

NOTES

INTERNATIONAL ANARCHY REVISITED: THE ONTOLOGICAL CHALLENGES OF A POST-SOCIAL CONCEPTION

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Introduction

The concept of international anarchy is introduced with great relevance in the variants of realism and is one that different theories of International Relations identify as common. It is in its consequences and interpretation that views tend to contrast. However, the present excursion attempts to reflect critically on these same ontological assumptions of international anarchy – especially those presented by the realistic school, specifically the neorealist strand.

Within the realistic literature, the assumptions of international anarchy tend to vary in its interpretation, highlighting Raymond Aron's classical realistic vision of Kantian inspiration and Kenneth Waltz's hobbesian-inspired structuralist vision. The differences between these thinkers are based on the focus of analysis: Aron holds a more historicist vein and pays attention to the inner heterogeneity of States to conceptualize international anarchy ontologically; Waltz, with a strain inspired by economic methodology, seeks a theoretical construction of International Relations through the interconnection between factors and concepts, the most prominent being the concept of international anarchy.

Waltz draws it as this lack of coercive power at the supranational level, which inevitably results in violence (Waltz, 1979). The first part of the definition does not tend to be challenged by the other schools; the discussion tends to focus on the results that anarchy generates internationally. In this sense, this expedition seeks to broaden the focus of discussion to ontological assumptions, distancing itself from the evaluation of its structural consequences.



The constructivist approach raises essential questions for the discussion of the ontological assumptions of international anarchy and represents a challenge to the neorealist interpretation of anarchy. Alexander Wendt, in "International anarchy is what States make of it", highlights the importance of the social process in the conception of anarchy, allowing a post-social phenomenology disconnected from a relationship with the nature of States. This is the fundamental point where this outing goes beyond Wendt's thinking and differs from the Waltzian perspective.

Conceptualization and mobilization of the concepts of international anarchy, state of nature, structure, and structural power

The publication of *Theory of International Relations*, by Kenneth Waltz, in 1979, shaped the theoretical debate of International Relations as a discipline and established neorealism as the dominant school of thought at the time. Its contributions highlighted the scientific basis that provided realistic thinking interconnected with philosophical foundations, which contributed to the strengthening of theories of International Relations (Buzan, 1993: 1).

In this work, Waltz draws inspiration from realistic principles, but tries to avoid classic realms, identifying himself as neorealist. Classical realism was constructed through a literary tradition based on the theory and practice of international relations after World War II, especially with contributions from Carr, Morgenthau, Raymond Aron, Niebuhr, among others. These thinkers were considered as "realistic" because they predisposed themselves to analyze the objects of study according to what they were and not what they would like them to be (Buzan, 1993: 1-2).

Therefore, according to Buzan (1993), as to Waltz's assuming as a neorealist, the first response of the discipline's thinkers was to seek to find the common ground between classical realism and neorealism, highlighting the coherence between Waltz's thinking with a realistic tradition that could go back to Hobbes and Thudides (Buzan, 1993: 2). Three common premises stand out among these currents: the nature of international relations is essentially conflicting; the essence of social reality is the group, rather than the individual, particularly the State or conflictgroup; the main human motivation in political life is power and security (Gilpin apud Keohane, 1986: 304-305).

The second answer, highlighted by Buzan (1993), was to seek the distinctions between the two theoretical currents, especially the differences between the hermeneutic tradition of classical realms and the structuralist basis of neorealism. Walker (1987) highlighted the classical predisposition to focus on the historical approach in the analysis of social reality that allows understanding the development of the practices of social actors, in contrast to the neorealistic predisposition to analyze social reality in a stabilized and structured way. His statements imply that classical realists focus more on the agent, while neorealists place their perspective on the structure. However, this argument lacks development because it does not measure agent-structure relations (Buzan, 1993: 2).

Buzan (1993) also advances a third answer: the criticism that both classical realism and neorealism need to extend and develop their theoretical foundations.



The focus on literature in the 1980s was mainly related to the need to find the common points between classical realism and neorealism, to differentiate this school of thought from the neoliberal current or new institutionalism. Nevertheless, there were also theorists who sought to find a point of reconciliation between the realist current and the neoliberal current (Niou & Odershook, 1991 apud Buzan, 1993: 2-3); an example can be found in the work of Hedley Bull (1995) on international society and international anarchy. This led some field theorists to accuse the discipline of losing its orientation, falling on a lack of substantive progress (Holsti, 1985: 1-2; Ferguson & Mansbach, 1988; Onuf, 1989: 8 apud Buzan, 1993: 3-4). For the reflection intended to be made, the most relevant criticism about the loss of orientation of the discipline was the fact that all theories developed on erroneous premises, such as international anarchy being considered the central and fundamental principle of International Relations, when it comes to Onuf (1989) of an empty concept (Onuf, 1989: 14).

It is necessary to clarify that although Kenneth Waltz (1979) was a pioneer in the application of structuralism in International Relations, specifically within the Realistic School, structuralism was a movement that dominated social sciences in the 20th century. Structuralists insisted that social sciences must go beyond self-conceptions because individuals are constrained by structural forces over which they have no control and may not even know exist (Buzan, 1993: 5). Buzan (1993: 6) advances that this structuralist approach makes it possible to break with the state of nature assumptions to ground the behavior of agents, according to a realistic logic.

Still, for Kenneth Waltz, the structure has three dimensions: ordering principles (*i.e.*, anarchy), differentiating principles, and capacity distribution (Waltz, 1979: 79-101 apud Wendt, 1995: 134). These aspects, although they highlight the disposition of the agents, do not allow us to understand their behavior, since this factor depends mainly on intersubjectivity (Wendt, 1995: 134), a concept that is unrelated to waltzian theory.

Waltz's criticism is not related to the structuralist character of his theory, but to the fact that it is characterized as anarchic and the approach to conflict groups as an object of study, to achieve the realistic premises mentioned and justify the logic of power of the international system. Criticism is specifically directed at the realistic assumptions and not at the generality of its structuralist approach. This criticism is based on the Wendtian assumption that the structure consists of material conditions, interests, and ideas (Wendt, 1999: 139), which with intersubjectivity imply that the structure is socially constituted – *i.e.*, dependent on a process of socialization.

From the assumptions presented about structuralism, there is a relationship between the concepts of structure and state of nature that deserves its proper clarification, understanding what is considered a process of socialization and as post-social.

The order of thought should be inspired by Waltz (1979) and Aron (1968) and, like these thinkers, from anthropological assumptions, inspired by Rousseau, to view the state of nature as a non-systemic state where there is no social structure, because political units are isolated, unaware of the existence of others. Only when political units begin to interact with each other – when the process of socialization begins – the international system is formed (Buzan, 1993: 68-70) and the structures that characterize it emerge. As for Waltz, the ordering principle of the structure that characterizes the international



system is international anarchy, so this can only be constituted after interaction between political units – that is, after the beginning of the social process, being therefore post-social. The process of socialization based on wendtian constructivist assumptions of international anarchy also demonstrates this.

Up to this point, the lens has not yet focused directly on the concept of international anarchy, the object under analysis, but it is already possible to highlight some relevant points: first, international anarchy, whether in the Waltzian approach or in the Wendtian one, is a characteristic of the international structure; second, being characteristic of the international structure, international anarchy cannot exist in the state of nature, having as a necessary condition the interaction between units – *i.e.*, the process of socialization; third, and considering the second point, international anarchy is post-social.

There are neorealist assumptions in which the concept of state of nature arises wrongly associated with the concept of international anarchy, being instrumentalized to explain the origin of an anarchic arena based on the nature of the constituent units (Little, 1993: 136-138). This type of analysis mainly uses comparisons with the state of Hobbesian nature to explain the logic of self-help and the principle of safeguarding safety and self-sufficiency of States. And yet, if the logic behind the concept of anarchy is intertwined with the nature of political units, then if there is a transformation in the nature of the units, it is also possible to transform the logic of anarchy (Little, 1993: 136-138).

International anarchy is defined by Waltz (2014: 130) as "the absence of a central Monopoly of legitimate force" above political units; for Wendt (1995), anarchy is socially constructed. However, its definition and operationalization are too limited, revealing itself as a concept that sustains everything, but which explains little, as Onuf (1989) argued. The lexical meaning of the word 'anarchy' refers to disorder, lack of rules or even lack of a normative structure (Fernandes, 2012: 88). Paradoxically, the meaning employed in International Relations implies the opposite.

But the absence of coercive power above States does not necessarily imply that they are in a state of nature, as we have previously examined. Moreover, when referring to the legitimate monopoly of force, reference is made to coercive force; nonetheless, this does not imply that political units are not limited by structural forces, which act above them and condition their behavior. This type of power, to exist, can only be formed at the structural level –above States – as a characteristic of the international structure. If there is such a force, is there still international anarchy?

Barnett & Duvall (2005) developed a taxonomy on the concept of power, based on the conceptualization of agent-structure duality, seeking to focus on the relationship between social context and human action. One of the typologies addressed is the conceptualization of Structural Power, which operates in a direct, specific, and mutually constitutive way in the social relations of agents (Barnett & Duvall, 2005: 48-49). This concept, while recognizing the transformative capacity that agents can have, emphasizes the conditioning role of the structure on the agency (Barnett & Duvall, 2005: 49). It is this characterizing power of the structure that defines nature and what kind of social agents the political units will be, establishing the intersubjective norms that define the interests that sustain actions (Barnett & Duvall, 2005: 53).



Therefore, the same structure that, for Waltz, is characterized by international anarchy as an ordering principle, may also prevent the application of a structural power that shapes the behavior of political units. Being, in lexical terms, 'anarchy' and 'power', opposite terms, international anarchy, being characteristic of the structure – and, thus, the result of the process of socialization (which makes it post-social) – falls on a paradox.

Moreover, understanding international anarchy because of the socialization process, so it is a characteristic of the structure, the former institutionalized as a norm that composes the latter. Just as structural power is channeled through the process of socialization to limit human action, international anarchy is also channeled to (not) limit the action of States. This institutionalization of an absence of a monopoly of legitimate force above the States (norm of 'non-norm') is applied through mechanisms of structural force that condition the actions of political units.

Analysis of realistic assumptions of international anarchy developed by Raymond Aron and Kenneth Waltz

The classical realistic view highlights international anarchy as a unique characteristic element of relations between States, which is the explanation of the occurrence of conflicts between them (Aron, 1966: 724). Consequently, in a collectivity of sovereignties, each one will be governed by its own law and the sovereigns must not recognize another obedience. The State, being the holder of the legitimate monopoly of violence, applies its power externally without constraints (Aron, 1968: 28).

For Aron (1968), man is naturally a social animal that reaches its full potential through society, which allows the accumulation of knowledge and power amongst generations. Inspired by Kant's criticism of Rosseau, Aron uses the anthropological methodology of the latter to empirically strengthen his thinking with the example of the development of Neolithic societies, which through the formulation of a framework of values, lifestyle, and a way of seeing the world, began to identify their peers and "foreigners". This strangeness and identification of difference does not necessarily imply a hostile environment between socialites; it means that each sociality has developed conscious of its originality and its own culture, celebrating the discovery of being different from others. Given this presupposition, international relations are denoted from culture and, therefore, do not derive from the natural state, and conflicts are an integral part of civilizations and a form of relationship between States also do not come from the state of nature, but from culture (Aron, 1968: 30).

The philosophical distinction between state of nature – "where everyone can count only on himself" – and civil society – "where law rules, justice is served through the courts and where the police suppress violence" (Aron, 1968: 31) – does not imply that relations between States continue to represent a primary state of war for all (Aron, 1968: 31); that is, of a primitive enmity that arises spontaneously in contact with difference. This distinction is the result of historical experience: the city-states and empires were built through violence, without a higher entity that would suppress it. Since that moment, historical experience has shown that all international systems have been anarchic, as they have not been subjected to sovereignty. This authority, when recognized, would nullify the autonomy, independence, and sovereignty of States. For this reason, the order



of relations between States is anarchic and this anarchy has been fostered by historical experience (Aron, 1968: 30-32).

The neorealist school, which gains momentum in the figure of Kenneth Waltz, inherits the contributions of classical realms, but is inspired by the assumption that "Between States, the state of nature is a state of war" (Waltz, 2014: 130). This principle permits comparison with the Hobbesian assumption of state of nature; if there is no coercive government of international law, which has a monopoly on violence in the Weberian sense, it is unknown when a conflict can start. Consequently, international anarchy is the absence of supranational rules associated with the occurrence of violence (Waltz, 2014: 130); States interact in an environment of constant insecurity, where they seek their own gains, risking the survival of their peers (Bull, 1981: 721).

Therefore, in the anarchic sphere, the "similar units" (Waltz, 2014: 131) co-act, trying to maintain an autonomy in a self-help logic, where each unit invests in the production of means for its protection, understanding that each unit will serve what dictates its interests. If in a rational calculation, one State considers that attacking another is what suits it best, then it will do so and there will be nothing to stop it (Waltz, 1959: 232). In the international system only force relations can, thus, result due to their anarchic character. But not all relations between States are conflicting and a conflict is one of the typologies of the relationship between two units.

Analysis of Wendtian constructivist assumptions of international anarchy

Alexander Wendt's constructivist ideas assume Waltzian assumptions from a State-centered and holistic theory, where the State, as the main actor in the international scene, channels the behaviors of other actors and defines the structure according to its ever-changing identity.

The focus on structure is necessary to challenge the causation powers of anarchy if the process and institutions are not subordinate to it. If "anarchy is what States make of it" (Wendt, 1995: 132) and if "a system of self-help and political power is socially constructed under anarchy" (Wendt, 1995: 132), this anarchy is mutually constitutive in an agent-structure relationship, starting from the social process of agents.

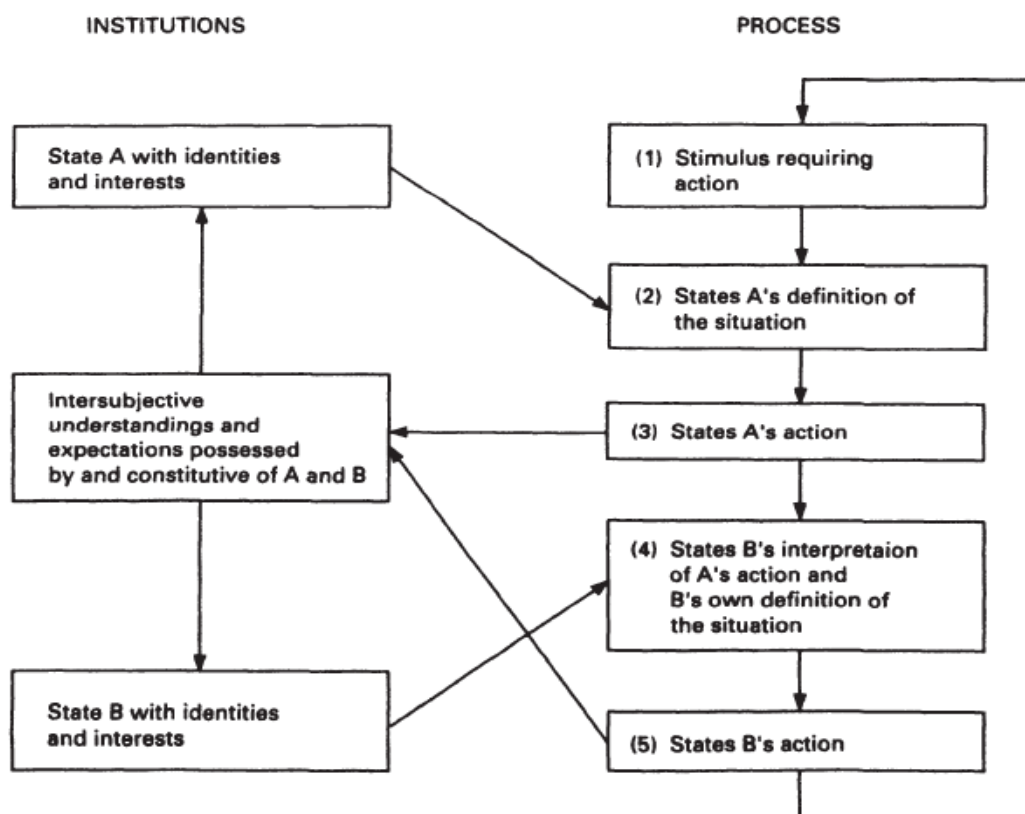
The international structure, in this sense, does not come from international anarchy since it is insufficient to explain relations between States. The process of identity formation is mainly concerned with self-preservation, which explains the existence of different interests between different agents. The self-help system is a form of institution of a type of structure that can occur under international anarchy; however, it is not unique, depending on the interactions between States and their positions towards the others. The logic of anarchy and power distribution depends on this cognitive variable of institution, so the realistic characterization should be added to the intersubjectivity of a structure of identities and interests in constant transformation (Wendt, 1995: 133-138).

The implications of this thought lead Wendt (1995) to affirm that States, before performing interactions with one another, do not conceptualize themselves or others, having no security interests before any interaction (Wendt, 1995: 139-140).



The institutions of structures transform the interests and identities of the States, but these also transform those, and both variables are changeable (Wendt, 1995: 153). The relationship between institutions and the socialization process is explained by the existence of an intersubjective understanding and expectations between A and B, that is, a structure. State A has its own interests and identity, such as State B. These components of structure, State A and State B, result in the institution. The process, in turn, consists of five stages, with a causal relationship, the latter being causality of the former, in using a circular circuit. First, there is a stimulus that requires action. State A outlines the situation in its perspective, defining itself. State A acts, creating subjective expectations and understandings that influence both A and B. From the action of A, B withdraws its interpretation of A's action, considering its own interests and identity, with a view to a definition of the situation. Depending on its interpretation, B reacts to the Action of A, contributing to intersubjectivity and allowing A to define B (Wendt, 1995: 153-155).

Figure 1 - Dynamics of the socialization process and institutions



Source: "Anarchy is what states make of it" by Alexander Wendt (1995)

Wendt explains how anarchy is socially constructed as part of the structure.



Conclusion

For Aron (1968) and Wendt (1995), international anarchy is not a characteristic that comes from States being in a state of nature; it results from the establishment of relations between them. This disassociation factor between international anarchy and a state of nature discards Waltzian assumptions of characterization of international anarchy and highlights the process of socialization as an explanatory factor.

It is, thus, understood that the international structure is socially constructed, that through the processes of socialization throughout the historical experience institutionalizes international anarchy as a rule of 'non-rule'. Conflicts do not arise naturally between States, and they do not tend towards self-preservation due to the state of nature. A structure defined in neorealistic terms may occur if a behavioral pattern in the socialization process leads to it, but this is not necessarily the case because the agent can transform the structure.

Being there no structure before the socialization process, there can also be no international anarchy within these conditions, as this is characteristic of that. By accepting anarchy as "what states make of it" (Wendt, 1995: 132), it will only make sense to interpret anarchy as the fruit of the interaction between States. This idea is not absurd because a State, before receiving a stimulus that leads to interaction with another, has no perception of this, being isolated. In this abstract scenario of only one State, there is no anarchy, as there is no room for relations between actors. It is particularly now that this State receives the stimulus to initiate interaction with another that realizes that there is no conditioning to its action. Only in the process of socialization it is, thus, possible to recognize international anarchy. The other, which will react to this first initiative, will have the same realization, giving rise to a mutual recognition of international anarchy.

So, international anarchy is internalized by actors as a rule of 'non-rule', becoming a norm of shared behavior in an intersubjective way, which channeled by the process of socialization, becomes a common norm. A common understanding of anarchy is transferred between States, resulting in a cognitive network of institutionalization. Anarchy, when institutionalized and recognized by agents, becomes an element of the structure. However, State A, with its own identity and interests, is a receiver of the intersubjective understandings shared between A and B, and international anarchy is one of those understandings that will infiltrate the identities and definition of interests of both, conditioning the way in which they carry out their actions. For that, anarchy exercises a structural power – *i.e.*, the ability of the structure to condition the action of the actor and his interests (Barnett & Duvall, 2005: 52-55) – on States, to the extent that it standardizes and conditions their behaviors. The concept of international anarchy is, thus, designed as a paradox of the norm of non-norm, which is still limiting.

Overall, international anarchy can only be built ontologically through mutually constitutive relations between agents and structure. This disconnection from the Waltzian view empowers an exercise of abstraction, where international anarchy is institutionalized as a norm, being applied as a structural power. It is this cover-up of a



non-standard and this application of structural power that makes it important that the concept of international anarchy is revisited.

Finally, it is important that the debate around the concept of anarchy decentralizes from the different analyses of its consequences and focus on the core of the problematization: the ontological assumptions of a concept that explains everything, but itself.

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