
Ruggie summarizes certain elements of Waltz’s social theory, which he views in light if Durkheim’s theory, and then criticizes it for being too static. He acknowledges the need to have a theory involving the system (a “totality formed by the union of parts, a totality enjoying a ‘specific reality which has it’s own characteristics’” (133-4, citing Durkheim)), as it constrains the behavior of the parts/states (135). However, he accuses Waltz of turning the methodological principle of theorizing at the system-level into an ontological principle (151).

Waltz’s concept of political structure, inspired from Durkheim’s, consists of three analytical concepts (134):

- a) The organizational principle: anarchy vs. hierarchy
- b) The differentiation of the units (see below (##))
- c) The distribution of capabilities (bipolarity, multipolarity, unipolarity; and corresponding levels of power (in relative terms)).

These concepts must be seen as constituting a “generative structure”: they provide three levels of foundations which determine (enable) how international politics will be practiced. a) comes first and, when realized as anarchy, makes b) relevant, which determines how c) will be relevant. a) and b) give rise to realpolitik and balancing; c) determines what alliances are possible.

(re:##) In part V, Ruggie criticizes Waltz for taking “differentiation” to mean “differences”. Waltz says that differences between units (states) that would be relevant for international politics disappear by a process of selection and imitation, and only relative power ultimately differentiates units. Ruggie says that “differentiation” should refer to the “principles on the basis of which the constituent units are separated from one another.” (142).

The modern international system is based on a principle of differentiation characterized by the concepts of property rights and sovereignty. Those concepts are deeply embedded in our institutions and without them international politics would not be what they are (see p145 last paragraph). The “invention” of those concepts marked an axial shift from medieval feudal to modern inter-national international politics. (see p144 first full paragraph!).

“When the concept of ‘differentiation’ is properly defined, the second structural level of Waltz’s model does not drop out. It stays in and serves to depict the kind of institutional transformation illustrated by the shift from the medieval to the modern international system; by extension of the argument, it serves as a dimension of possible future transformation, from the modern to a postmodern international system.” (146)

Finally, the Durkheimian concept of dynamic density (“the quantity, velocity, and diversity of transactions that go on [between units]” (148)), which is also determinate of change (think of how globalization can be neatly interpreted as an increase in dynamic density and how it affects international politics (i.e. think of the literature on security communities)), is ignored by Waltz and reinstated by Ruggie.

Critique: Waltz agrees with the empirical implications of much of Ruggie’s arguments. However, Waltz’s theory is interested in systemic phenomena, whereas Ruggie describes phenomena based in unit-level processes. Waltz can thus be seen as bracketing the variable of differentiation as it is described by Ruggie.