

INTERACTORS

States as Interacting Units

Jukka T. Seppala
Helsinki, Finland

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1 Introduction

This essay seeks to introduce a framework for analyzing interaction between state actors. In this endeavor, the essay will draw from various sources. The purpose is not to introduce a new theory of International Relations (IR) but to provide an exploratory analysis of the issues involved in international interaction between states. The framework is a hybrid one and draws from various mainstream approaches to International Politics. However, while drawing from these sources, the essay also seeks to introduce a host of new concepts for analyzing international politics.

Table 1 helps to locate the framework in the field of International Politics.

Table 1. The field of International Politics.

	Multiple actors (IR)	Single actor (FPA)
Short-term	1) Interaction - Interaction - Outcomes	2) Decision-making - Single decisions - Foreign Policy
Long-term	3) Systemic change - Changes in relative capabilities of states, alliance patterns etc.	4) Grand strategy - Long-term goals of state actors

Table 1 is inspired by a figure by Ripsman et al. (Ripsman et al. 2016, 82), but seeks to emphasize the division between single and multiple actors rather than systemic outcomes or foreign policies of single states. The figure by Ripsman et al. introduces three types of Neoclassical Realism that refer to decision-making, grand strategy, and long-term structural change. What is missing in their analysis is the interaction between states which is the focus of this essay.

Table 1 divides the field of International Politics into a focus on short-term and long-term factors, and a focus on multiple actors or single actors. Regarding the long term, analyzing structural change or the rise and fall of great powers is a well-established tradition in IR. Also, in the long term single states introduce grand strategies that guide short-term policy and interactions. The short-term focus on single actors is the traditional realm of Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA).

The short-term focus on multiple actors has been the traditional focus of International Relations theorizing. This analysis has primarily sought to explain the outcomes of interactions between state actors. However the analysis of actual interaction between state actors is also a possibility, and this essay seeks to analyze this interaction itself. The main questions to ask are: How do states interact? What is the nature of this interaction? What factors determine these interactions? What do states seek from their interactions with other states?

To analyze these questions it is essential to discuss the nature of social reality and the nature of states as institutions and organizations. This involves the analysis of ontological questions. The main point is that the dividing line is not between the natural and the social sciences, but between objective and subjective reality. The social world is a mixture of both. It consists of material embodied interacting individuals whose actions are guided by their subjective interpretations of this material reality.

To understand fully the interactions of state actors and what they are pursuing in these interactions requires taking into account both the objective and subjective realities. However, the main focus of the analysis of interaction is not on the subjective reality of individual actors, but on the objective reality of multiple embodied interacting agents. The interactions of states which are composed of individual actors and agents do belong to the objective side of reality, although it is not possible to understand these interactions without also understanding the thinking and motives behind the actions and choices of state

actors. For the above reason, this essay also seeks to analyze what motivates state actors. The assumption is that motives provide the reasons, the direction, and the energy for action.

Thus, it is necessary both to explain and understand. The objective is to explain what happens on the objective level of reality of interacting agents. However, this explaining of interaction fundamentally depends on the subjective realities of the decision-makers who formulate foreign policy, or understanding.

To explain international interaction between state actors it is necessary to introduce three levels of analysis:

1. Decision-making unit(s)
2. External influences
3. Level of interaction

The decision-making unit (DMU) refers to those decision-makers who are responsible for formulating foreign policy and decisions of the state. Depending on the case this may involve a single individual or multiple individuals in various positions. On this level, the focus is on the decision-making, perceptions, and motives of the actors. Also, bureaucratic politics and analysis of the rationality of the decision-making process belong to this level. The analysis of this level necessarily draws on subjective understandings of the relevant decision-makers.

The level of external influences includes all influences to the decision-making process that are external to the DMU. These include both domestic and international influences, relations between the actors, and historic and contextual factors. At this level are the main explanatory variables of the behavior of states. These variables either directly or indirectly influence the subjective states of decision-makers and actions of state actors.

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The level of interaction, finally, is the level at which the interactions of states analytically take place. On this level, the single actions of states combine to form patterns of interaction that we call social structures. It is this level that is the objective side of the social reality of state interaction, and it is these interactions, their nature, and outcomes that we are interested in.

This essay adopts the hypothesis or position that structural external influences on the DMU do not directly cause or determine state behavior. Thus, material structures (distribution of capabilities) and institutional structures only indirectly influence the behavior of states. They do this by influencing, first, the perceptions and motives of the individuals that form the DMU, and second, the motives and perceptions of the DMUs of other state actors and hence their behavioral responses.

What is needed is an explanation of how these structures and other external factors influence the decision-making unit. The answer provided by this essay is based on Predominant Egoism and Hedonism. Thus, we need to bring in the Classical Realist notion of Human Nature, and the assumption is that the decision-makers of the DMU are predominantly hedonistic and egoistic in their motives. Predominant hedonism is the view that actors are motivated to approach gains, avoid losses, and accept losses in certain situations. However, the assumption is that state actors are primarily motivated to approach gains and avoid losses. Approaching gains and avoiding losses are directly related to how the decision-makers view the National Interest of the state and its prospects for survival in the international environment.

2 Reality

This section of the essay explores the nature of reality and the nature of the social world. The analysis is ontological. The first thing to notice is that the social world is a dual reality. That is, it is both objective and subjective. The main argument is that the dividing line is not between the natural and the social worlds. On the contrary, the dividing line is inside the social world. Both positivistic and interpretative methods are warranted. To understand this we need to start by defining reality, and by discussing how individuals perceive this reality.

The first thing to understand is the difference between objective and subjective reality. With objective reality, we mean material existence. The concept of existence is based on ontological realism which claims that at least part of reality is ontologically independent of human minds. So, objective reality consists of the material existence of physical objects that exist independently of observing minds. We will assume that the physical level of reality where our everyday life happens consists of different types of material objects and things that are either part of the physical, biological, or built environment. At this level of reality, classical physics works just fine and we do not need to consult Einstein's theories of relativity or quantum physics. So we will assume that the mind-independent objective reality that we experience consists of materially existing things that we can physically interact with. Notice that other individuals are also included in this definition. We are embodied social animals and we have a real existence in the material world.

Subjective reality or experience on the other hand is observer or mind-dependent. It is the first-person point of view of the world as it is. Subjective reality can further be divided into two levels. The first level consists of the sensory experiences of the individual which are interpreted by the observer's

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material brain. Perceptual interpretation is the process by which the brain interprets incoming sensory data, and perceptual experience is the conscious result of this interpretative process. This is experience Type I.

The second level of subjective reality consists of the processes we normally call thinking. The other name for this is cognition in the wide sense of the concept. Thinking is a cognitive process by which we assign meaning to our perceptual experiences. This process of interpretation of meaning happens via language and the use of concepts. This is experience Type II. Perceptual experience Type I allows us to gain information about the external objective reality or existence, but the interpretation of meaning or experience Type II makes it possible to understand the meaning of this information. People act and interact in the social world based on their subjective interpretation of meaning or experience Type II. And it is the combination of experience Type I and Type II that defines a person's total subjective experience.

The human mind performs these cognitive interpretations with the use of language and concepts. It is the concepts that the individual forms of his/her sensory experiences of the outside world that determine his/her subjective reality in the end. The hypothesis here is that individuals interpret situations and form concepts primarily via three modes of cognition. These primary modes of cognition are the analytic, hedonic, and normative modes of thinking. There are other modes like aesthetic cognition (thinking), but for the purposes of this essay, these three primary modes of cognition and thinking are the most important. This typology is inspired by Parsons & Shils's book *Toward a General Theory of Action* (1962, 58-60). But we will simplify the typology and give it a slightly different interpretation in this essay.

Analytic thinking refers to the factual and logical aspects of a person's thinking and evaluation of the situation. This is the "true/false" aspect of

thinking, and it is concerned with the person's beliefs and knowledge of the world. Normative thinking refers to the moral and behavioral aspects of a person's thinking and evaluation of the situation. This is the "right/wrong" aspect of thinking and is concerned with how the person evaluates his/her own and other actors' behavior in a situation. Hedonic thinking refers to the ways in which a person values different objects and forms relationships to objects. This is the "good/bad" aspect of thinking, and emotions, interests, and preferences are the evaluative aspects of this mode of thinking.

Now that we have an idea of how individuals perceive the external world and how they understand and assign meaning to it, we are ready to think about the social world or social reality. First of all, we must understand that social reality is the combination of both objective existence and subjective experience. That is, it is the combination of observer-independent material and physical reality and observer-dependent mental reality. The latter type of reality is primarily composed of the person's conceptually and linguistically interpreted reality or experience Type II.

Thus, social reality and the social world are the result of the simultaneous interplay of objective reality and subjective reality. When we talk about social interaction, we talk of actual embodied individuals interacting in the world. This interaction is observable, and forms patterns that we call social structures, in the real world. However, this interaction is guided by the beliefs, evaluations, and interpretations of meanings of subjective individuals. That is, the observable interaction of individuals is guided by the contents of the minds of individuals. It is the three modes of cognition, or the analytic, hedonic, and normative modes of thinking, that drive the interpretations and interactions of embodied individuals in the final analysis.

Conceptualized in this way, we see that social reality is both objective and subjective. The social world consists of both interacting bodies and communicating minds. It is the minds that determine the behavior and interactions of embodied individuals, and at the same time, it is the embodied individuals and their interactions that determine the contents of individual minds.

What this means is that in order to understand the social world both positivistic and interpretative methods are needed. Yaqing Qin explains that any social theory needs a hard core that is composed of two parts, a metaphysical and a substantive part. The latter is concerned with empirical facts, while the former helps to understand and interpret those facts. (Qin 2018, 25). With respect to the idea of the duality of social reality, there are multiple possible ways of interpreting the same objective reality. How individuals think matters and this thinking depends on the concepts and theories that these individuals hold in their minds.

This analysis is important also from the point of view of the subject of this essay, that is, how states interact. We are primarily concerned with the objective reality of state interaction, but in order to understand what states are doing, we need to understand the subjective realities of state leaders. And it is these two realities that produce the interaction patterns between state actors. The decision-making units of states interpret the external environments and the behavioral responses of other state actors, that is the objective reality around them, and these interpretations, or their subjective realities, then guide their actions in the real world. Thus, the interaction patterns that we observe between state actors are the result of the interaction of objective and subjective realities.

Different DMUs within different states may interpret the objective reality around them in differing ways because they may have different concepts,

theories, values, and historical experiences. The structure of the system may provide strong signals for states to act in certain ways, but in the end, these structural influences affect state behavior only indirectly via the perceptions of the DMUs. The point is that we cannot understand how states interact by focusing exclusively on the material structures of the international system. On the contrary, we need to bring into the analysis the way that the decision-making units interpret the reality around them.

3 Determinants of State Behavior

In this section of the essay, we will take a look at the determinants of state behavior. What is it that drives states into action? The starting point for this discussion is Figure 1, which outlines the determinants of state behavior.

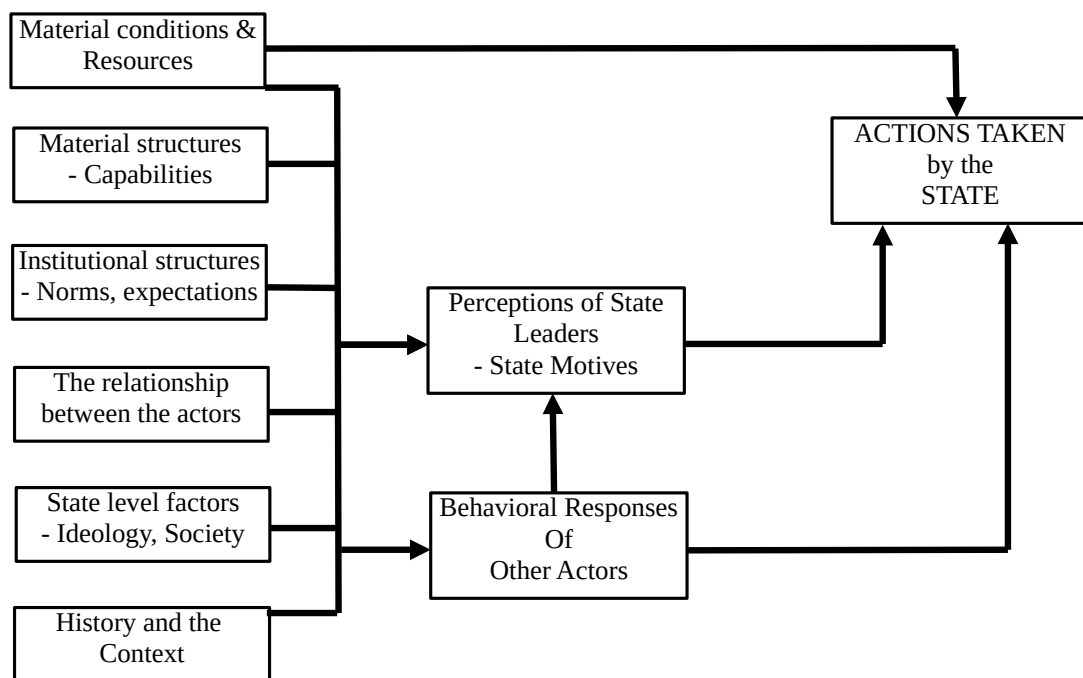


Figure 1. The determinants of state behavior.

Figure 1 outlines the main influences and determinants that guide state action. In the upper right corner of the figure, we see the box "Actions taken by the state". These actions are both directly and indirectly influenced by various factors. In this model, there are three direct influences and seven indirect influences on the actions taken by the state.

The most important direct influence is the perceptions and motives of the decision-making unit (DMU) of the state. How the leaders of the state understand and frame the situation matters most to state behavior. But there are two other direct influences on state behavior. Material conditions and resources affect state behavior both directly and indirectly. It is a basic fact that if a state lacks some material resource, then this may affect directly the state's capacity to take action in the physical world. The third direct influence on state behavior is the behavioral responses of other state actors. A more powerful state can use military force to coerce a weaker state into taking actions it would not otherwise have taken.

So the most important determinant of state behavior is the perceptions and motives of the DMU of the state. These perceptions and motives are influenced by the way that the DMU interprets the world via the help of analytic, normative and hedonic thinking and evaluation. This interpretative process may be influenced by misperceptions or bureaucratic politics within the DMU.

The most important external influence on the DMU is the behavioral responses of other states. We will assume that structures do not have a direct influence on the decisions of the DMU and state behavior, so we will need another mechanism that will explain the external influence of structural factors on state behavior. The assumption in this essay is that structural factors influence the perceptions and motives of the DMUs of various state actors. So, besides being a direct influence on state action, the behavioral responses of other state actors also affect the perceptions and motives of the state DMU.

The model of the determinants of state behavior in Figure 1 also includes seven influences on the DMU that function as indirect determinants of state behavior. The first of these are the material conditions and resources that the state is confronted with. These material conditions and resources thus function as both direct and indirect influences on state behavior.

The second indirect determinant of state behavior is the material structure. This refers to Kenneth Waltz's system structure and the distribution of capabilities within the system (Waltz 2010). The position adopted in this essay is that this material structure does not affect state behavior directly. As Waltz acknowledges states may not read the structural signals of the system correctly, which means that the structure does not have a direct causal effect on state behavior (Waltz 2010, 74, 92). Instead, the material structure influences both the perceptions and motives of the state DMU and the perceptions and motives of other states' DMUs. This differs from Waltz's conception of indirect structural influence, which produces its effects via socialization and competition (Waltz 2010, 74).

The third indirect determinant of state behavior is the institutional structures that the state confronts. The institutional structure does not have a direct material existence. It arises from the reflexive knowledgeable actions of individual actors but does not itself have the capacity to affect these actors directly. Instead, the actors have knowledge of these institutional status rights and obligations that guide the behavioral expectations of the DMUs, and this knowledge is stored in the minds of the individual actors. The point is that state actors may choose not to act according to the accepted normative standards. There is usually nothing in the material world that prevents states from ignoring the institutional normative expectations in the situation. But the other states may protest this breach of normative expectations, and change their behavioral responses accordingly, which the state DMU then has to take into account in its future deliberations.

The fourth indirect determinant of state behavior is the relations between the state actors. Some constructivist writers such as Alexander Wendt have written about these relations and their effects on state interactions (Qin 2018, 132; see also Brown 2019, 46). Also, Yaqing Qin has written a book about how

relations between states affect state behavior (Qin 2018). These relations do not refer to the institutional status relations between actors but refer to the quality of relations between state actors. Thus, states can cooperate or compete, or be in friendly or hostile relations with each other. Dependency and domination relations are also possible, as are relations of interdependence. Relations between state actors as a determinant of DMU perceptions and motives have been largely overlooked in the mainstream IR theory, but they are an important influence on state behavior. The problem from the point of view of DMUs of states is that DMUs can never be sure of the future intentions of other states' DMUs. Today's friend may be the enemy of tomorrow.

The fifth indirect determinant of state behavior is the state-level factors. These refer to domestic influences on the DMU. Ideological considerations belong to this category, and so do the influences of media and pressure groups on the DMU. Depending on the DMU's relationship with the society and societal factors these factors may enable or constrain the behavior of states. Ripsman et al., for instance, mention state-society relations and domestic institutions as factors affecting foreign policy (Ripsman et al. 2016, 70-79).

And finally, the sixth indirect determinant of state behavior is the historical context. Jonathan Kirshner for instance sees the historical context as a major determinant of state behavior (Kirshner 2022, 45). The historical context is more than just the immediate situation and context of interaction. The historical context also refers to the "autobiographical self" of the DMU, or the way in which the history of the state affects the identity, perceptions, and motives of the state actor.

Besides the six indirect determinants of state behavior explained above, the behavioral responses of other state actors also provide a constraining effect on the decisions taken by the DMU. The DMU has to take into account what the other actors are doing in the interaction situation, and this is a major influence

on the perceptions and motives of the DMU. It should be noticed that the perceptions and motives of the DMU and the behavioral responses of other state actors are the primary factors driving the interaction process.

4 Predominant Hedonism

In this section, we will take a closer look at what motivates human actors. Our starting point will be the concept of approach and avoidance motivation by Elliot and Covington (Elliot & Covington 2001). The basic idea is that humans approach positive or desirable events or possibilities, and avoid negative or undesirable events or possibilities. This kind of thinking is also supported by neurophysiological evidence (Elliot & Covington 2001, 80). Reeve describes both approach and avoidance-oriented structures in the human brain (Reeve 2005, 52-65). But rather than describe behavior in terms of pleasure and pain, a better way to describe behavior and motivation is in terms of positive and negative experiences (Rozin 1999, 112).

Based on this analysis we can make two assumptions that can be regarded as preliminary axioms at the general level:

1. Human actors approach positive experiences
2. Human actors avoid negative experiences

These assumptions are compatible with the positions of psychological egoism and psychological hedonism. Both of these positions are related to motivation. Psychological hedonism is the view that the ultimate motive of actors is to experience pleasure or to avoid pain. Psychological egoism, by contrast, is the view that actors are concerned with their own welfare, and the motive for action is self-interest. Both of these positions will be used to develop the account of motivation and human nature in this essay.

There is also a difference in focus between psychological hedonism and psychological egoism. In psychological hedonism, the scope of motivation is restricted to the individual. In psychological egoism the scope of motivation is social. Human nature refers to the social side of human motivation. The fact that

actors approach positive experiences and avoid negative experiences does not make them good or evil. It only makes sense to talk about good and evil when the actions of individual actors are considered together with the outcomes of their actions with regard to the positive and negative experiences of other actors. It is common to talk about selfish and altruistic behavior when referring to the concept of human nature, and this is related to psychological egoism and self-interested action.

In this essay, self-interest is defined in terms of positive and negative experiences. There are many ways to define positive and negative experiences. First, they can be defined as subjective hedonic evaluations of good and bad. Secondly, there is also the possibility to define positive and negative experiences in terms of gains and losses which can be quantified if need be. Gains and losses are related to the positive and negative experiences of the actor, and they are also related to the concept of psychological egoism. Robert Shaver comments on psychological egoism (Shaver 2021):

Psychological egoism claims that each person has but one ultimate aim: her own welfare. This allows for action that fails to maximize perceived self-interest but rules out the sort of behavior psychological egoists like to target — such as altruistic behavior or motivation by thoughts of duty alone.

Thus, in general, an actor will try to approach positive experiences and avoid negative experiences.

However psychological egoism is false as an empirically universal statement (Shaver 2021). Human actors do not always act in ways that satisfy the axiom of avoiding negative experiences. This can happen because of delayed gratification, norm and rule-following, or an act of altruism. Thus, psychological hedonism is also false as an empirically universal statement. But Shaver sees

that there is a way out of this problem. And that is the concept of predominant egoism. Predominant egoism allows for exceptions, is not trivial, and is empirically plausible (Shaver 2021).

So the proposal is that empirically we base our argument on predominant egoism developed by Gregory S. Kavka (Kavka 1986, 64-80), which states in the most general sense that "we may say that human action in general is predominantly motivated by self-interest" (Kavka 1986, 64). Kavka also develops four propositions of predominant egoism (Kavka 1986, 64-65):

1. For most people in most situations, the "altruistic gain/personal loss" ratio needed to reliably motivate self-sacrificing action is large.
2. The number of people for whom altruism and other non-self-interested motives normally override self-interested motives is small.
3. The number of situations, for the average person, in which non-self-interested motives override personal interest is small.
4. The scope of altruistic motives that are strong enough to normally override self-interest is, for most people, small, that is, confined to concern for family, close friends, close associates, or particular groups or public projects to which the individual is devoted.

With the help of predominant egoism, it becomes possible to differentiate different kinds of interactions between actors. There are a total of four classes of interactions between actors:

1. Selfish
2. Cooperative egoist situations in which neither actor loses
3. Altruist
4. Situations in which one or both actors lose while neither gains

These four classes of interactions consist of a total of nine basic types of situations. In terms of gains and losses, selfish behavior refers to acts where actor A gains while actor B loses as a result. Cooperative egoism refers to all types of situations where both actors A and B do not experience a loss. There are a total of four types of situations that involve cooperative egoism and these will be explained later in this essay. Altruistic actions refer to situations in which actor A experiences losses so that actor B can experience gains. The remaining three situations are situations in which one or both of the actors lose while neither gains. These different types of interactions between actors will be explained later in this essay.

There is also a need to redefine the concept of psychological hedonism and introduce the concept of predominant psychological hedonism, which leads to three different types of motivational axioms:

1. Approach positive experiences
2. Avoid negative experiences
3. Accept negative experiences

There are now two possible views on motivation and human relations. First, there is the view based on standard psychological egoism and hedonism, which is the basis of approach & avoidance motivation, but which is false. Second, there is the view based on predominant psychological egoism and hedonism which mirrors reality in that it allows for altruistic behavior besides the standard approach and avoidance motivation. This essay adopts the view on human motivation and human nature based on predominant psychological egoism and hedonism.

We will use predominant hedonism and egoism to describe state behavior. We assume that states are predominant hedonists and that they will

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predominantly approach positive experiences and avoid negative experiences. However, there are situations in which states may accept losses in order for other states to gain. Official development assistance belongs to this category of actions.

Predominant hedonism allows us to explain how the indirect determinants of state behavior introduced above influence state behavior. The assumption is that DMUs of states will evaluate the possible gains and losses related to various external influences, and make decisions based on these assessments. Hence, depending on states' motive, states seek to mold their responses to these external influences so that their responses predominantly maximize gains or minimize losses. This behavior is applicable to the cases in which the state's motive is either to seek gains or avoid losses. In cases in which the state accepts negative experiences, it is assumed that the primary motive is that of reputation and identity. The state will either act selfishly or altruistically in these kind of situations.

5 State Motives

In this section of the essay, it is time to combine the previous ideas and arguments and form an explanation of state motivation. *A motive is defined as a thing that gives actions reasons, direction, and energy.* And state motives are those things that motivate the DMU of the state in question. Now, there's a lot in this definition of motives, and it helps to think of decision-making and behavior as a process:

Reasons <> Intentions <> Means <> Actions <> Outcomes <> Consequences

A motive, as defined above concerns the reasons, intentions, and consideration of the means of action before the action is taken. Actions follow a motive and are followed by outcomes and consequences. The difference between these is that outcomes refer to the direct result of the action taken, while consequences refer to the longer-term developments after the action taken. Actors such as states have variable influence on the outcomes depending on their power relative to other actors, but usually only limited influence on the consequences that follow.

Of the components of motives, we will first analyze the reasons for action. It all starts with the perceptions of the DMU. These perceptions are influenced by the indirect determinants of state behavior (See Figure 1) and the behavioral responses of other actors. The incoming stimuli are interpreted via the three modes of cognition. That is, the DMU considers the analytic, normative, and hedonic dimensions of the situation.

The analytic dimension concerns the general facts of the situation. The normative dimension concerns the analysis of actions taken by other actors. The analysis concerns whether the other actors are following the accepted norms of

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behavior, and also concerns the possible expectations regarding the other actors' future behavior.

The hedonic dimension is the most important because it is the link to the state interests as defined by predominant hedonism. Thus, the DMU has to consider how the facts and the normative and behavioral aspects of the situation affect the state interests or the expected gains and losses in the situation. The definition of state interests by the DMU is the source of the reasons why states act in certain ways in the situation. This is the first part of the definition of state motives.

The second part concerns the direction of action or the formation of goals. The formation of goals, or state intentions, is based on the reasons for action. The DMU has to consider expected outcomes and consequences of action based on state interests. The expected outcomes sought thus give direction to the planned action. This is the second part of the definition of state motives.

The third and last part of state motives concerns the energy of the planned action. Without energy, the action will not be taken. During this phase, the DMU has to consider various means to achieve the goals pursued by the state. And it is of utmost importance to consider the efficacy of proposed actions. That is, the DMU has to consider whether the proposed actions can be performed satisfactorily and whether the expected outcome of the proposed actions is in line with the ends sought. If the proposed actions cannot be performed, or the expected outcome is not in line with the ends sought, then the proposed action lacks energy, and the DMU has to consider other options.

It is important to notice that the motive is composed of three parts. First, there has to be a reason for taking some action based on the hedonic evaluation of the state interests as defined by the DMU. Second, the DMU must form goals and intentions which give the action direction. And thirdly, the proposed action has to be able to bring about positive results or the action will not be taken. That

is, the action needs energy, which is the final impetus that pushes the state into action.

A few words about rationality. Rationality is a contested concept, although mainstream IR uses the concept of rationality to form predictions about state action. It should be evident by now that this essay sees the prediction of state behavior with the help of the rationality assumption as problematic. The argument is not that states are not rational, but that since the DMUs of states have different theories, concepts, and external factors that influence the interpretation of outside events, then rationality cannot be used to predict state behavior universally.

So, this essay provides another definition of state rationality: *Rationality involves the state's DMU trying to find the most effective means of satisfying their predominantly hedonistic motivations.*

Rationality thus involves procedural rationality as defined by the state's motive. For the actions and the decisions behind them to be rational, the DMU has to consider the reasons, direction, and energy of the proposed action. Or put it another way: rationality concerns the rationality of how the motive and its components are formed and put together. Rationality also involves considering the possible gains and losses associated with the proposed action. States are not utility maximizers, but predominant hedonists. They try to approach possible gains and avoid possible losses, but on some occasions, they may also act altruistically.

Now, altruism is irrational behavior from the point of view of standard rational choice theory, which sees actors as maximizing their expected utility. However, this essay sees rational actors not as utility maximizers, but as predominant hedonists. Depending on the primary motive of the state in the

situation, the state may also accept losses, and act rationally based on this motive. The motive in question is the reputation and identity of the actor.

Finally, rationality does not imply that if the action taken does not produce the intended outcome, then the action is not rational. On the contrary, the definition of rationality does not concern the outcome (Mearsheimer & Rosato 2023, 66-68). It only concerns those evaluative procedures taken before the action. Hence rationality is about the motive of the state as defined and developed by the DMU.

One only has to think about the Prisoner's Dilemma to drive this point home. The actors in the situation are acting rationally, but in acting so they produce an outcome that is not in the best interests of the actors. Hence rationally formed motives do not always produce optimal outcomes.

States can never be sure that actions taken will produce the desired outcome and especially the (long-term) consequences, because the outcome also depends on what other state actors are doing. The DMU of the state may try to analyze the expected actions of other states in advance, but these considerations are never perfect. This is because of the indeterminacy of outcomes.

The rationality assumption thus helps to evaluate the quality of the decision-making process, not the success of the proposed action. And this means that in analyzing ongoing state interaction the rationality assumption cannot provide the DMU with exact predictions of the behavioral responses of other actors.

6 Interaction

In this part of the essay, we will finally begin to analyze how state actors interact in the international arena. Remember that previously we mentioned the concept of levels of analysis. Three levels were identified: the decision-making unit (DMU), external influences, and the level of interaction. We have already discussed the DMU and external influences. Now it is time to discuss the level of interaction.

The level of interaction is the level of analysis where the interaction of state actors analytically takes place. On this level, the actions and interactions of state actors form patterns of interaction or social structures. These patterns form the objective external social reality of individual actors. The analysis of social structures may be performed with the help of a table. Table 2 is a generic example of such an analysis.

Table 2. Generic form of the pattern of social structure.

State A's action	State B's action	Explanation of behavior	Interpretation
- State A performs action A		- State A's action A begins the interaction	- State B interprets the action and forms a motive for action
	- State B performs action B	- State B's behavioral response to action A	- State A interprets the action and forms a motive for action
- State A performs action C		- State A's behavioral response to action B	- State B interprets the action and forms a motive for action
	- State B performs action D	- State B's behavioral response to action C ends the interaction	

Table 2 forms an identifiable pattern of interaction. The generic form shows us that the social structure is composed of action-reaction patterns. At each step

of the sequence, one of the actors performs an action and the other actor interprets this action and forms its own motive for action. This may appear somewhat simplistic but this is what short-term interaction is all about. It is about actors taking actions and other actors forming behavioral responses to these actions. Table 2 allows us to break this sequence of actions into its constituent units and analyze what is going on in the interaction.

The action-reaction patterns thus form identifiable patterns we call social structure. Such identifiable patterns or social structures include war, diplomacy, and alliance formations.

Now, the important question is who is performing the actions in these sequences? And there are three possibilities. First, the action may be performed by a state considered as a unitary actor. This is a simplifying assumption that makes the analysis easier. Second, the action may be performed by the DMU. This form of analysis is preferable when the focus of analysis is on the interactions of the decisions taken by each state. Third, it is possible to interpret the state as a Multiactor Agent.

This last possibility is interesting because it pictures states as agents that are composed of multiple actors who act on behalf of the state. That is, states as actors are composed of human individuals who act on behalf of the state. The state is also a legal person, so it is important to remember that the individuals who act on behalf of the state do not act in their personal capacity. Instead, they act on behalf of the state. This allows us also to view the state as an actor in the world, but an actor that is composed of multiple actors.

In order to understand the concept of multi-actor agents it is necessary to define what we mean by actors and agents. These concepts are not the same. By actors, we mean that the states or the individuals acting on behalf of them can take action in the world. They are thus part of the material objective reality of

the social world. Agency on the other hand refers to the capacity of these state actors to define interests, form goals and make and implement decisions in the social world. It is about the motives of the state actor. Agency also requires the actors to have sovereignty and a certain amount of autonomy with respect to other actors. Slaves for instance are not autonomous agents, because they have lost their sovereignty and agency, but they are still actors in the social world.

States as multi-actor agents are organizations and bureaucracies. The state is organized both hierarchically and horizontally and is composed of differentiated bureaucracies that possess some agency themselves. This is what is behind the notion of bureaucratic politics in foreign policy decision-making. The thing to notice again is that it is individual human actors who do the acting within these organizations and bureaucracies.

The picture of the state as an actor that emerges from this analysis is an agent that may perform multiple actions simultaneously, and that may have multiple simultaneous points of contact with other state actors at any given moment. The president, secretary of state, and secretary of defense may all be involved in simultaneous diplomatic efforts with their counterparts in other states. And during a war thousands of military personnel may simultaneously interact with military personnel from other states.

So, we have three different conceptions of the state as an actor. And it depends on the problem we are trying to understand which of these conceptions to use to analyze the interaction process between state actors. The state as a unitary actor is a convenient simplifying device that allows us to concentrate on the interaction pattern itself while the motives and the decisions taken by the state are given.

The analysis of the interaction pattern itself may be idiographic or nomothetic. Idiographic features of the pattern allow us to understand the unique

historical situation, while nomothetic features allow us to understand what is general and repetitive about the social structure in question.

Finally, the assumption here is that the formation of the interaction pattern depends on the direct determinants of action as depicted in Figure 1. The most important determinant of state action is the perceptions and motives of the DMU. The action taken by the state is directly influenced by the DMU, the behavioral responses of other actors, and the material conditions and available resources. All the other external factors influence the actions of the interacting states indirectly, by influencing the perceptions and motives of the DMU and the behavioral responses of other state actors.

Thus, we have a picture of state action and interaction that is primarily determined by the DMU and the behavioral responses of other actors. The material structures (distribution of capabilities) do not have a direct influence on state behavior, and the institutional structure is only the holistic description of the institutional status positions and expectations that are applicable in the situation. These structural influences have to be interpreted by human actors in order for them to have an effect on the formation of motives by the DMU. And it is always the possibility that the DMU will interpret the systemic signals incorrectly.

And one final thing to notice is that when we talk of the influence of the material structure we are not talking about its influence on the outcomes of state interaction, but of its influence with regard to the DMU's motives and the actions of single state actors during an interaction sequence. These two types of influences are not the same, although they are closely related.

7 Human Nature

In this part of the essay, we will take a look into the nature of interactions between state actors. We will take predominant hedonism as a starting point and analyze what this means from the point of view of state interaction. The question to ask is whether state actors are primarily selfish, egoistic, altruistic, or something in between? Table 3 will aid us in this analysis.

Table 3 illustrates the connections between intentions, actions (situations), and outcomes (gain/loss scenarios). Actor A's intentions are of three types: approach/allow positive experiences, avoid/cause no negative experiences, and accept/cause negative experiences. The table also identifies 9 different types of actions (situations) based on the intentional combinations of actor A. And finally, Table 3 identifies 17 different types of gain/loss scenarios (outcomes), that are possible based on actor A's intentions and actions. The exact magnitudes are not important, only the relative magnitudes so that different gain/loss scenarios can be identified.

The thing to notice is that actor A has two types of intentions. First, actor A has intentions regarding his/her own outcomes, and second, actor A has intentions regarding the outcomes of actor B. The different types of actions and outcome scenarios are formed by combining these two types of intentions.

The types of actions illustrated in Table 3 are related to predominant hedonism. The types of actions most relevant to this essay are selfish, the win-win type of cooperative egoistic, neutral status quo, altruistic, and lose-lose. The different types of actions are also manifestations of human nature. The thing to notice again is that the type of action depends on the outcomes of both actor A and actor B.

Table 3. The connection between intentions, types of actions, and outcomes.

Actor A's intentions	Actor A's intentions with regard actor B		
	A) Allow positive experiences (Gains for B)	B) Cause no negative experiences (Neutral: no gains or losses for B)	C) Cause negative experiences (Losses for B)
1) Approach positive experiences (Gains for A)	- Cooperative egoism (1A) Type I (Win-Win) (Positive sum) - +100/+100 (= +200) - +100/+50 (=+150) - +50/+100 (=+150)	- Cooperative egoism (1B) Type II (Neutral Egoism) (Positive sum) - +100/0 (= +100)	- Selfishness (1C) (Positive sum, zero-sum and negative sum) - +100/-50 (= +50) - +100/-100 (= 0) - +50/-100 (= -50)
2) Avoid negative experiences (Neutral: no gains or losses for A)	- Cooperative egoism (2A) Type III (Neutral Generosity) (Positive sum) - 0/+100 (= +100)	- Cooperative egoism (2B) Type IV (Neutral Status Quo) (Zero-sum) - 0/0 (= 0)	- Neutral selfishness (2C) (Negative sum) - 0/-100 (= -100)
3) Accept negative experiences (Losses for A)	- Altruism (3A) (Positive sum, zero-sum and negative sum) - -50/+100 (= +50) - -100/+100 (= 0) - -100/+50 (= -50)	- Neutral altruism (3B) (Negative sum) - -100/0 (= -100)	- Lose-lose (3C) (Negative sum) - -100/-100 (= -200) - -100/-50 (= -150) - -50/-100 (= -150)

Table 3 also provides information about the type of scenarios in which the actions occur. Three types of scenarios can be identified: zero-sum, positive-sum, and negative-sum. Selfish and altruistic situations allow for all three types of scenarios, while the other types of situations allow for only one type of scenario each. The win-win type of situation allows for three kinds of positive-sum scenarios, and the lose-lose situation allows for three kinds of negative-sum

scenarios. In total, the nine different types of situations provide 17 different types of gain/loss scenarios that may happen in the relations between actors A and B.

To sum things up, a few words about predominant psychological hedonism and egoism are in order. The focus of predominant psychological hedonism is on the motives and intentions of a single actor. These are defined by the three basic motivational axioms. The three motivational axioms also allow for accepting negative experiences, so that they are not entirely about maximizing positive experiences and/or minimizing negative experiences. However the focus of predominant psychological hedonism is entirely individual. That is, it describes the intentions of single actors.

Predominant psychological egoism as defined in this essay, on the other hand, has its focus on the interactions of individual actors. Cooperative egoism, selfishness, and altruism describe the actions of single individuals, but only with respect to other individuals. Actors cannot be selfish, altruist, or cooperative egoist just by themselves. Hence the difference between predominant psychological hedonism and egoism is that predominant psychological hedonism has its focus on the motivational axioms or the intentions that the actor has himself/herself. It does not take into account other actors. Predominant psychological egoism uses the same three motivational axioms to describe the actions of individuals, but now these axioms or intentions come in pairs. Selfishness for instance is defined by two intentions the actor has: the first concerns the actor himself/herself, and the other concerns the other actor that the actor is interacting with. And these intentions have their basis in predominant hedonism. For example, in selfish acts the intention of the actor is to gain himself/herself by causing a loss to the other actor. Thus, the actor has two

simultaneous intentions: one that concerns himself/herself, and the other which concerns the other actor.

This is the main difference between predominant psychological hedonism and egoism as adopted in this essay. The other main difference is that predominant psychological hedonism is concerned with the motives and intentions of the actor, while predominant psychological egoism is concerned with the nature of the action or the interaction. And both psychological hedonism and egoism can be used to evaluate the actual outcomes of different actions. And finally, it is the types of actions that define human nature. Human nature thus refers to selfish, egoistic, or cooperative actions and so on.

The last point to make concerns the duality of the actors' intentions. It is common to talk about egoistic actors as self-interested actors. But as the duality of intentions shows self-interest does not rule out taking other actors' interests into account. Win-win types of situations show this most clearly. In this type of situation actor A is clearly self-interested and acting egoistically, but actor A also allows actor B to gain in the situation. It is only in the selfish type of interactions that self-interest is only self-regarding. The four types of cooperative egoistic situations, however, are situations in which neither actor A nor actor B experiences losses.

What does this all imply for the study of International Relations and the interactions between state actors? Table 3 shows that a total of 9 different types of actions (situations) are possible between state actors. The types of actions most relevant to this essay are selfish, the win-win type of cooperative egoistic, neutral status quo, altruistic, and lose-lose. Different IR theories think about these possibilities differently. All these 9 different types of situations are found in the relations between state actors, but it may be assumed that most state interactions involve either selfish or win-win type situations.

Interactors: States as Interacting Units

The win-win type of cooperative egoism allows for three types of positive-sum scenarios. The traditional dispute between realists and liberalists is whether states are interested in absolute or relative gains. The win-win type of situation allows for both types of outcome scenarios.

States may also pursue altruistic policies like official development assistance or status quo policies. And the lose-lose type of situations are also possible. Negotiations regarding climate change illustrate this possibility. The debate partly concerns who is to bear the costs of these measures.

But the argument is that states pursue either selfish or win-win types of relations most of the time. Win-win type of situations are mostly related to economic relations between state actors, while selfish interactions describe the relations of states in their pursuit of security and survival.

All in all, Table 3 describes all possible types of relations between state actors from a predominantly hedonistic or egoistic, and human nature perspective. The main conclusion is that human nature is neither good or evil, but manifests in a spectrum of possibilities. The nine different types of actions and situations between state actors illustrate these possibilities. However, not all possibilities are equally prevalent in the day-to-day interactions between states, and it remains to be empirically shown which types of actions and scenarios dominate state interactions. The hypothesis in this essay is that selfish and win-win type of actions are the types of situations pursued most of the time.

8 Hybrid Theory

In the previous section, we saw that Human Nature manifests itself via a number of possibilities. We identified 9 different types of situations and a total of 17 different types of scenarios related to human and state interaction, ranging from selfishness to altruism. In this section, we will take a look at these situations from the point of view of International Relations theory.

Annette Freyberg-Inan has analyzed how Realism in the field of International Relations approaches human motivation (Freyberg-Inan 2004). She points out that Thucydides in ancient Greece saw human motivation as consisting of three elements: fear, profit and honor. This is known as the Athenian thesis (Ibid., 24-25). These motives correspond to the psychological needs of power, achievement, and affiliation, and the IR theories of realism, liberalism, and constructivism (Ibid., 162-168).

We will use Freyberg-Inan's analysis and Table 9.1 from her book *What Moves Man* (Ibid., 163) and Table 3 from this essay to form Table 4, which seeks to relate IR theories, motives, and intentions.

In Table 4 we see, first, that there are three main theory orientations: realism, liberalism, and constructivism. Second, there are three basic motives that correspond to the Athenian thesis: fear, profit, and reputation. Third, these three basic motives correspond to the three hedonic intentions related to predominant hedonism as explained in this essay. These three hedonic intentions are: seek gains, avoid losses, and accept losses. Fourth, these hedonic intentions are linked to various foreign policy concerns, which are then linked to various gains/losses scenarios, or intended outcomes, as introduced in Table 3 in this essay.

Table 4. Theory orientations, basic motives, hedonic intentions, foreign policy concerns, and primary intended outcomes.

Theory orientation	Basic motive	Hedonic intention	Foreign policy concern	Primary intended outcome
- Realism	- Fear	- Avoid losses	- Survival	- Neutral status quo - Neutral/neutral
- Realism	- Fear	- Seek gains	- Security	- Selfish - Gains/losses
- Realism	- Fear	- Seek gains	- Power	- Selfish - Gains/losses
- Liberalism	- Profit	- Seek gains	- Wealth	- Win-Win - Gains/gains
- Constructivism	- Reputation	- Accept losses	- Identity	- Altruism - Losses/gains
- Constructivism	- Reputation	- Seek gains	- Identity	- Selfish - Gains/losses

The point is that Table 4 lets us conduct a three-step analysis from left to right. Take liberalism for example. The motive of profit leads the state actor to seek gains. Second, the intention of seeking gains in this instance leads to the foreign policy concern of seeking wealth. And third, this foreign policy concern is then related to the primary intended outcome.

From Table 4 we see that the theory orientation of Realism offers three possible points of view. The first realist option corresponds roughly to the defensive realist position. In this variation states only seek to avoid losses or to maintain their sovereignty. The main foreign policy concern is survival, and the primary intended outcome in terms of Table 3 is the Neutral Status Quo. The second realist variation corresponds roughly to the offensive realist position. In this variation, the state seeks gains in the form of maximizing its security by increasing its military capabilities. The primary intended outcome is selfish. That is, the state seeks gains for itself and thus losses to the other actor since security involves a zero-sum scenario. The third realist variation corresponds roughly to the Classical Realist position. The hedonic intention is to seek gains,

and the foreign policy concern is directly related to power. The state seeks power in general, not just security, but influence across the board. The primary intended outcome is also selfish. So, we see that realism offers us three analytical variants. The point is that a state may seek only one variant at a given moment, and it is an empirical question which variant is applicable in the situation.

Moving to liberalism, the basic motive is that of profit, which leads the state to seek gains. The foreign policy concern is that of increasing wealth, which leads the state to seek a cooperative egoist Win-Win situation with the other actor. That is, the situation involves gains for both actors. The reason why the situation leads the state to seek a Win-Win situation with the other actor is that it is the only way in which the state may induce the other state to cooperate. Seeking a selfish outcome is not a situation that would lead the other state to cooperate, so the only way that the state may seek cooperation in the economic realm is to allow the other actor to gain also.

Constructivism offers two options. Both rely on the motive of reputation. The first variant leads the state to accept losses, and the foreign policy concern is that of identity. The primary intended outcome is altruism. The state accepts losses for itself so that the other state may gain. Official Development Assistance and humanitarian aid correspond to this scenario. This is the benevolent variant of constructivism, and the other one is the malevolent variant. In this second variant, the motive of reputation leads the state to seek gains, and the primary intended outcome is selfish. That is, the state seeks gains for itself, and losses to the other actor. An example of this scenario can be found in the Peloponnesian War, in which Athens punished the city-state of Melos because it did not want to appear as weak or indecisive (Kauppi & Viotti 2020, 270). That is, Athens wanted to uphold its identity and reputation.

The key takeaway from this section based on Table 4 and predominant hedonism is that Hybrid Theory is possible. Realism, liberalism, and constructivism are all related to each other via the three basic intentions of predominant hedonism. The question is not whether states may seek gains, avoid losses, or accept losses, but in what circumstances states will pursue these different aims? The empirical historical record contains all three possibilities.

Some assumptions can be made. The realist scenarios in Table 4 all correspond to the security and power position of the state. So it can be assumed that realist explanations will be most relevant in these situations. The liberal scenario in turn is most suited to the analysis of cooperation and mutual gains. And finally, the constructivist scenarios can be used to analyze state identities and states' concern for their reputation.

Identity refers to the self-image of the state actor as perceived by the DMU. It contains, first, the autobiographical image that is about the history of the actor. Second, is the image of the self that is related to how the actor views itself. Americans for instance view themselves as a free country, and freedom is the central concept related to their sense of self. And third, there is the social self. The social self is related to the way that the state sees its role in the world, and how the state is related to other actors. It is assumed in this essay that states do take into account their identity when making foreign policy decisions, and that they aim to uphold their identity.

The last point to be made is that the proposed hybrid theory might be predominantly realist. It would be much easier to incorporate the liberal and the constructivist concerns for profit and reputation into one existing paradigm, rather than to try to create a totally new paradigm. Thus, there would be a need to approach these additional motives from a realist perspective, so that realism could embrace predominant hedonism.

9 Conclusions

This essay has sought to understand the nature of the interaction of states. We began our discussion with the analysis of social reality and concluded that social reality is both objective and subjective. We also sought to understand the subjective side with the help of predominant hedonism. The assumption was that states either seek gains, avoid losses, or accept losses. And based on this analysis we introduced Table 3 which depicted the 9 different interaction situations and 17 different gains/losses scenarios that predominant hedonism makes possible between state actors.

Based on this analysis we can conclude that human nature is neither good or evil, altruist or selfish, but that a number of different motives are possible. We also saw that these hedonist intentions correspond to the basic motives of fear, profit, and reputation, and to the IR paradigms of realism, liberalism, and constructivism.

Based on the above analysis we concluded that the analysis in this essay, and the consequences of adopting predominant hedonism as the basis of our understanding of human nature, leads us toward hybrid IR theory that would seek to include aspects of realism, liberalism, and constructivism. It was also suggested that this hybrid theory could take realism as a starting point. Thus, we would seek to analyze the motives of fear, profit, and reputation from a realist point of view with the help of the predominant hedonist view of human motivation in general.

The question to be asked is this: what would be the best strategy to build such a Hybrid Realism? The suggestion here is that we first outline the assumptions of general realism that are applicable to all the different middle-range theories of realism that would be based on the motives of fear, profit, and reputation, and the framework of predominant hedonism. This general realism

would be based on three assumptions. First, the focus would be on the political relations of state actors. This would delimit the boundaries of hybrid realism. Second, we would make the basic realist assumption that the international system is anarchic. And third, we would assume that human nature is predominantly hedonist.

All the other assumptions and middle-range theories would have to be compatible with these three assumptions. The third assumption about human motivation would ensure that the subjective side of social reality would be taken into account, while the focus on states and anarchy would focus on the objective side of social reality. We need to bring back the human factor into the analysis, and predominant hedonism is the assumption that is needed to enable this.

And finally, this hybrid realism would embrace multiple methodologies. Both positivistic and interpretative methods would be warranted depending on the research question. However, the analysis of the subjective side of social reality could be primarily based on historical case study analyses. The analysis of the determinants of state behavior as depicted in Figure 1 would especially have to be based on the case study method because there are potentially so many variables that influence the decisions of the DMU. The object of such an analysis would not be to make predictions but to understand state behavior and interaction in general.

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