

Furthermore, due to the subjectivity of the observer involved in the interpreting enterprise, a pure scientific inquiry and method would be impossible. That is, unlike the conventional understanding of realism as pursuing a value-free science, it is inevitable that the social scientist becomes both an observer and an agent (with stake) in perceiving and interpreting historical and social phenomenon. Carr also argues that an objective “historical fact” cannot exist. For example, by dividing *facts* into two categories, Carr posits that facts are bestowed with certain values at the discretion of the historians observing the facts: while “facts of the past” refer to historical information that the historians do not regard as important, “historical facts” are information that the historians deem as important.

Therefore, the primary task of the interpreter is “to examine history, to distil an understanding of the practical consensus, to communicate this distilled understanding to each and every participant, and thereby situate all in a transhistorical normative-practical order” (Ashley 1981, 211). In other words, the many concepts and ideas that classical realists provide are not definite in terms of their applicability and relevance across time and space – as the neorealists contend.

Rather, the specific contexts, the particular “political and cultural environments” to which key terms such as national interest are conceptualized and internalized are to be closely interpreted.

2.2.2. Neorealism

On the other hand, the epistemology of neorealism is polar opposite to that of classical realism. Neorealism is essentially the embodiment, or the carrier of the positivist turn in international relations, reflecting and continuing the tide of scientism in the social sciences: “[e]mbedded in most social sciences and in the study of international relations is the belief that through science and reason the human race can gain control over its destiny. Through the advancement of knowledge, humanity can learn to master the blind forces and construct a science of peace...The fundamental problem faced...is not uncontrollable passions, but ignorance” (Gilpin 1981, 226). The idea is that “if all men followed reason, the conflicts which separate them would disappear or, at worst, be resolved in compromise...the perfect world is the world in which all obey the commands of reason” (Morgenthau 1946, 14).

In fact, this rationalist movement has a longer historical background. In the antiquity, people viewed everything, be it the world or knowledge, in light of the hierarchical relationship between God and man. However, since the twelfth century, in lieu of the theologically-based perspective, Aristotelian thoughts sparked debates to rethink about the definition of knowledge and science. For instance, people began to question the origin and nature of the universe and consequently, a series of academic disciplines began to develop e.g. astronomy, physics, medicine, law, mathematics and so on. From then onwards, philosophies and epistemologies built on the scientific fad continuously developed, culminating into an actual reality of the Scientific Revolution. Then, since the Enlightenment period, marked by a series of scientific discoveries by key figures such as Copernicus, Galileo, and Newton, the dominant “scientific” reason was to regard that anything that is observed with human eyes should be and can be empirically verified.

Under this intellectual atmosphere, “attempts were made to extend the new way of thinking to the social world and to discover the natural laws of social intercourse which, in both their rationality and universality, would correspond to the laws of physics”. Morgenthau pinpoints Hugo Grotius, with his philosophy of the “natural system”, as the pioneer in developing the idea that the social world can also be governed by objective laws independent from the divine will, but managed by human reason (*Ibid.*, 12). His philosophy gave grounds to the idea that man, with his rational faculties, and governed by rational laws, can fully understand and act upon the rational world.

Consequently, rationalist philosophy assumes that the rationally right is also equivalent to the ethically good. In other words, anything that is short of the demands of both ethics and expediency is only an indication of lack of knowledge and reason. Furthermore, the rationally right action is also the successful; “as conformity with the laws of nature guarantees success in the physical world, so in the social world does compliance with the laws of reason” (*Ibid.*, 14). Moreover, even if a man or a society should lack knowledge and reason, rationalist philosophy assumes that education can help overcome the shortage hence progress is attainable. Finally, it accepts that the laws of reason are universally applicable (*Ibid.*, 13-20).

Grounded in this rationalist philosophy, positivism, when applied to social sciences, upholds five general expectations. First, that scientific knowledge intends to understand the social reality in relation to a certain fixed structure or causal relations that are not bound by human subjectivity. Second, that science aims to create technically useful knowledge, which can facilitate human capacities to make predictions, act efficiently, and wield control. Third, that this knowledge is value-free. Fourth, that the truth of ideas and concepts is to be tested or falsified via their correspondence with the external environment. Fifth, that human subjectivity does not make a difference in conducting social science research (Ashley 1984, 249-250).

The adoption of such rationalist assumptions in the IR academia, particularly by the idealists, liberals and neorealists, signaled their total departure from the pre-rationalist traditions of distinguishing social studies and politics from natural science. Furthermore, such different stances in the epistemology meant shifting from traditional historical approaches in research to employing “scientific” modes of research, exemplified by the exponential increase of quantitative research.

All in all, the stark differences in the epistemologies of classical realism and neorealism again show how distorted the conventional understanding of realism is. Most critically, classical realists’ assumption that men’s rational faculties and reason are limited and that the physical mechanisms of natural science cannot be exactly emulated in society have resulted in their employing of epistemologically skeptical and interpretivist approaches. On the other hand, neorealists’ strong confidence in the perfectibility of men and their search for “objective” laws and patterns as in natural science laboratories have rendered them to employ structuralist, positivist methodologies and approaches.

2.3. Axiology

In terms of axiology, or ethical theory, classical realism is in its essence a critical theory, while neorealism is a problem-solving theory.² According to Cox, problem-solving theory and critical theory each has different goals. A problem-solving theory obviously aims at solving social problems. To this end, and because it takes the world as it is, the problem-solving theory aims to make the prevailing social and power relationships and the institutions “work smoothly by dealing effectively with particular sources of trouble”. Therefore, when explaining or analyzing social phenomena, it *fixes limits or parameters* to the source of the

² This distinction is borrowed from Cox’s categorization hence subject to his “biased” emphasis on the importance of constructing a critical theory.

problem of issue and *reduces* the problem into a set of *laws or regularities* “which are amenable to relatively close and precise examination” (Cox 1981, 128-129).³

On the other hand, a critical theory is *reflective* in nature, as its aim is to be “aware of the perspective which gives rise to theorizing, and its relation to other perspectives” and ultimately seeks for other possible alternatives other than that created the problem at issue. Therefore, unlike the problem-solving theory, it does not take the existing social and power relationships and institutions for granted, but questions them by tracing back to their *origins and history*. (Cox takes note of the fact that the problem-solving theory is non-historical or ahistorical because it assumes the permanence of the institutions and power relations.) Moreover, critical theory attends to the problems of the real and the practical with a different approach to that of the problem-solving theory; it aims to address the issues “from a perspective which *transcends* that of the existing order” (*Ibid.*, 130). In this respect, critical theories also serve the function as *normative* theories in that they suggest a normative alternative to the existing order.

2.3.1. *Classical Realism*

As detailed above, the ontology and the epistemology of classical realism reveal that classical realism is fundamentally critical against rationalism and the existing order upheld by its tenets. The method that classical realists employ in criticizing rationalism, scientism, positivism and the like is to trace back to history and to the continuing effects it has on the present. Cox even writes that “critical theory is theory of history” because it is concerned not just with the past, but also with the continued process of historical change. For this reason, it is often criticized for failing to explain changes and for adjusting the concepts “to the changing object it seeks to understand and explain” (*Ibid.*, 129). However, because critical theory or classical realism essentially employs interpretivist, hermeneutical approaches, the

³ Italics added by the author.

need for a transhistorically or universally fixed concepts to explain the changes are obviated.

Therefore, while being skeptical of neorealist, structuralist, positivist or technical approaches to international politics and of the rational cognitive faculties of men to address the problematic, classical realists suggest an alternative to address the practical problems: practice. Despite having a pessimistic outlook of the real, they call for practice and moral will of statesmen to fill in the void between theory and the reality of politics. Unlike rational neorealists who assume that solutions can be sought for, classical realists doubt the perfectibility of the rational faculties of men. Yet, their suggestion for normative practice of men all the while having a pessimistic outlook on the human nature and on the rationality of reason shows that the classical realists were at ease in accepting this apparent irony of the humanity than in denying it. To this account Brown calls Niebuhr a “pessimistic optimist” (Brown 1986). Or, as Rosenthal writes:

Niebuhr and the realists were pessimistic in the sense that they accepted the immediate inadequacies of human beings. They were optimistic because while they accepted the inherent limitations of man, they simultaneously committed themselves to the improvement of the social world in which they as individual human beings lived. Despite their doubts about perfection, they did believe that they could make the world a better place. Not all realists possessed the same degree of optimism that Niebuhr’s faith enabled him to sustain, but most were willing to work toward the normative ends that seemed forever to elude them (Rosenthal 1991, 7-8).

Likewise, because it is not unconcerned with the practical, classical realism aims at reconciling the divergent value systems that inform and support the different moral understandings in international politics. Therefore, rather than merely seeking for a legitimate explanatory theory to give account for the problems via simple ‘structures’ such as balance of power, classical realism as a normative theory resolves to construct the ‘rules of politics’ that are informed by moral consensus on diverse values. As a matter of fact, there are a number of ethical and normative credos that classical realists such as Niebuhr and Morgenthau embraced and upheld. The following chapter will explicate on the issue.

2.3.2. Neorealism

Neorealism, as a problem-solving theory, is essentially grounded on rationalist/ positivist epistemology. That is, the idea that problems can be solved and that solutions can be sought for stems from the assumption that once the right formula is discovered, social problems can all be solved rationally and with certainty (like mathematical and physical problems). Therefore, it is readily presumed that social problems can be solved through logical deduction and by resorting to the principle of reason.

For instance, neorealists believe that the problems that occur in the international society, owing to the anarchic situation of the international society – which they assume as a given structure – can be dealt with by tracking the sources of the trouble in the structure itself. On the specific issue of nuclear weapons, Waltz writes that in the anarchy of states, where “the structure of international politics has not been transformed”, “improving the means of defense and deterrence relative to the means of offense increases the chances of peace” (Waltz 1988, 626). Here, “improving the means of defense and deterrence” would refer to the solution to tackle the problem of nuclear proliferation.

The reason why structures are held as constants and as solutions to the problematic is because neorealists (or structuralists) deny history as process. That is, due to the ever-fixity and the confined limits of the structures, they believe that changes in the history can be dealt with by adjusting the structures proper. Not only do neorealists try to explain isomorphisms across societies and nations based on the structures, but with same logic, they also believe that making predictions is possible. This is in stark contrast to the classical realists who contend that – with the limited rational faculties of men hence the acknowledged limit to theorize the untheorizable and to control the uncontrollable – prediction is essentially impossible. Waltz writes in the introduction of *Theory of International Politics* that:

The urge to explain is not born of idle curiosity alone. It is produced also by the desire to control...Prediction may certainly be useful: The forces that propel two bodies headed for a collision may be inaccessible, but if we can predict the collision, we can at least get out of the way. Still, we would often like to be able to exert some control (Waltz 1979, 6).

As a result, neorealism departs from classical realism's concern with the normative as it considers international society to be a realm of causal necessities, rather than that of intersubjectivities. Therefore, it rules out any possibility of a societal, moral standard to function in international politics, other than the workings of the objectified structural constraints. It is precisely this central focus on the real that locates neorealism at an opposite end to classical realism, which on the other hand, aims to reconcile the real and the ideal.

In short, this chapter has tried to show the incompatibility between the metatheories of classical realism and of neorealism. As it has been illustrated above, the ontology, epistemology and axiology of classical realism are in sync with each other only when they are not conflated with those of neorealism, and the vice versa as well. Therefore, conflating classical realism and neorealism is highly problematic since the metatheories of each render the grand theory as a whole to be incompatible and inconsistent when the distinction is absent. Amongst all else, neorealism's positivist and structuralist turns signaled its total departure from the traditions and the spirit of classical realism.

Besides the fact that such turns effected the two theories to provide entirely different renditions on international politics, neorealism's breakaway from classical realism was more than methodological as is commonly known. In fact, another significant impact was that neorealism abandoned any concern with the normative. Nonetheless, since both classical realism and neorealism were often relayed together as one grand theory of realism, realism itself was seriously misunderstood as an amoral or immoral theory. Therefore, the following section will take over the metatheoretical discussions provided above and elaborate upon what classical realism as a normative theory offers.

IV. Classical Realism as a Normative Theory

A simple reason why realism is commonly perceived as a bellicose and an amoral or immoral theory may perhaps be due to the fact that the most often cited tenets of realism such as evil human nature, power politics, balance of power, national interest, survival and the like exhibit highly negative connotations. Moreover, while an international political theory or an IR theory can serve the functions of both an explanatory theory and a normative theory, the fact that classical realism bears much normative elements has been significantly neglected. That is, as much as classical realism aims to describe and explain how the world is like, that is, on the *what is*, it also seeks to inquire how the world *ought to be* like. Such emphasis on the normative renders classical realism to be rhetorically and logically coherent with the afore-mentioned metatheories, particularly with the axiology.

In fact, the traditional classical realists embraced here such as Niebuhr and Morgenthau are as much ethicists as they are pessimists or skeptics; they are essentially concerned about both the real and the ideal and the normative. Meanwhile, they are distinct from other moralist philosophers who depreciate the political and the nature of politics. They are also different to optimistic liberals and the idealists who readily assume that cooperation among states are possible so long as they share the common objective to establish peace and security in the international society. Rather, classical realists are by all means *realists* who believe that a faultless utopia cannot be achieved. Such a view is well summarized in what Morgenthau says:

Political realism does not require, nor does it condone, indifference to political ideals and moral principles, but it requires indeed a sharp distinction between the desirable and the possible – between what is desirable everywhere and at all times and what is possible under the concrete circumstances of time and place (Morgenthau 1985, 7).

Therefore, in order to vindicate the school of classical realism as a normative international theory, this section will delineate on some of the major ideas that the thinkers commonly provide. To begin with, a common thread that runs through along the lines of classical realists such as Augustine, Niebuhr and Morgenthau is

the idea of working within the *limits*, which seems to be intricately related to their assertions on political ethics; ontologically and ethically, their acceptance of the limits in achieving absolute good due to the pervasiveness of selfishness and the will-to-power inherent in human nature; epistemologically, their skepticism towards the rationality and perfectibility of reason hence the limits of men's rational faculties in achieving perfect peace and justice. Such a paradigm is well echoed in how Morgenthau opens *Politics among Nations*:

...[T]he world, imperfect as it is from the rational point of view, is the result of forces inherent in human nature. To improve the world one must work with those forces, not against them. This being inherently a world of opposing interests and of conflict among them, moral principles can never be fully realized, but must at best be approximated through the ever-temporary balancing of interests and the ever precarious settlement of conflicts (Morgenthau 1985, 3).

This idea of accommodating the *limits* – or working “with the forces” – is applied to the domain of ethics in international politics, extrapolating upwards from the morality of man to that of (international) society/ states. The specific means to which classical realists advise in realizing political ethics in the realm of international politics is i) practice and prudence of statesmen, ii) yet with a modest degree of national interests and policy objectives, iii) and with the aims to achieve lesser evil.

1. Practice and Prudence of Statesmen

Recalling from the previous section on the ontology of classical realism, classical realists accept the duality of human nature – the selfishness and the lust for power which is perpetually in tension with their will to the transcendental – as an apparent contradiction; “[t]he lust for power as ubiquitous empirical fact and its denial as universal ethical norm are the two poles between which, as between the poles of an electric field, this antinomy is suspended. The antinomy is insoluble because the poles creating it are perennial” (Morgenthau 1945, 17).

“Taking this sinful world as it is”⁴, this gap between the two poles is to be filled via practice and prudence of statesmen. Classical realists were skeptical of hence warned of the rationalist and positivist assumptions and methodologies which reduced politics or international relations to “a system of abstract propositions with a predictive function” (Morgenthau 1995, 248) and to an ahistorical and apolitical enterprise. Therefore, as an alternative to such a social engineering approach, and in tandem with their focus on the “human” factors, the practice of statesmen is suggested as the practical guidance.

In *Politics among Nations*, Morgenthau makes it clear that politics is not a technical domain; “politics is an art and not a science, and what is required for its mastery is not the rationality of the engineer but the wisdom and moral strength of the statesman” (Morgenthau 1946, 10). Likewise, Morgenthau concludes the seminary work with an entire chapter devoted to suggesting diplomacy as the practical means to achieve “peace through accommodation” within the limited moral, social and political conditions of the time hence the nine rules of moderate diplomacy (Morgenthau 1985, 584-591).

Similarly, in *In Defense of the National Interest*, he characterizes how an “intellectual” statesmanship should look like:

The task of ascertaining what one’s own nation needs and wants in order to be secure, and what the other nation needs and wants in order to be secure, and whether there is inescapable conflict or the possibility of accommodation between these needs and wants – this task is an intellectual one...(Morgenthau 1951, 149).

Particularly, amongst all else, prudence is the very character that is called for in the practice of statesmen. According to Morgenthau, prudence refers to the ability to consider the political consequences of seemingly moral action, or “the weighing of the consequences of alternative political actions” (Morgenthau 1985, 12). Classical realism maintains that although political actions must be judged according to universal moral principles, since the states are void of the kind of moral

⁴ Niebuhr, from the Serenity Prayer

right that an individual has to sacrifice his interests over a universal moral cause, wise statesmen are called to make prudent decisions and judgments on behalf of, and for the state. That is, while “politics will, to the end of history, be an area where conscience and power meet, where the ethical and coercive factors of human life will interpenetrate and work out their tentative and uneasy compromises” (Niebuhr 1940, 4), prudent decision reconciles the moral conscience and the potential of moral disapprobation that arises from political actions.

This is in stark contrast to the tenets and approaches of neorealism, structuralism and positivism, for their aim is to find and construct deeper objective relations in the *structures* which are believed to form the basis under the *surface* of human practices and conducts. Therefore, “in trying to avoid “the shop-girl’s web of subjectivity” or “the swamps of experience,” to use Levi-Strauss’s words, structuralists adopt a posture that denies the role of practice in the making and possible transformation of social order” (Ashley 1984, 237). Thus, men are regarded more as objects than as subjects or agents in the making of foreign policies and international relations.

Then, when a statesman equipped with political prudence, wisdom and moral strength also thinks and acts “in terms of interest defined in terms of power”, it would be readily expected that the foreign policies implemented and diplomacy conducted under his leadership to be consistent with the national interests of the state as a whole. Without such qualities, Morgenthau warns that statesmen are highly vulnerable to fall into the traps of being swayed and deceived by their ideological preferences and motives.

Both Niebuhr and Morgenthau employ the case of American foreign policy and leadership of the post-WWII period to show how America also was not exempt from falling into these traps. First, foreign policies often resemble personal ideological preferences and political sympathies of the statesmen and are even more prone to be so in a democratic government. Because foreign policies themselves are

implemented and practiced by imperfect men – whose reason is moved more often by irrational forces than the rational – classical realists acknowledge the inevitability and the invariability of the subjective and biased nature of foreign policies. In fact, the propensity to which the statesmen may be guided by such personal desires and other emotive qualifiers, such as nationalism, may indeed be higher in a democracy where winning popular support and paying attention to the public opinion matter to a significant degree. Thus, Morgenthau posits that

[a] foreign policy that is passionately and overwhelmingly supported by public opinion cannot be assumed for that reason alone to be good foreign policy. On the contrary, the harmony between foreign policy and public opinion may well have been achieved at the price of surrendering the principles of good foreign policy to the unsound preferences of public opinion (Morgenthau 1985, 165).

Therefore, in deciphering the “personal wish” – the personal desires to actualize the moral values and political ideals he cherishes – and the “official duty” – thinking and acting in terms of the national interest – (Morgenthau 1985, 7), the intellectual, moral and political will and courage of the statesmen become ever more important (Morgenthau 1951, 230). In international politics and in conducting foreign policy, statesmen’s capacities and prudence are crucial not only because the general public is relatively ill-informed of and unaware of the international politics, but in terms of the morals, they tend to think in simplistic “terms of absolute good and absolute evil” (*Ibid.*, 223). Furthermore, in terms of national interest, the public wants quick and prompt results that are of more worth today than tomorrow.

In case of America, Morgenthau pinpoints to the constitutional structure of the American government and the Presidential system for causing the President to be readily led astray by his attempts to win the hearts of both the Congress and the public. A fatal consequence would then be executing foreign policies void of substance and consistency in foreign policies. Morgenthau criticizes the Truman administration for being swayed by the public’s stance on (re)armament vis-à-vis the Soviet Union rather than it being guided by the critical concerns of the national interest i.e. national survival at stake (*Ibid.*, 232-33).

Second, motives cannot serve as reference points to judge either moral or political success of foreign policies. Because human motives are extremely difficult to discern, the only criteria to judge the inner motives of statesmen are the external consequences that have been translated into their diplomatic actions and foreign policies. History has repeatedly proven that good motives are not always translated into a more moral and successful foreign policy. Likewise, personal interest-driven motives do not necessarily mean that they would result in a less virtuous and unsuccessful foreign policy.

Therefore, Niebuhr writes that “the social consequences of an action or policy should be regarded as more adequate tests of its morality than the hidden motives. The good motive is judged by its social goal” (Niebuhr 1940, 170). Similarly, Morgenthau maintains that when ascertaining successful foreign policies, it is important to understand the statesman’s “intellectual ability to comprehend the essentials of foreign policy, as well as his political ability to translate what he has comprehended into successful political action” (Morgenthau 1985, 6). Since the selfish nature is imbedded in men hence in the society of which they compose, realists contend that the responsibility, intellect, and prudence of statesmen are crucial in trying to stay detached from their personal political sympathies and in well translating the good motives into successful foreign policies.

Although statesmen are highly prone to be led by their personal ideological preferences and their benign motives not always translated into successful policies, classical realists do not entirely negate their potential to practice good. The complexities of human nature, especially the will to the transcendental leave the windows of opportunity always open. This is precisely why they contend that the role of statesmen is crucial; since a prudent statesman will know the limits of himself as a finite human being to exercise absolute good and of power-seeking states to subordinate their own national interests to universal moral principles, classical

realists contend that it is precisely in living with this tension that the meaning in irony and mystery is found:

The task of building a world community is man's final necessity and possibility, but also his final impossibility. It is a necessity and possibility because history is a process which extends the freedom of man over natural process to the point where universality is reached. It is an impossibility because man is, despite his increasing freedom, a finite creature, wedded to time and place...The world community, standing as the final possibility and impossibility of human life, will be in actuality the perpetual problem as well as the constant fulfillment of human hopes (Niebuhr 1945, 187-188).

2. National Interest and Universal Moral Principles

Then, apart from the individual capacity of the statesmen, how do classical realists accommodate the inherent selfish nature of national interest and the dictates of universal morality? Whereas the pessimistic outlook on the limited capabilities of humans, statesmen and societies provides how the realists perceive of the *what is*, they suggest on the *what ought to be* as well. Murray (1997) summarizes the four practical and normative strategies the classical realists equally suggest in trying to juxtapose the tension between the real and the ideal especially in tying national interest to the universal good.

First of all, national interests in general, and foreign policies in particular are to be defined not *solely* in terms of power, but also in terms of broader national purpose and ideals. That is, realists contend that defining national interests strictly in terms of survival runs the risk of failing to give an account on the overarching purpose hence depriving the entire society of its existential meaning and the source of justification for its existence. Such a proposition is grounded on the realists' image of the human nature, which is composed of both the natural and the spiritual dimensions. The latter renders all humans to be loyal to their community "only if it includes values wider than those of the community" (Niebuhr 1962, 36-37). Consequently, a successful foreign policy and a desirable national interest should

reflect broader ideals and purposes above and beyond mere strategies. As Niebuhr contends, it is the inclusion of these broader ideals and purposes in a community's (e.g. a nation) value systems that renders the individuals' loyalty to the community to be morally tolerable. (*Ibid.*, 37.)

Second, such national interests laden with broader purposes should be guided by self-limitation and respect for other (states). Here, the idea of working within the limits that the realists repeatedly stress is brought up once again. Even if a state's national interests were to incorporate broader goals and objectives to achieve universal morality, they should be practiced with a sense of modesty – knowing one's limits – and with a consideration of others' interests and values. This is first and foremost grounded in the classical realists' acknowledgement of finiteness of human capacities, and second, of the reality and the destructiveness of power *and* politics. Acknowledging that the counterpart state will have its own interests just as one has its own rendered Morgenthau to suggest a Cold War policy to the US as follows: "We must be strong enough to resist aggression and wise enough to accommodate foreign interests which do not impinge upon our own" (Morgenthau 1951, 88). In more general terms, Niebuhr maintains that it is imperative for one to have "a concern for both the self and the other in which the self...preserves a 'decent respect for the opinions of mankind', derived from a modest awareness of the limits of its own knowledge and power" (Niebuhr 1962, 148).

Third, realists call for obligations at a higher level, to cooperate on areas with shared interests, as well as those with wider transnational interests. Furthermore, it is even more desirable that a state (or statesman) plan and act upon disinterested areas. Niebuhr acknowledged that it is difficult for a nation to have a concern for other nation in authentically altruistic terms. That is, a nation's self-concern is only a collective composite of individual self-love which blinds one from considering the "interests which are bound up in a web of mutual interests with other nations".

Nonetheless, Niebuhr warns that such self-interest would end up being self-defeating as they would be narrowly defined with short term objectives. Therefore, the moral and spiritual guidance to draw from when defining national interests is to refer to “a wider system of values than that of the national interest – to a civilization for instance, to a system of justice, and to a community of free nations”. (David and Good 1960, 332-334). Morgenthau resonates Niebuhr’s idea in arguing that when all nations are perceived “as political entities pursuing their respective interests defined in terms of power”, one can execute “policies that respect the interests of other nations, while protecting and promoting those of their own” (Morgenthau 1985, 13).

Finally, at the farthest end, national interests are to be subordinated to the universal moral principles. As ideal as it may sound, however, such a goal is to be aimed for even within the limits of nations acting solely on their own accords and interests. Niebuhr argues that achieving a world community based on mutual consensus where all participants share the universal moral strictures will be extremely difficult, if not unattainable. The fact the most of the modern inter-state accords have been formed under the fear of having a common, concrete foe shows the difficulty to which a value consensus can serve as a binding force. Nevertheless, Niebuhr offers a realistic dint of hope:

The possibility of placing constitutional checks upon the power of the great nations, who must furnish the core of the world community, lies in the fact that they will find it impossible to reach a stable accord with each other if they do not embody plans for the organization of the world into their agreements...The real hope for the development of a system of at least quasi-constitutional restraints upon the power of the great nations lies in the fact that they cannot approach the issues between each other without dealing with the whole of international life in which their power has become preponderant (Niebuhr 1945,178-180).

As illustrated above, the ways in which classical realists define and characterize national interests are significantly, if not utterly different to how they were and are conventionally understood. Today, most of the ‘realist’ definitions of national interests only revolve around a few phrases such as survival and struggle for power. In fact, when compared to the contexts of the realists’ postulations on the

real and the ideal of national interests, it becomes clear that they bear much normative elements. In sum, “[c]lassical realism argues that states must find the appropriate balance between power and morality as they strive to achieve the national interest, which always has national survival as its minimum. That the moral element has been excised from many contemporary accounts is unfortunate...” (Cristol 2009, 242).

3. Ethics of Imperfection and Responsibility and the Lesser Evil

In fact, since classical realism is fundamentally grounded in the ontology of human nature strongly driven by self-centeredness and the lust for power, it also dictates that even a prudent statesman would fall into a moral dilemma when the requirements of national interests and those of universal good contradict each other. Moreover, even a moral act is highly prone to fall prey to the egotistic and proud nature, to which trap the great powers and empires have fallen into. Thus, it is well acknowledged that self-righteousness, “hypocrisy, and pretension are the inevitable concomitants of the engagement between morals and politics” (Niebuhr 1945, 184). Murray thus argues that such conception of human corruption “can be understood less as an attempt to ground such an explanatory theory of international conflict, than as an attempt to articulate a conception of man as a moral being who can never realize the moral ideal to which he aspires” (Murray 1997, 98).

Then, here again classical realism’s one of the main spirits of accepting the contradiction or working within the limits is re-emphasized. In the Augustinian and Weberian traditions, classical realism responds to the contradiction with the ethics of imperfectionism (Augustine) and responsibility (Weber), of which philosophies Morgenthau succeeds and translates into the idea of achieving the lesser evil.

Despite the dismally permanent conditions of human finiteness and sinfulness, Augustine repeatedly stresses humility as an important character to

recognize the limited and imperfect faculties of men. Therefore, in the tension between the transcendental moral imperatives of the *City of God* and the temporal political objectives of the *City of Man*, the ethics of imperfectionism is to serve as a guidance to approximate the ideal. In other words, the ‘resolution’ in the perennial paradox is to accept that this tension will never be complete, but always exist as a dialectic of absolutes.

This is contrary to how perfectionists address moral issues; they choose to avoid political actions on the terms that all political actions are unjust. Morgenthau condemns such an attitude in that their abstention from evil actually resembles their egotism in regarding themselves as more moral or conscious than those who they name as ‘unjust’ or evil (Morgenthau 1946, 202). Niebuhr also shares the idea when he argues that there is a serious error in believing that resorting to violence is always immoral and to non-violence is intrinsically good. He argues that such a perfectionist logic is invalid because it is strictly grounded on consequentialist terms. For instance, Niebuhr employs Ghandi’s non-violence movement which was not entirely just at its own right because its boycott against British cotton industry resulted in undernourishment of the English children working in the factories (Niebuhr 1940, 172). Therefore, judging morality on consequentialist terms is erroneous. Thus, the ethics of imperfectionism mandates that rather than abstaining from any political actions, approximating even an imperfect political ethics is relatively more valid and moral.

Furthermore, the Weberian ethics of responsibility stems from Weber’s dealing with the problem of the paradox embedded in “political ethics”. As Rosenthal describes, “Weber, like most political realists, was very much at home with paradox” (Rosenthal 1991, 44). That is, he proposed a model of ethical dualism, whereby different standards of morality exist for the world of the real (politics) and the world of the ideal (ethics). The idea hence is that political ethics aims at blending the two standards: “the ethic of ultimate ends” dictates that the morality of an action

would be judged by the intent, than by the outcomes; “the ethic of responsibility” provides that the morality of an act would be judged by its outcomes, and that the motives are secondary. In addressing this paradox, Weber maintains that “an ethic of ultimate ends and an ethic of responsibility are not absolute contrasts, but rather supplements, which only in unison can constitute a genuine man – a man who can have the ‘calling for politics’” (Rosenthal 1991, 44; Weber 1958).

When articulating this concept of Weberian ethics of responsibility in contemporary terms, Rosenthal brings to the fore the idea of ‘responsible power’, which also aims to reconcile the two forms of ethics mentioned above. Rosenthal argues that the responsible power is the “power considered in relation to its possible political and ethical ramifications” (Murray 1997, 111).⁵ It is not so difficult to find the idea of prudence resonating in this definition as well.

Similarly, Morgenthau did not end his note on the ethics of unselfishness by contending that “man cannot hope to be good,” but further added that he “must be content with being not too evil” (Morgenthau 1946, 192). However, because “the lust for power as ubiquitous empirical fact and its denial as universal ethical norm are the two poles between which, as between the poles of an electric field, this antinomy is suspended. The antinomy is insoluble because the poles creating it are perennial” (*Ibid.*, 201). Therefore, Morgenthau’s prescription to this paradox where political ethics cannot escape from the “enduring presence of evil in all political action”, is to aim for one that is less or least evil. His defense against the potential critics against this idea of the lesser evil is that it is better than utterly obliterating the moral dimension as the perfectionists, rationalists, or perhaps neorealists do. In fact, Morgenthau constantly admits the limits of achieving perfect morality in politics hence modestly contends as follows:

Neither science nor ethics nor politics can resolve the conflict between politics and ethics into harmony...To act successfully, that is, according to the rules of the political art, is political wisdom. To know with despair that the political act is

⁵ Quoted from Murray (1997), 111.

inevitably evil, and to act nevertheless, is moral courage. To choose among several expedient actions the least evil one is moral judgment. In the combination of political wisdom, moral courage, and moral judgment, man reconciles his political nature with moral destiny. That this conciliation is nothing more than a *modus vivendi*, uneasy, precarious and even paradoxical, can disappoint only those who prefer to gloss over and distort the tragic contradictions of human existence with the soothing logic of a specious concord (Morgenthau 1946, 203).

All in all, classical realism's emphasis on i) the prudent practice of statesmen, ii) who would define national interests in tandem with the dictates of universal moral principles, iii) and with the modest aims to achieve lesser evil based on the ethics of responsibility, vividly illustrates its promises as a normative theory. In fact, unlike other international political or IR theories which elude normative elements – most notably neorealism as pertaining to the topic of the thesis – classical realism's juxtaposing of the real and the ideal renders it to hold much relevance across time and space. To show its relevance to the contemporary international politics, the following is a delineation on what kinds of implications the above-mentioned tenets of classical realism would have for South Korea's contemporary foreign policies.

V. Implications for South Korea's Foreign Policies

Considering that the core assumptions and propositions of classical realism have been hitherto misunderstood, why is this enterprise of reconstructing classical realism important so as not to make it merely an academic exercise? In other words, what kind of relevance does it hold in the contemporary international politics? In this final section, the due relevance of arguing in defense of classical realism as a normative theory in the context of the contemporary international politics will be discussed by providing some implications it could have for South Korea's contemporary foreign policies. The case of South Korea is chosen as realism persistently holds the most explanatory power both in the academia and in the foreign policy making circles. However, the problems of misunderstanding classical realism and of conflating it with neorealism have only exacerbated due to the dual interplay of the challenges in the process of theoretical development and of the harsh geopolitical circumstances. The time frame of the discussion is limited to South Korea's contemporary foreign relations of the post-World War II and the post-Cold War periods.

1. Background

1.1. Theoretical Misunderstanding

As an importer of most, if not all IR theories, South Korea faces a number of challenges in the IR discipline in its efforts to “de-colonize” or localize/regionalize the West-oriented IR theories. In the academia, the necessity and importance of creating an IR theory that is derived from its own history have been consistently raised with the aims to explain the peculiarities that are dissimilar to those of the West. In fact, the challenge is arguably more demanding so as not to create another parochial IR theory, but to bear universal validity.

Unfortunately, whilst excessively focusing on these challenges, the problem of marginalizing metatheoretical debates in the course of the so-called “Great Debates” dialectics in the West only persisted in Korea. That is, when Korea’s IR scholarship started to develop after the end of the Korean War in 1953, it was both inevitable and natural for it to be dependent on the American IR scholarship. As a consequence, most of Korea’s early IR academics in the 1950s-60s studied in the US and since a great majority of the American IR scholars of the time were realists, the foundation of the Korean IR scholarship was built upon realism. As a quick illustration, Korea’s first IR textbook, *International Politics* (1954) written by Cho Hyo-won, is, in fact, a summary of the works of major American realists, namely Morgenthau and F.L. Schuman. Cho frankly writes in the book that it was a compilation of the ideas and concepts that he personally regarded as important while he was studying in America (Park 1987, 179).

Likewise, since American IR theories, especially realism, were regarded as “objective” and “scientific” IR theories in the early phase of Korea’s IR scholarship, a natural and direct corollary of such an uncritical adoption was to perceive realism as an amoral or immoral theory. That is, even at the outset of the theoretical development, discussions on the normative concerns were largely marginalized. Consequently, realism was more or less employed mostly as an explanatory and analytical tool, rendering the normative side of the theory to be discounted, not to mention the metatheoretical difference between classical realism and neorealism.

Therefore, it is quite unfortunate that a comprehensive understanding of the theory was fatally lacking in a country like South Korea where its international relations were explained mostly in the light of the realist ideas. Particularly, the near-absence of making distinctions between classical realism and neorealism has created some substantive consequences when interpreting major realist concepts such as balance of power. A brief explanation on how classical realists and neorealists each view balance of power will be provided.

Whereas the classical realists' definition of balance of power incorporates both the explanatory and normative elements, that of neorealists' is confined to the explanatory and analytical utility of the concept. As articulated above, the essence of classical realism is grounded on the politics of limits; the idea of keeping balance of power is an ideational extension of their emphasis on the limited capabilities of human nature hence states to keep the interest-prone, power-seeking states in order. This acknowledgement of the inherent, invariable nature of states' lust for power renders the balance of power scheme to be the suboptimal alternative to prevent the abuse of power – be it domestic or international.

Yet, in the anarchic international society, with no authorized entity to restrain the power of each states and the human nature always prone to corrupt, Niebuhr writes that a “balance of power is in fact a kind of managed anarchy”. However, Niebuhr further continues that it is also “a system in which anarchy invariably overcomes the management in the end” (Niebuhr 1945, 174). That is, while a constitutional check is necessary to prevent the group of great powers serving the role of the central power from degenerating into imperialism, moral restraints are also needed to practice justice and to create a just, stable order. Therefore, in practical sense, Niebuhr emphasizes the need to share a sense of unity and community amongst each other. This is deemed as a feasible normative guidance because the great powers acknowledge and admit that it is impossible to keep a stable balance of power without a mutual consensus on common values and interests. Niebuhr hence posits that a shared sense of community or unity should serve as the centrifugal force in keeping the balance of power among states.

By the same token, Morgenthau takes a similar position in the idea that balance of power should not be defined only in terms of material power, but also incorporate normative and moral elements. In fact, Morgenthau was quite uncomfortable with the concept itself as he regarded the concept to be a rationalist *Zeitgeist* of the Enlightenment period. To Morgenthau, the idea that a balance could

be maintained mirrored the rationalistic, scientific paradigm of viewing the international society as an ordered sphere hence severely disguising the invariable nature of politics, namely the will to power (Molloy 2004, 22).

Furthermore, Morgenthau argues that the uncertainty of precisely measuring each other's capabilities or power renders states difficult to keep a stable balance of power in their attempts to maximize – as opposed to restraining – their power. Not only is an accurate, quantitative calculation of power – whereby one's military strength is measured in x pounds, its statesmanship y pounds, and zeal z pounds – impossible, but further challenge is that power in the international politics is also materialized in the shapes of alliances of more than one powers hence magnifying the uncertainty (Morgenthau 1985, 224-225).

Therefore, as Niebuhr does, Morgenthau also emphasizes the importance of having a value consensus amongst the states, particularly amongst the great powers, on common interests and on a common definition of justice (Murray 1997, 133). The moral will of these states to keep the balance of power grounded on a moral value consensus – because it undergirds the coercive aspects of power and order – is pronounced as the means to approximate the ideal: “[w]here such a consensus no longer exists or has become weak and is no longer sure of itself...the balance of power is incapable of fulfilling its functions for international stability and national prosperity” (Morgenthau 1985, 239).

On the other hand, neorealists assume balance of power as a given structure in the system of international politics. In the anarchic international society, the self-help system “stimulates states to behave in ways that tend towards the creation of balances of power” (Waltz 1979, 118). Therefore, neorealists maintain that balance of power itself, as a structural element held as a constant, is what helps keep order and stability in international politics. Particularly, bipolarity is considered as the most desirable and stable arrangement in the balance of power structure.

As a result, neorealists prescribe to states to seek for strategies to keep the balance. For instance, against a new revisionist state which aims to destabilize the incumbent balance of power or the status quo, states are called to balance via internal and/or external balancing strategies: internal as in military and arms buildup, external as in forging military alliances with other states. Moreover, not to dismiss the importance of implementing pertinent foreign policies to cope with complex foreign relations, but squarely limiting the policy options to a few strategies such as containment, engagement or hedging reduces the art of politics into a mechanical engineering. Therefore, as Ashley argues, the neorealist perspective of balance of power has “set out to develop and historically to corroborate theories that would portray a fixed structure of international anarchy” and “trim away the balance of power concept’s scientifically inscrutable ideological connotations” (Ashley 1984, 232).

Likewise, classical realism and neorealism have utterly different positions and definitions on even the most commonly cited realist concept, balance of power. In fact, without having had sufficient discussions on the metatheoretical debates when importing realism, neorealism is readily regarded as the more developed and more “scientific” form of theory in Korea – and is perhaps so elsewhere. Consequently, the neorealist description of balance of power is more widely taken as the default definition. However, the defects of such an understanding are quite substantial and consequential for a country like South Korea, which has been and is constantly surrounded by the reality of balance of power among the great powers. Above all, the neorealist understanding has rendered its national interests and foreign policies to be void of normative elements and the realm of international politics, which is essentially “an art of politics”, has turned in to a matter of scientific engineering, a strategy-focused enterprise. In fact, as classical realists equally contend, the perennial problem of the political can only be appropriated and

addressed by political judgment based upon appropriate value judgments, than by “scientific” engineering.

1.2. Geopolitical Circumstances

Furthermore, the geopolitical situation of Korea being constantly surrounded by great power politics rendered realism to have the most explanatory power. As it was repeatedly argued throughout the thesis, one of the most severe issues in terms of misunderstanding realism is conflating classical realism and neorealism. Korea is certainly not exempt from seeing the distorted picture. Due to the peculiar geopolitical history of being surrounded by great power politics and the persistence thereof, for most of the South Koreans, realism was and is inarguably the most realistic and plausible lens to view its foreign relations.

Most prominently, the bipolar structure between the US and the USSR during the Cold War period and that between the US and China in the post-Cold War international politics paint the general picture of South Korea’s reckoning of the contemporary balance of power. Viewing it strictly in the neorealist terms, that is, as a *structural mechanism*, its survival deemed to depend on the internal and external balancing strategies that the neorealists purport. Even during the Cold War period of the “ideological” balance of power between the US and the USSR, Korea’s survival as a nation state was contingent upon its military alliance with the US. Therefore, to South Korea, *on the surface*, the Cold War balance of power was less of an ideological conflict, but more of a physical and military confrontation.

Furthermore, although it has vividly witnessed the failure of neorealism to predict and explain the end of the US-USSR bipolarity, the ensuing bipolarity between the US and China seemed to place Korea at an endpoint to choose only one side between “the two roads diverged in a yellow wood”. Overwhelmed by the rise of China and the fear of the potential threat, Korea’s China foreign policies revolved around a few policy options such as ‘containment’, ‘engagement’ and/or ‘hedging’

strategies. Such a view was vividly evinced when the THAAD deployment issue came to the fore since 2016.

On the one hand was the US having initiated the plan and purging South Korea to deploy the missile defense system on the accounts of defending South Korea against North Korea's potential missile threat. On the other hand was China vehemently opposing the deployment on the grounds that the deployment signaled "the expansion of the U.S.- allied ballistic missile defense architecture in the Asia Pacific" (Meick and Salidjanova 2017, 3), which would weaken China's nuclear deterrent. Consequently, a fierce debate both in the Korean public and in the government was *whether* Korea should keep and strengthen its ties with the US which was politically pressuring Korea or to side with China, which was economically and politically coercing Korea.

Yet, caught in the dilemma of whether to hold hands with the US, its closest ally, or with China, its biggest economic partner, what was blinded in the academic and strategic debates was the primary national goal and purpose to which the policies should ultimately aim for. The strategy-driven perspective is paradigmatic of defining national interests in terms of typical neorealist terms, namely the military and economic capabilities. In fact, if its national interests were to be defined in the classical realist terms, South Korea's foreign policy prescriptions would take an utterly different route.

Therefore, bearing in mind that the misunderstandings of (classical) realism are prevalent in Korea's conception of the theory, the normative elements of classical realism are expected to offer both practical and moral guidance in helping it navigate through the turbulent waves of the complex foreign relations. Following is an articulation on some suggestions and implications for South Korea's foreign policies that can be drawn from the normative tenets of classical realism recited thus far.

2. Implications for Foreign Policies

In order to maintain consistency in its foreign policies and foreign relations and to fulfill the interests of both itself and of the international community, it will be suggested here that South Korea's national interests should be clarified in accordance with the prescriptions the classical realists provide. However, this is not an exclusive list of suggestions, but is posed to supplement to or add to normative and moral factors in constructing and defining its national interests. Here, the four strategies referred to in the previous chapter (4.2) are used as the guideline.

First, national interests, which are materialized into foreign policies in international politics, should be guided by a national purpose that portrays universal values. Today, South Korea's foreign policies seem to be void of such an overarching purpose. For instance, Korea's foreign relations with its East Asian neighbors, namely North Korea, China and Japan are each laden with historically, socially and politically sensitive issues. Consequently, diplomatic relations with these states are often and fatally influenced by ideological divisions than by an overarching national purpose and objective.

For example, Korea's left and right wings are generally distinguished in relation to one's position towards North Korea. Although one of South Korea's long-held national objectives is reunification of the Korean Peninsula, political divisions created along the hard-liners and the soft-liners towards North Korea create inconsistency in its North Korea policies; whenever progressive, left-wing parties win the presidency, pro-North Korean policies such as the well-known Sunshine Policy of the Kim Dae-jung administration are legislated, while conservative parties implement hardline policies against North Korea.⁶ Therefore, Korea's contemporary

⁶ As a side note, such a case illustrates the classical realists' emphasis on the inseparable nexus between domestic and international politics. In fact, they would perhaps contend that the domestic politicians' individual lust for power is one of many examples showing the reality of politics and that it is the same in the kinds (as power politics), but only different in the degree.

North Korea policies are highly limited to the confines of the statesmen's ideological preferences.

Then, what would classical realists such as Niebuhr and Morgenthau possibly prescribe to South Korea's North Korea policies? Perhaps, a successful and consistent North Korea policy should be guided by a broader purpose that reflects and stands for universal values which transcend a merely national and ideological perspective (Rosenthal 1991, 175). Currently, a common rhetoric for unification is an appeal to the economic advantages that would stem from the joining of the two economies and the peoples or an emotional appeal to the homogenous nationhood. Such a rationale has lost its persuasiveness to many young Koreans and certainly unconvincing to the international community. Therefore, at this juncture in international politics climate where the Peninsula has become the hotbed of tensions between the great powers especially due to the North Korea factor, South Korea's definition of its national interests vis-à-vis reunification should reflect transcendental and universal values e.g. peace and stability of the region or consolidation of democratic society that would be convincing both to the domestic audience and the neighboring states who certainly do have high stakes on the dynamics of inter-Korean relations. As Niebuhr suggests, "[l]oyalty to the community is therefore morally tolerable only if it includes values wider than those of the community" (Niebuhr 1962, 37).

Second, national interests defined in terms of universal moral requirements should be guided by *self-limitation* and *respect for others*. George Kennan ascribed the weaknesses of American policies to their "legalistic-moralistic" approach, while giving little attention to the potential effect its policies could have on other nations (*Ibid.*, 147-148). Niebuhr's prescription to such an egotistic attitude is to have "a concern for both the self and the other in which the self...preserves a 'decent respect for the opinions of mankind', derived from a modest awareness of the limits of its own knowledge and power" (*Ibid.*, 148).

Unfortunately, South Korea seems to be repeating America's mistake in showing less respect for others, especially when its diplomatic relations are downgraded due to contentious historical issues. Most prominently, due to the centuries-long enmity between South Korea and Japan – however important it is to right the wrongs and do justice to the victims – the relations between the two fail to develop beyond a certain threshold. On this very account, Niebuhr has made a remark on how there is a sense of self-righteousness lingering on the 'victim', or the weak state, which is distinct from that of the strong. The weak, in this case South Korea, of yesterday "may, on gaining social victory over their detractors, exhibit the same arrogance and the same will-to-power which they abhorred in their opponents and which they were inclined to regard as a congenital sin of their enemies. Every victim of injustice makes the mistake of supposing that the sin from which he suffers is a peculiar vice of the oppressor" (Niebuhr 1941, 240).

If Korea would modestly take heed to Niebuhr's comment in its relations with Japan, the victim-mind and the sense of self-righteousness should be transmuted to a sense of respect for the counterpart. Such a revival in thoughts can be also facilitated by a modest awareness of its limits in conducting foreign policy without the Japanese cooperation or coalition. Korea and Japan are in a unique relationship as they are the two biggest military allies with the US hence the trilateral military alliance is critical to all three parties. Knowing the vitality of this alliance also means acknowledging its limited domestic military capacities in securing peace and security without an intact alliance. In practical sense, a policy implication of such an approach would entail cooperating with the strategies and policies of its counterparts, rather than devising its own independent foreign policy. For instance, in order to show its respect and willingness to cooperate with its allies, South Korea should seriously consider its policy goals and options to engage with the Free and Open

Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategy that both the US and Japan are currently fostering.⁷ Furthermore, Japan is the biggest democratic state in the East Asian region hence bears much potential as a political ally to foster democratic consolidation in the region as a whole, based upon a moral and normative consensus.

Third, realists call for obligations at a higher level, to cooperate on areas with shared interests, as well as those with wider transnational interests. Furthermore, it is even more desirable that a state (or statesman) plan and act upon *disinterested* areas. The most outstanding norm of the twenty-first century would be the value of world community or international society. In fact, being informed by such a value-laden goal is possible only at the modest acknowledgement that an indifference towards the intricate connectivity with others that create mutual interests would only end up being self-destructive in the long run. To name but a few examples that Niebuhr provides in suggesting mutual and transnational interests that should serve as a guidance are a community of free nations and humanitarian concern for the humanity (Davis and Good 1960, 334).

This recommendation seems to be particularly relevant to South Korea's relations with China. South Korea's relations with China is unique in many ways. First, in the contemporary international politics, South Korea's relations with China have not dwindled or entirely severed by the fact they have different state systems; that is, while China is allegedly a communist state and South Korea a democratic republic, the primary reason of dissonance in their relations was less due to the fact that they have different governing systems, rules and norms and so on.

Rather, and as a second characteristic, their relations tend to revolve around a set of issue areas, and especially around practical interests. Since China is its number one trading partner for as long as seventeen consecutive years since 2003

⁷ On May 30, 2018, the Trump administration has signaled the US' concentration and concern on the Indo-Pacific region by renaming the "US Pacific Command", which is stationed in Hawaii and is responsible for overseeing US military operations in Asia, to "US Indo-Pacific Command". (Browne 2018)

(KITA 2019), Korea's economy is highly dependent on and even vulnerable to its trade relations with the economic giant. As if proving such dependency or vulnerability, China tried to coerce South Korea on the deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) with economic measures such as suspending or cancelling K-Pop events in China, banning sales of Korean products and regulating Chinese tourism to South Korea. Obviously, the economic retaliation had direct effects on the Korean economy (as well as on the politics and the society).

In fact, recent data show how Korea's dependency on the Chinese economy is having detrimental effects on its economy. According to the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy (MOTIE) data on export and import trends (Apr. 1, 2019), as of March 2019, Korea's exports decreased by 8.2 percent, the biggest slide in nearly three years (MOTIE 2019). Although a number of factors such as the Sino-US trade war, global economic slowdown and growing protectionist trade policies are attributed as the primary causes, the report pinpoints at the dramatic fall in Korea's exports to China – which decreased by 20.7 percent and 15.5 percent in February and March, respectively – as another key factor.

Korea's national interests involved in such relations are certainly critical to its economic stability of the state and the people. Unfortunately, its national interests vis-à-vis China is less driven by normative motives than by practical and often short-term interests i.e. economic stakes. Nonetheless, it is to no surprise that today's ROK-China relations are characterized by such practical interest-oriented partnership. In their diplomatic history even before the normalization in 1992 shows signs of such features. For instance, during the late 1980s especially around the time of June 4 Tiananmen Incident, South Korea had been one of the very few (other than the Philippines and the Soviet Union) which had been rather silent on the military suppression at the Tiananmen Square.⁸ In fact, "progress" was being made in their

⁸ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs only expressed "grave concern" on the issue, which was a rather moderate response relative to other states such as the US, Japan and other European countries which openly and strongly criticized China.

economic relations even after the incident; as a harbinger to the establishment of trade representative offices in 1991, joint ventures remained active, China's trade surplus with South Korea grew from \$267 million in 1989 to \$715 million in 1990, and ferry routes and charter flights were established in June and August 1989, respectively (Chong 2007, 45).

Although the economic relations have undeniably resulted in positive effects to both economies, the centrality of economic interests over other has. Precisely on these accounts would classical realists contend that Korea's national interests should be drawn more from a profound source of morals and of justice, namely the long term good of the alliance of free nations (Davis and Good 1960, 333). When considering the necessity and importance of promoting a global community of free nations and the long-term self-destructiveness of being excessively swayed by short-term economic interests in its relations with China, Korea should aim to reorganize the priorities of its interests.

Finally, at the farthest end, national interests are to be subordinated to the universal moral principles. Morgenthau writes that "[t]he more important a society considers those interests and values which it tries to safeguard by rules of conduct, the stronger are the sanctions with which it threatens an infraction of its rules" (Morgenthau 1985, 245). In other words, weaker sanctions would imply that the society is less supportive of the interest and values at issue. For instance, executing capital punishment on the accounts of murder would reflect the former case. In the international scene, realists contend that universal moral strictures should serve as the ultimate check in terms of practicing political ethics, such as outlawing mass extermination "by the virtue of absolute moral principle, the violation of which no consideration of national advantage can justify" (Morgenthau 1948, 82).

When such universal moral scruples serve to guide Korea's national interests in its foreign relations, the most challenging yet critical value would be on the violations of human rights in North Korea, ranging from severe human rights

infringements in prison camps, extreme starvation and lack of freedom of the peoples and so on. If following Morgenthau's diagnosis, the South Korean government's relatively soft stance on North Korea in regard to the issues of human rights violations reflects how much (less) of an emphasis it is placing on such values. For instance, in the recent "Panmunjeom Declaration" ratified between Moon Jae-in of South Korea and Kim Jong-un of North Korea on October 15, 2018, not a single statement was made concerning the North's human rights issues. As a response, Tomas Ojea Quintana, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on North Korea, expressed his concern that the human rights issue is being overshadowed by other political objectives such as engagement and denuclearization (Lee 2018).

Of course, the political stakes involved in the inter-Korean relations are extremely high to impose stringent sanctions on North Korea on the accounts of human rights violations. Besides, the interest-driven nature of the states is intrinsically incompatible with the cosmopolitan value-driven policies. Nonetheless, at this specific juncture in which the inter-Korean relations as well as the North's relations with other states such as the US, China and Russia are witnessing diverse changes and shifts, the responsibility of the South to subordinate its expedient and political interests to the moral scruple of protecting human rights should certainly and rightly be re-emphasized both in the domestic and the international societies.

However, inasmuch as the above-mentioned normative principles sound highly utopian and ideal to accomplish, the classical realists repeatedly emphasize the importance of approximating the ideal, or achieving the lesser evil, or juxtaposing the ideal and the real. Moreover, since politics is an art, not a science, they regard it as the very tasks of a prudent statesman who has the 'calling for politics' and the ethics of responsibility as Weber says, or is equipped with 'political wisdom, moral courage, and moral judgment' as Morgenthau maintains. Despite the many challenges in incorporating the normative and moral elements to the domain of politics, as Morgenthau emphasized (Morgenthau 1946, 203), it is the political

wisdom, moral courage, and moral judgment of the statesmen to prudently decide and judge based on a correct understanding of what underpins the fundamental cause of conflicts.

Furthermore, just as Morgenthau has attributed to the democratic, constitutional framework of the US Congress and the presidential system for preventing the statesmen from independently carrying out his policy goals, Korea's governmental structure also is not without deficiencies. That is, it lacks a mechanism to sufficiently check or correct the top decision maker(s) if or any policy misunderstandings should arise. In the past two decades, major foreign policy decisions such as, but not limited to, Korea-US FTA, troop dispatch to Iraq and a number of historical issues with Japan and China have been swayed by public opinion under the pretext of "democratic" decision making process (Kim 2007, 152). Not to dismiss the importance and the necessity of the democratic systems, but the foreign policy issues have often become domestic politics issue, rather than a diplomatic concern, of which responsibility is, and should be relegated to the statesmen in principle.

Moreover, the single, five-year term of the presidency is also accounted as one of the primary causes in creating discontinuities in Korea's foreign policies. It is a double-edged sword that can serve as strong mechanism to foster policy objectives, while bearing much possibility of being manipulated for less benign purposes and often for personal interests. Unfortunately, South Korea has had unpleasant memories with its presidents in its relatively short, but dynamic history as a democratic republic since 1948. From a number of autocratic and authoritarian presidents in its early period to the latest impeachment of the former president Park Geun-hye, it looks like as if the opposite definition of prudence seems to have guided the statesmen's policies and actions in a number of instances.

As a matter of fact, classical realists endorsed here throughout the thesis such as Niebuhr and Morgenthau would perhaps suggest that it is of primary importance

that South Korea and its statesmen modestly acknowledge their limits in addressing the myriads of foreign policy challenges as well as the universal moral scruples. Furthermore, in South Korea's peculiar geopolitical circumstances, it is imperative that the statesmen not easily let his ideological sympathies befall him, especially in its relations with North Korea; South Korea's North Korea policies are highly prone to be susceptible to ideological preferences. Moreover, establishing national purposes that would incorporate both the interests of the state and the universal moral principles should be regarded as the 'responsibility' and the 'calling' for the prudent statesmen.

VI. Conclusion

Classical realism has been widely and severely misunderstood in the IR theory discourse and the thesis has especially pinpointed the issues of discounting the (metatheoretical) differences between classical realism and neorealism and of deeming classical realism simply as an amoral or immoral theory. These issues were problematized because the prevalence of realist-oriented thoughts and policies in today's international politics discourse renders the misinterpreted theories and policies to be rhetorically and practically inconsistent without sufficient understandings of the historical, philosophical and contextual underpinnings of the theory. Furthermore, the continuous marginalization of normative concerns in the discussions only exacerbates the problem of giving lesser and lesser importance to them.

The metatheories, which provide the historical, philosophical roots to which each theory is developed upon, have demonstrated that classical realism and neorealism were founded upon rather different ideational, philosophical, and historical backgrounds. Recalling the metatheoretical differences, ontologically, classical realism assumes human nature as the fundamental basis of all reality, while neorealism takes systems- and structure-centered approaches. Epistemologically, classical realism is an interpretivist or an epistemologically skeptical theory, while neorealism is a positivist. Axiologically, classical realism is a critical theory and neorealism, a problem-solving theory. These differences have revealed that the two theories, although often regarded as one grand theory of realism, are grounded on starkly contrasting metaphysical assumptions. Therefore, it would be more natural and appropriate for them to offer different arguments and prescriptions than to concede with each other.

Furthermore, a more thorough excavation of the classical realists' arguments and original texts have revealed that classical realism is essentially a normative theory which aims to juxtapose the real and the ideal; it first acknowledges the

invariable nature of humans to be driven by their will to live and the will to power hence states to be perennially bound by the same self-interest, egotism and the lust for power. However, simultaneously accepting politics as an art, and not a science, it further dictates that it is the responsibility of prudent statesmen to endeavor to incorporate universal moral principles in defining national interests in the realm of international politics. In fact, acknowledging that even a prudent and wise statesman could face a moral dilemma within his limited capacities, classical realists offer that

Based on closer delineation on the classical realists such as Niebuhr and Morgenthau, it has been found out that classical realism has much to offer – than is conventionally understood – in terms of providing moral guidance on how to address the normative concerns in the midst of the chronic prevalence of the *realpolitik*. Considering that many scholars and statesmen refer to realism in their foreign policy prescriptions, it is expected that an accurate understanding of the tenets of classical realism will facilitate their thought process or policy implementation process in trying to show more concern to the moral scruples which have been severely marginalized.

It was also under these hopes that some implications for South Korea's foreign policies were provided in the light of the major features of classical realism as a normative international theory. Despite the fact that realism has gained the most explanatory power in Korea both in the academia and in practice, marginalization of the normative side of classical realism has not only resulted in misunderstanding of the theory *per se*, but also created the domain of politics to that of technical engineering and of analytical exercise. Therefore, re-defining national interests and foreign policy goals that would incorporate these normative concerns in its foreign relations seems to be an essential task in its foreign affairs of the present and the future.

Above all, classical realism bears traits that render it to be a both realistically and normatively sound IR theory. That is, the aims to achieve the ideal and to realize

universal moral scruples are predisposed to the fundamental presupposition that a perfect ideal cannot be achieved due to the finiteness of human beings. It is this acknowledgement of the limited capacities of men to control and comprehend all the variables and factors that beget the many problems in the international politics (as well as the domestic) that underlies the primary arguments and tenets of classical realism hence the modest prescriptions to the realities of the international politics.

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국문 초록

고전적 현실주의가 전세계적으로 오랫동안 국제관계, 혹은 국제정치이론으로서 받아들여지고 있었음에도 불구하고 잘못 이해, 인식되어 온 부분들이 있다. 특히, 본 논문에서는 i) 메타이론적 이해의 결여로 인해 고전적 현실주의와 신현실주의간의 차이가 간과되었던 점과 ii) 고전적 현실주의의 규범이론으로서의 역할이 상대적으로 주목받지 못했던 점을 문제화한다. 이와 같은 이슈를 주목하는 이유는 현실주의가 가장 오랜 기간동안 적용 및 수용된 국제관계, 혹은 국제정치이론임에도 불구하고 현실주의, 특히 고전적 현실주의에 대한 포괄적인 이해가 부족하여 국제정치에서 규범적 논의의 주변화 등과 같은 실질적인 결과를 초래하였기 때문이다. 따라서, 본 논문은 고전적 현실주의와 신현실주의 각각의 메타이론을 설명함으로써 두 이론 간의 차이를 설명한 후, 고전적 현실주의의 국제정치규범이론으로서 갖는 역할을 주목하고자 한다. 또한, 이와 같은 논의가 현대 국제 관계에서 갖는 적합성과 중요성을 한국 대외정책에 주는 시사점에 비추어 논하고자 한다.

주요어: 고전적 현실주의, 메타이론, 국제규범이론, 라인홀드 니부어, 한스 모겐소

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