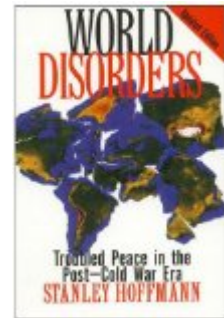


Stanley Hoffmann. *World Disorders: Troubled Peace in the Post-Cold War Era*. Lanham, Maryland and Oxford, England: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998. vii + 279 pp. \$29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8476-8574-5.

Reviewed by Allyson Ford (Department of Political Science, Columbia University.)  
Published on H-Diplo (June, 2000)



## Beyond the Bleeding Heart: Liberalism in International Relations

In *World Disorders: Troubled Peace in the Post-Cold War Era*, Stanley Hoffmann provides a revival for liberal international relations theory. In this book the reader will find a sophisticated defense of liberal internationalism, a probing attempt to define a post-Cold War role for the United States, and a nuanced discussion of the problem of nationalism. This collection of previously published essays focuses on two new challenges for American foreign policy makers. One is the pressure on the Westphalian international system, in which states have the power and the right to control the governance of their internal affairs without the interference of others, from both above and below the level of states. Hoffmann argues that we are in a post-Westphalian international system, in which three levels of international politics exist: the globalized level, the level of states, and the level of peoples. More than ever before, the concept of state sovereignty does not fully explain how international politics works. Related to this, the second challenge is the coincidence of both integration and fragmentation in the international system. Hoffmann convincingly argues that the social science approach to studying these issues is too remote and abstract to be useful: instead, he calls for what he describes as a traditional approach to the study of world politics. "Instead of predictions, we can offer scenarios." (p. 8) Hoffmann's approach to the study of international politics is to list conditions that are likely to promote peace and security, rather than look at causal variables in isolation from their context. This makes his book useful not only for political scientists but also for a wide audience of people who are

interested in understanding the patterns of world politics.

The book is divided into three sections. The first section, "Theorists and Theories," brings ideas and normative considerations back to liberal internationalism. He argues that material conditions and external pressures do not fully compel state behavior: it is therefore both possible and necessary for IR theorists to construct a moral guideline for the conduct of international politics. In Chapter Two, Hoffmann reviews the work of Hedley Bull, who is known for his work on the international society. Bull differentiated between the international system (which refers to contact between states, the impact of one state on another, and the difference between the intention of the actors and the results of their actions), and the international society (by which he meant the common interests, values, rules, and normative framework for international politics.) He was no starry-eyed idealist: Hoffmann shows that in his writings on arms control, Bull was very cynical about the potential for arms control to prevent international conflict. At the same time, Bull argued that Realpolitik alone did not fully explain international politics, and that to do so, one must look at the international society as well as at the international system. Although Hoffmann admires Bull's work, he rightly critiques it on the grounds that Bull neglected to explain how much of an international society was likely to develop in an anarchic international system that makes cooperation difficult, particularly in security affairs.

In Chapter Three, Hoffman critiques John Rawls's attempt to create a theoretical framework for the construction of a well-ordered and just international society. Rawls had hoped to develop an ideal theory that could be used to evaluate the existing international system and then shape the scope and direction of international reform.[1] Rawls also attempted to devise his principles in such a way as to make them acceptable in a multicultural world. Generally, he tried to "reconcile a pluralism of reasonable conceptions of the good (for instance, different beliefs about the role of religion in society) with a single political conception of justice." (p. 38) Hoffmann notes three problems with Rawls's theories: first, it is not clear that a social contract would be helpful to guide behavior in international politics. Given that states are often in conflict with the people they govern, it is unclear who would be the parties to the contract. A second and related problem is that this framework neglects the promotion of human rights, which Hoffmann views as a universal concern. Finally, most of the problems in international affairs are the concern of non-ideal theory, such as the question of how to get international order in real-world conditions: it is unclear how helpful Rawls' use of ideal theory is for this purpose. Hoffmann provides an alternative normative guideline, which is a combination of Kant's ideas about natural law (but without Kant's faith in the abilities of human reason to promote peace) and Judith Sklar's concept of "liberation from fear," the idea that everyone, regardless of their culture, can agree that there is only one ultimate evil, cruelty and the fear it unleashes. By this, Hoffmann argues that one can avoid the twin evils of cultural imperialism and cultural relevance, and a universal normative guideline is possible.

In Chapter Four Hoffmann further develops his liberal theory of international relations that is intended both to analyze the international system and find ways to change and improve it. He argues that neoliberal institutionalism is flawed because it neglects ideational factors in world politics and focuses on international organizations and narrow conceptions of cooperation and defection. Meanwhile, neorealism is flawed because it ignores domestic politics and transnational actors. In Hoffmann's theoretical framework, the "post-Westphalian" international system requires a synthesis of the insights of both liberals and realists, one that recognizes both the opportunities and constraints on the ability of actors to promote a stable world order, which he explains more fully in the next chapter.

In Chapter Five, "The Crisis of Liberal Internationalism," Hoffmann asks why the Clinton administration

has demonstrated more pragmatism than Wilsonianism in its foreign policy. He argues that this is not due to any of Clinton's personal failings, but instead is traceable to the problems of liberalism itself. One problem is that liberals have supported the spread of democracy, on the grounds that this will promote greater peace, but as Hoffmann notes, they have been deeply divided on the question of whether this legitimates military interventions for this purpose. Liberalism also both promotes the idea of national self determination and relies on the power of human rationality. The problem here, as Hoffmann notes, is that this assumes that these two good things come together, which is rarely the case. Finally, liberals have traditionally feared granting too much power to a government: however, the problem in international politics is the disintegration of state power, which makes it difficult to obtain the cooperation liberals seek. Hoffmann asserts that liberalism requires a set of clear principles, and that it needs to limit and qualify the norms of both sovereignty and national self determination, while including human rights. His combination of the ideas of Kant and Sklar is intended to create these principles. While Hoffman's efforts raise many questions regarding the practicality of how to apply these ideas in international politics, his reconstruction of liberal internationalism nevertheless provides a specification of state interests that could serve as a useful guide to policymakers.

The second section of the book looks at the American search for a new world order after 1989. Chapters Six through Eleven discuss what America's role in the world should be, given Hoffmann's view that the United States can neither isolate itself from, nor unilaterally direct, world politics. Hoffmann argues in this section that the best way to cope with new threats is for the United States to play a leading role in world politics, but to do so multilaterally. In Hoffmann's words, America "can still lead...but we can no longer rule." (p. 96). As he explains in Chapter Seven, the limits of American power stem not from a decline in material resources or an imperial overstretch, but in its neglect of the domestic components of power: low savings rates, poor technical education, business leaders' obsession with short term gains, insufficient productive investments, and resistance to taxation all weaken the ability of the United States to act unilaterally. For Hoffmann, a global world order would require the suppression of both regional or global threats to security and large-scale human rights abuses. He repeatedly notes, however, that small steps may be all that can be done to promote world order, since international institutions are largely set up for a state system and have dif-

faculty coping with threats from the global or individual levels of world politics.

In Chapter Ten, Hoffmann reprints his 1996 Foreign Affairs article "In Defense of Mother Teresa," in which he argues against a foreign policy purely based on material interests. As he rightly argues, interests and values ultimately are not separable. Echoing Arnold Wolfers, Hoffmann reminds the reader that great powers have an interest in a stable world order: this goes beyond a mere concern for the security of their borders. The definition of the national interest is an ambiguous construct, not a self-evident imperative.[2] Since the world is interdependent, many internal problems in small, weak states will affect the United States. As Hoffmann concludes, "certain levels and kinds of distress are morally unacceptable and certain political, economic, and social breakdowns too dangerous to world order to be ignored." (p. 151). Chapter Eleven outlines two criteria for when outsiders should intervene in internal conflicts: when such conflicts threaten to cause regional instability, or if they result in massive human rights violations. Hoffmann recommends that intervention be undertaken by either multilateral organizations or by one state with the approval of the UN Security Council. The goal of intervention should not be limited to peace enforcement, but should include the provision of a solution to political disputes. Chapter Twelve looks at the United Nations, and argues that the distinction between international and domestic turmoil prevents it from acting effectively to reduce violent conflict.

The third section of the book, "Ethnicity, Nationalism, and World Order," focuses on the problem of nationalism. This is a very timely subject, and Hoffmann's discussion sheds much light on the matter. Hoffmann asserts that the study of nationalism does not lend itself to general theories, grand testable hypotheses, structural analyses, and quantifiable results. Instead, "a satisfactory study of national consciousness would require a far deeper look into the minds of people in a variety of social groups and settings and into the ways in which highbrow intellectuals, popular culture, the media, the economic elites, and the politicians who pull all the levers of power inculcate such consciousness into citizens—or even...turn subjects into citizens of a nation." (p. 199). Nationalism in Hoffmann's discussion is an ideology, one that gives people a secular community to which they pledge their allegiance. While some forms of nationalism are compatible with liberal internationalism, many are not: furthermore, many nationalist movements are a threat to world order. Hoffmann's solution is to develop mech-

anisms in international governance to prevent and settle ethnic conflicts: he argues in favor of standing forces for international and regional organizations. Hoffmann also suggests limiting and qualifying the norms of state sovereignty by subjecting such sovereignty to the authority of international and regional organizations. More optimistically, Hoffmann notes that the best case solution would be a gradual decline in the importance of nationalities: perhaps this could come about by encouraging the development of multiple and overlapping identities. In Chapter Sixteen Hoffmann pauses to consider whether America's national cohesion is at a dangerously low level, and he argues that the real problem is not national unity, but the inability of leaders to confront domestic political problems such as the creation of the underclass. In the concluding chapter Hoffmann notes that political life is the ceaseless process of accommodation among individual rights and duties, the rights and duties of groups within a nation, those of the national group, and those of the state. In his variety of liberalism, states do not exist purely for the protection of private lives from international anarchy: rather, they also have the positive purpose of uniting people to achieve common purposes. This is what makes a liberal internationalist theory possible.

Overall, this book is outstanding. However, there are some small flaws, including Hoffman's criticism of neorealism: he states that it is flawed because it neglects the role of domestic politics in setting foreign policy. However, as Ken Waltz explicitly states, neorealism is not a theory of foreign policy: it is intended to examine the interactions of states on a systemic level.[3] It is also unclear why Hoffmann devotes his attention to the United Nations as a provider of world order while ignoring the potential of other organizations such as NATO. Regrettably, Hoffmann chose to leave out of this collection his essays on the Bosnian crisis, but it can be argued that NATO was ultimately more effective than the UN at imposing order in the Balkans. Also, although Hoffmann has made some progress in determining criteria for when outsiders should intervene in internal conflicts, there is still room to debate the exact meaning of "massive human rights violations" or "regional instability"; it was not at all clear to observers of the Bosnian affair whether this conflict would promote greater regional stability or instability. Some further development of these key concepts would make Hoffmann's case stronger.

More generally, while Hoffmann's treatment of liberalism and his discussion of international relations theories are very sophisticated, his silence on constructivism

is puzzling. Hoffman does not discuss constructivism in any of these chapters—an odd omission, since many constructivists share Hoffmann’s skepticism about an overly scientific approach to the study of international politics, his recognition of the importance of ideas in shaping state interests and world affairs, and his emphasis on the development of a normative framework. Hoffmann’s views in fact seem to be much closer to those of constructivists than to liberals, and the book would have been even stronger had he included a discussion of constructivism in the development of his liberal internationalism.[4]

These problems notwithstanding, Stanley Hoffmann has written a thought-provoking and illuminating book that has much to offer students of international politics.

#### Notes

[1]. From this ideal theory, one can construct a social contract for actors in world politics, which would sustain a set of principles of justice that would then be applied to political, social, and economic institutions of society. See, for example, John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993) and Rawls, “The Law of Peoples,” in Stephen Shute and Susan Hurley, editors, *On Human Rights* (New York: Ba-

sic Books, 1993).

[2]. Arnold Wolfers, *Discord and Collaboration* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962).

[3]. Kenneth N. Waltz, “International Politics is not Foreign Policy,” *Security Studies*, vol. 6, no. 1, 1997, pp. 54-57.

[4]. Good discussions of constructivism in international relations include Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (New York and Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Cecelia Lynch, *Beyond Appeasement: Interpreting Interwar Peace Movements in World Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999); John Gerard Ruggie, *Constructing the World Polity: Essays on International Institutionalization* (New York and London, England: Routledge, 1998); Yosef Lapid and Friedrich Kratochwil, eds., *The Return of Culture and Identity in IR Theory* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1996); Peter Katzenstein, ed., *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

Copyright (c) 2000 by H-Net, all rights reserved. This work may be copied for non-profit educational use if proper credit is given to the author and the list. For other permission, please contact H-Net@h-net.msu.edu.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-diplo>

**Citation:** Allyson Ford. Review of Hoffmann, Stanley, *World Disorders: Troubled Peace in the Post-Cold War Era*. H-Diplo, H-Net Reviews. June, 2000.

**URL:** <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=4182>

Copyright © 2000 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at [hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu](mailto:hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu).