International Politics & Human Nature

Ultimately, International Politics is Driven by Human Nature. Discuss.

Introduction

Since the beginning of its emergence as an academic discipline, the study of international relations and world politics has been dominated by political realism, which "believes that politics, like society in general, is governed by objective laws that have their roots in human nature" (Morgenthau, 1993: 4). This essay will argue that the very foundational view upon which this theory is based – its understanding of human nature – is partial, flawed, and "embedded in a masculine perspective" (Tickner, 1988: 430). By tracing classical realism back to its roots in the concept of original sin, this essay will show that realists have never taken an interest in the study of the nature of humans; only the nature of *man*. From Augustine's writings in the fourth and fifth century, through to the twentieth century neo-realism of Waltz, a realist outlook has consistently chosen to focus on those aspects of human nature seen to be masculine, such as political domination, and negated those which are deemed to be feminine (Tickner, 1988: 437). The essay will then examine Hillary Clinton's bid to become Democrat nominee for the US presidential elections in 2008 and her time as Secretary of State, and will pose the question: if international politics is driven by human nature, then why is the international political arena "a sphere for men only" (Enloe, 2001: 13)? The media coverage of Clinton and the sexism she frequently encounters demonstrate that the enduring domination of political realism in the US, and its concept of politics driven by a masculininst structure of "human nature", mean that Clinton and other women aiming for the commander-in-chief role are doomed to hit a glass ceiling that does not allow femininity, or even humanity, to govern foreign policy. As Tickner and Sjoberg argue, "[g]ender relationships are everywhere in global politics; wherever they are not recognized, the silence is loud" (2010: 209). Political realism's definition of human nature does not recognise the experiences of one half of humanity, and the task for feminist scholars of international relations is to make that silence deafening.

The Origins of Classical Realism: Original Sin and the Fall of Man

According to Kenneth Waltz, there are three images of realism, depending on where one believes the major causes of war can be found: "within man, within the structure of the separate states, within the state system" (2001: 12). This essay will deal with the first image, the so-called Classical Realists, who believe that war is the result of inherent characteristics within human nature. While there are many forms of realism and many realist works dating back to Thucydides in the fifth century BC, one of the founding fathers of classical realism is Saint Augustine. While Augustine found in the story of the Garden of Eden the explanation for the nature of humans, for "the source of their inhumanity to one another", and for their mortality (Wiley, 2002: 205), there is much to be questioned and challenged in this story by feminists.

According to Genesis, God created Adam "in his own image" (Genesis, 1: 27) and then created Eve in order that he should have "a helper fit for him" (2: 18). God then tells Adam that he must not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, but Eve is tricked by a serpent into eating the fruit and "she also gave some to her husband, and he ate" (3: 6). This moment, Adam's fall, leads God to curse all mankind to a mortal life: "you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (3: 17). In the New Testament of the Bible, we see the consequences of Adam's fall and the beginnings of what Augustine would interpret to mean the sinful nature of all mankind: "as sin came into the world through one

man and death through sin, and so death spread to all *men* because all *men* sinned" (Romans, 5: 12, emphasis added). From the very beginnings of the concept of original sin then, one question leaps out at a feminist scholar: what about the women?

Jerome Gellman argues that a close analysis of the text itself shows that God never punishes or chastises Eve for sinning (2006: 329). God tells Eve that because of her actions, "I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing [...], yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you" (Genesis, 3: 16). This, Gellman argues, is not a punishment or a curse in response to sin, it is a correction to man's "helper" to ensure that she better fits his needs (2006: 328). God, disappointed with Adam, goes on to conclude that "the wickedness of *man* was great in the earth, [...] every imagination of the thoughts of *his* heart was only evil continually" (Genesis, 6: 5-6, emphasis added). From this analysis of the Bible, it is clear that the fall of man is exactly that: man has sinned but woman is not deemed to be man's equal and culpable of sin, she is a helper fashioned by God for man in need of correction. Any interpretation of human nature based on Genesis must therefore be read as an interpretation of the nature of man, not humanity.

Augustine believed that human nature changed completely from the moment of Adam's fall and that all future men would inherit Adam's sin (Wiley, 2002: 206). This conclusion leads to two assumptions about international politics, which can be seen in more contemporary realist thought. Firstly, that man is not responsible for his own, evil nature, and therefore little can be done to prevent him acting on it: "nothing good dwells within me [...] I can will what is right, but I cannot do it [...] if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me" (Romans 7: 18-20). The second assumption is that political life is one long psychological struggle between man's will and the sin he inherited at birth: "mind and body, reason and emotions, rationality and appetites, reason and passions" (Wiley, 2002: 57); in other words Adam and Eve or masculine and feminine. The only way to secure oneself or one's state is the triumph of the masculine qualities over the feminine, in the reason and rationality required to counter one's own sinful passions and appetites, and most importantly, those of others. These dichotomies live on within international politics today, and still serve to keep women out of this sphere.

Every Man against Every Man: Classical Realism

Though nearly sixteen hundred years have passed since Augustine decided that man's nature changed because of the fall of Adam, realists who have been inspired by his interpretation of human nature, such as Hans Morgenthau, emphasise the "continuit[y] of the human condition" and the "permanence of human nature as reflected in the political construction of states" (Buzan, 1996: 50). As Waltz argues, "[t]o say, then, that certain things happen because men are stupid or bad is a hypothesis that is accepted or rejected according to the mood of the writer" (2001: 28). Feminist writers, in all of their various moods, question how, and where, women fit into this pessimistic view of international relations.

The examples of the male-centeredness of the realist view of human nature and its role in international politics would be far too many to list, however it is worthwhile considering some of the writings of some of the more famous realists. Thomas Hobbes wrote in the *Leviathan* (published in 1651), "I put for a general inclination of all mankind, a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death" (1996: 66). He finds three causes for war in the nature of men: competition, diffidence and glory: the competitive wish to rule over other men's "persons, wives, children and cattle," the diffident want to defend them, and the glory-seeking will fight for "trifles" such as a differing opinion (83-84). For Morgenthau in *Politics Among Nations* (first published in 1948), human nature causes "states*men*" to act in self-interested ways and this interest is defined as power (1993: 5, emphasis added). Power, he tells us, "may comprise anything that establishes and maintains the control of *man* over *man*" (ibid: 11, emphasis added). He quotes George Washington in saying "[f]ew *men* are capable of making a continual sacrifice of all views of private interest, or advantage, to the common good" (11, emphasis added), before going on to explain that real man is a jumble of "political man" (a beast), "moral man" (a fool) and "religious man" (a saint) (15-16). Kenneth Waltz, a neo-realist who argued that human nature alone was not responsible for war, still agrees with the definition of human nature itself: "[t]he root of all evil is man" (2001: 3), and "peace is the primary goal of few men or states" (236).

This resignation to a perpetual state of power relations pitching "every man against every man" (Hobbes, 1996: 84)

is based on a myth, a story that is "recurring, primordial, and appealing to a particular group's ideals, hopes and fears, and widely felt emotions" (Booth, 1996: 328). Furthermore, this myth has terrifying consequences because it "postulates a realm of international politics in which the amoral behaviour of political man is not only permissible but prudent" (Tickner, 1988: 432). The influence of realist thought on international politics has led world leaders to believe that power is the only key to relations between countries and to mistrust the behaviour of all other states. Realists do not simply study international politics, they are part of perpetuating the problems within it (Buzan, 1996: 53). Striving to pin down human nature and create universal laws to explain war creates a theory "which offers relatively immediate gratification, simplistic solutions to complex problems and reifies and reflects the interests of the already powerful" (Zalewski, 1996: 352). Many feminists would argue that the world has changed, international politics has changed, and it is only the assumptions of realists that remain constant.

Realists do not have the monopoly on reality; they quite possibly don't even have a very good grasp of it. Their theory serves to maintain the status quo and ignores the complex power structures required to do so. As Cynthia Enloe states, we are left with a Superman comic strip for a portrait of international relations, when the reality is closer to a Jackson Pollack (1996: 188-189). Realists' definition of politics, driven by the nature of man, is so narrow that it cannot even conceive of the idea of accommodating femininities, and the enduring influence of realist thought helps to ensure that they do not do so. It is not, as Morgenthau argues, that "the human mind cannot bear to look the truth of politics straight in the face" (1993: 16), but rather that the realist mind cannot bear to look the truth of feminism straight in the face.

Negating Femininity: Hillary Rodham Clinton's 2008 Presidential Bid

In polls of US voters, Dianne Bystrom tells us that issues that are seen as "masculine", such as foreign policy, and traits that are seen as "masculine", such as toughness, strength and experience, are top of the voters' agendas (2008: 62). Given that political scientists have shown that women are considered to be "kind, compassionate, sensitive, understanding, honest, and trustworthy", while men are seen to be "strong, tough, experienced and knowledgeable", it is hardly then surprising that a US poll in 2000 found that the majority of respondents in the US felt a man would do a better job than a woman in the area of foreign policy (60-61). Far from being driven by human nature, the US political arena has been socially and culturally constructed over centuries, to a point where the characteristics that are perceived to be necessary in a leader are also perceived as masculine (Carroll & Liebowitz, 2010: 8). While women have made some progress in domestic US politics, the reactions of the media and politicians to Hillary Rodham Clinton's bid for the 2008 Democratic presidential nomination show that when it comes to foreign policy and the international political arena, "[t]he US presidency remains a bastion of masculinity" (Anderson, 2002: 107).

Kim Fridkin Kahn's studies of the media's impact on the political fortunes of women have found that female candidates in the US receive "less campaign coverage than their male colleagues," when they do receive coverage it is "disproportionately negative, emphasizing their unlikely chances of victory" and there is "considerable distortion between the themes articulated by women candidates in their ads and coverage of those themes in the news" (2010: 176-177). A study in 2008 found that coverage of Clinton by ABC, CBS, NBC, and Fox was 52 percent negative, compared to just 39 percent negative for Barack Obama and 33 percent negative for John Edwards (Bystrom, 2008: 65). This in itself is telling, however it is only when we look into what that coverage consists of that we begin to see hostile reactions to the idea of a woman having the necessary characteristics to hold her own within a field supposedly driven by human nature.

Women who aspire to leadership in politics must negotiate a double bind: "if they are too feminine, they are deemed incompetent. If they are too masculine, they are considered not likeable" (McGinley, 2009: 710). If they were to behave in exactly the same way as a male counterpart, they would still be judged differently for it (2009: 712). Many analysers and the media have failed to take this into consideration when debating why Hillary Clinton lost out in the primaries in 2008. While they are quick to criticise the failures of her campaign, they do not see that these decisions may have been taken to counter gender stereotypes (Carroll, 2009: 10). The media criticised her for emphasising experience, and therefore seemingly representing the status quo while Obama stood for change, yet studies have shown people stereotype women as being less experienced than men (2009: 6-7). She was also criticised for

seeming too tough and not showing her human side, yet women are consistently perceived as being "less able than men to handle the military, national security, and foreign affairs," so she perhaps had no choice (ibid: 8-9). On a similar note, one of the issues on which she was criticized was her refusal to renounce her vote in favour of the war in Iraq. While Obama voted against the war, and John Edwards announced that his vote in favour had been a mistake, if Clinton had decided to renounce a previous decision on national security, "as a woman, she likely would have paid a much greater price for these decisions" (2009: 9-10). So, while her campaign may have been flawed, the media was consistently blind to the way in which the gendered office she was aiming at forced her to present herself in certain ways.

Some of the sexism that has been documented in the campaigns of female candidates in the US highlights the ways in which US journalists, politicians and public still have difficulty seeing women and feminine characteristics as compatible with international politics. Patricia Schroeder, who also bid for the Democratic presidential nomination, was apparently introduced at a rally by a state chair, who said he "didn't mind having a woman for president, but he didn't want a man for first lady" (Anderson, 2002: 124). While the state chair may have thought of this as an innocuous joke, it demonstrates perfectly the gendered perceptions of the role of president, and the very gendered support the president is perceived to require at home: the self-sacrificial, unquestioning support of a first "lady" and not a first "gentleman". When one company brought out a "Hillary Clinton nutcracker" doll, one political news correspondent said live on air: "That is so perfect. I have often said, when she comes on television, I involuntarily cross my legs" (Lawless, 2009: 72). At a campaign event in 2007, when John McCain was asked of Hillary Clinton, "How do we beat the bitch?", he implicitly endorsed this comment by replying, "that's an excellent question" (Carroll, 2009: 12). When Hillary Clinton was interrupted at one rally by two men holding banners and chanting "Iron My Shirt", the New York Times and Washington Post dedicated a combined grand total of 300 words in coverage to this offensive prank (Kornblut, 2008 & Wheaton, 2008). And time and time again, journalists focussed on her clothing rather than her policies. This ranged from criticism of her masculine "pant suits", to an article entitled "Hillary Clinton's Tentative Dip Into New Neckline Territory" in the Washington Post, which focuses entirely on Clinton's choice of top and its implications ("[s]howing cleavage is a request to be engaged in a particular way") and did not dedicate a single line to her topic, the burdensome cost of higher education (Givhan, 2007). When Clinton supporters complained about sexist treatment, it was largely treated as whinging, and rarely taken seriously (Carlin & Winfrey, 2009: 327). It is almost impossible to imagine Barack Obama being treated in a similar fashion, or that racist comments directed towards him would be treated with such derision, such little attention, and such implicit condoning.

It was in her apparent emotion during one campaign stop that the double bind for Hillary Clinton really became apparent. Having been criticised throughout her campaign for seeming too tough, for being a "bitch" and for not seeming human, Clinton came close to tears when asked by a female voter how she was dealing with the gruelling schedule of the campaign. Having been too strong and too emotionally detached, suddenly Clinton was portrayed as a hysterical mess, not fit to deal with international politics: "We are at war, […] Is this how she'll talk to Kim Jong-il?" (Dowd, 2008). Other interpretations found that she was putting on an act as one journalist quoted from the film *Adam's Rib*, "Here we go again, that old juice. Guaranteed heart melter. A few female tears, stronger than any acid" (2008). In yet another interpretation, the tears were real, "but it was grimly typical of her that what finally made her break down was the prospect of losing" (2008). These hostile reactions are typical of society's reactions to a woman transgressing traditional gender roles and characteristics, and they pose this question: if the arena of international politics is really driven by human nature – that of men and women – then why does it still seem so unnatural to so many that a woman might take a lead in it?

Negating Humanity: Hillary Clinton, Secretary of State

Having lost out in her bid to become US president, Hillary Clinton was appointed Secretary of State, a role that has earned her a great deal of praise as she has travelled more miles than any of her predecessors in foreign visits. However, one incident saw her once again deemed too weak because of a public display of supposedly "feminine," or even human characteristics. This is in the now infamous image published by the White House of the "Situation Room," where the president and his closest advisors are watching film footage of the raid that found and killed Osama bin Laden. As Kathy Kiely reports, the photograph resembles something Rembrandt might have painted,

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"[i]n a decisive moment now forever frozen in time, Clinton stands out not just because of her femininity but her lack of impassivity" (2011). Apart from one woman standing in the doorway, Clinton is the only female in the room, and while the males all look on with faces that, albeit exhausted and haggard, show little sign of emotion, Clinton has her hand to her mouth seemingly in horror or shock. At the time, Clinton felt the need to say that her hand was covering her mouth to prevent an allergic cough or sneeze, although a year later she went on to say "[w]hat it conjures up is all of the emotions that were running through my and every other person in that small group. It was just an extraordinary experience" (Hudson, 2012). So why then did she feel the need to hide behind an allergic reaction? Perhaps because she knew that this image would be taken to show that women cannot control their emotions, and so are unfit for the big, scary, masculine world of the war on terror. However, given that the scene she was watching included the killing of five people and a raid that almost certainly violates either International Human Rights Law, International Humanitarian Law, or both, perhaps this is more the kind of reaction we should hope for from politicians. It is not femininity that Clinton is displaying in this photograph, it is humanity; it is the reaction of a human being watching other human beings dying and recognising that, no matter what the circumstances, they are still human beings. Yet this humanity does not fit into the American, realist perception of human nature in international politics. The most important question is: would the photograph even have been released if Obama had been covering his mouth in shock or horror? Would this "bastion of masculinity" have been able to display this much humanity in the face of an enemy? The answer is almost certainly no, and for this reason, Hillary Clinton had every right to be angry at the photograph's release, and every reason to claim allergic reaction. As Kiely says:

Here's hoping that someday we'll get a picture from the White House Situation Room that features more than one woman at the table. Maybe then women no longer will feel obligated to hide their best qualities behind a sneeze (2011).

Conclusions

International politics is driven by a masculine construction of human nature and academics should resist any claims of knowledge that "privilege certain people, experiences, and texts while evacuating others from the history of ideas and actions" (Sylvester, 1996: 256). Realists such as Morgenthau and Waltz rely frequently on quotations from US presidents to explain their theories about human nature and the nature of international politics; this essay has used evidence from this very same arena to demonstrate that the US presidency and the steps to attaining it are constructed in such a way as to favour masculine qualities and block out not only femininity, but at times humanity. It would be wrong to deduce that Hillary Clinton lost her bid for the Democratic presidential nomination because of her gender—we can never be certain this is the case – however, the reactions of the media and the public to her candidacy reveal a great deal about a reluctance to place a woman in what is seen as an extremely masculine arena. The interpretation of this masculine arena as representative of humanity is simplistic, reductive and frequently dangerous. The academic study of international relations has two choices: it can continue with a philosophy that is over fifteen hundred years old, that negates the possibility of a better world, that excludes half of humanity and sees war as an inevitable result of the human condition rather than a result of humans' actions for which they must be held accountable; or it can embrace a poststructuralist approach and begin to consider the often gendered power structures that have brought conflict about, and how we may begin to resolve them. As Booth argues in his writing on the future of the discipline, "I find it easier to envisage […] a world without sovereign states and war than I do a world without gender" (1996: 337).

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