

2 CHAPTER

Theory of Idealism

Core thinkers: Woodrow Wilson, Hugo Grotius, Gautam Buddha, Mozi, Emmanuel Kant, Dante Alighieri

After reading the chapter, the reader will be able to develop an analytical understanding on the following:

- Assumptions of Human Behaviour
- Foundations of Idealism in International Relations
- Origin of School of Idealism
- Core Principles and Forms
- Criticism of the school

ASSUMPTIONS OF HUMAN BEHAVIOUR

Man has a nature which is inherently good. His behaviour is to strive for the goodness of the self and of others. Man displays a bad behaviour due to inherent flaws in the environment surrounding him. Therefore, man's behaviour may be altered if the environment is successfully modified. If man faces conflict, he will resolve it through cooperation.

FOUNDATIONS OF IDEALISM IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

If we try to apply the idea of human behaviour as explained above in the field of IR, then the theory of Idealism emerges as follows: states at the international level strive for peace and believe that peace can be achieved through cooperation. States do not prefer war as an outcome of conflict since war is perceived as harmful and irrational as a tool for conflict resolution. The reason of war is lack of understanding amongst states of each other's interests. If each state is able to understand the interests of the other state and accommodate those interests in the interest of resolving conflicts amicably, then all states will be able to cooperate and maintain peace within the international system.

ORIGINS OF IDEALISM

In the previous part of the book, we have already noted how the balance of power and its maintenance ultimately led to the outbreak of World War I. As the states resorted to alliance formations, it increased competition amongst the states, ultimately leading to WW-I. The establishment of the League of Nations as an international body post the Treaty of Versailles 1919 brought some semblance of stability in the system. The idea of League of Nations emerged out of fourteen points of Wilson which had envisaged not only

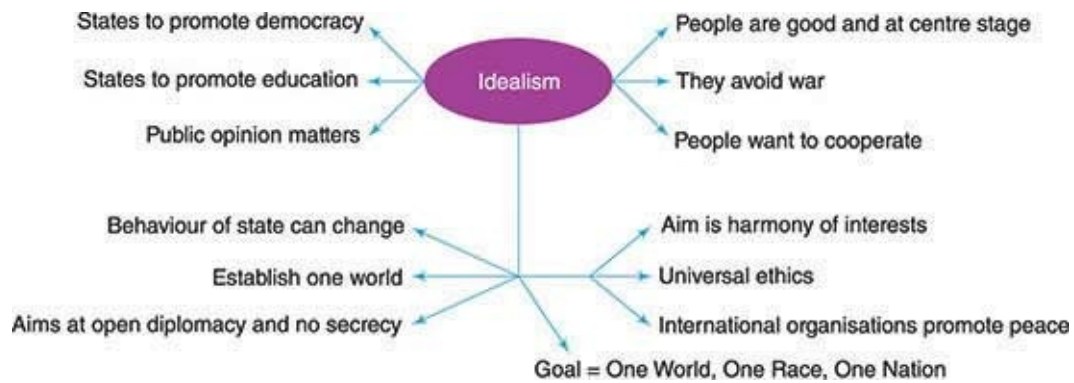
the establishment of an international body to ensure abstinence from wars in the future, but had also emphasised upon the need for behavioural modification on the part of the states to promote peace and harmony. Many scholars branded Wilson's proposals as 'idealistic'. This school emerged from the ruins of WW-I. Before proceeding further, it will be important to note that idealism is not a fully accepted tradition in IR as scholars have never worked consistently to develop it as a proper school of thought. Scholars have propagated various ideas and views have been built upon the ideas advocated. Thus, some scholars often refuse to provide idealism a philosophical tag of a 'school' in IR.

CORE PRINCIPLES AND FORMS

Idealism can be read as a policy prescription with faith in human reasoning. It tries and envisages a world which ought to be a better place in the future. It prescribes suggestions to envisage the world as the scholars see it. It promotes a set of universal ethics with an intention to establish the idea of 'one world' throughout the entire scheme of things, with the global citizenry taking centre stage in that thought. For the idealists, there is a firm belief that people will always cooperate to achieve harmony rather than opt for war or conflict. People have an ability to think, but they shall exercise their rational faculties only when states promote education. It prescribes that leaders of the states should promote education in the country since the more people are educated in a state, the more they shall exert control over their leaders so as to ensure peace. Thus, not only is education important, but public opinion in the decision making is also deemed to be paramount. The public opinion is better informed if the public is provided access to education. The idealists are also of the view that international organisations play a very crucial role in global harmony and that is why they put a lot of emphasis on such bodies.

One form of Idealism is known as Pacifism. Pacifists are those who emphasise upon human reason, morality and advocate promotion of democracy and public opinion in decision making. They press for a greater role of morality in the dealing and resolution of international affairs. Another group is called Globalists. The Globalists' philosophy also revolves around human reasoning and emphasis on democracy and public opinion, but what sets them apart is their emphasis on harmony of interests and universal ethics. One commonality between Pacifists and Globalists is that both perceive war as exceedingly harmful and contrary to human interest. In another form called Classical Liberalism, we find war branded as irrational, along with an emphasis on capitalism and an advocacy of idea that some greed is good. A summary in the table below gives a clear picture of the similarities and differences in the various streams of Idealism while the subsequent diagram captures the Idealist thought.

Form	Human Reason	Morality	Harmony of Interests	Public Opinion	Democracy	War	Capitalism	Universal Ethics
Pacifists	✓	✓	—	✓	✓	Bad	—	—
Globalists	✓	—	✓	✓	✓	Bad	—	✓
Classical Liberalism	✓	—	Some greed is good	✓	✓	Irrational	✓	✓



CRITICISM OF THE SCHOOL

A subsequent school of political thought that rose up called Realists termed these inter-war scholars 'Idealists'. Realism as a school emerged after the failure of the League of Nations to prevent the outbreak of WW-II. Scholars heavily criticised these inter-war scholars for fantasising about a world that ought to be than accepting the world as it is. The scholar EH Carr, a Realist, called the Idealists Utopians and their phenomenon of study as one emphasising upon Utopianism. EH Carr says that these scholars neglected the role of power and IR is all about power politics. Power, as per EH Carr, is a constant which cannot be eliminated from statecraft. Others also criticised Idealists by advancing the notion that if harmony was the core focus, then the League should have been able to prevent the outbreak of WW-II. Scholars have branded Idealists as scholars who overestimated the role of morality in IR and neglected the role of power as an instrument in state politics.