Liberalism Vs. Realism Essay, Research Paper

International relations are tricky at best and disastrous at worst. Innocent mistakes brought about by cultural differences can sometimes have unexpected consequences. In the Liberalism vs. Realism debate, I m sitting firmly over here on the left. I think people should be more important than money, and I think America needs to remain aware of, and engaged, in the global community.

I define myself as a Liberal, and to me that means that in general, I am more concerned with human rights, human potential, international cooperation and a just society than I am with monetary gain. I see government as neither adversary nor oppressor, but as a partner that can, indeed must, provide services that people and the private sector cannot provide for themselves.

Realism, as I understand it, is exactly what its name implies: a way of looking at the world without rose colored glasses , of seeing things exactly as they are. In this regard at least, the two schools of thoughts are in conflict, since most Liberals are admittedly more than willing to overlook people s faults and failings if the end result is a more harmonious relationship; realists would not allow such generosity.

In the international arena, Liberalism encourages a global community; Realism is likely to pull back from any such commitment until its adherents can clearly see what s in it for them.

I believe the basic problem of international affairs is the potential for innocent misunderstanding; the so-called culture clash . I realize this is a glimpse of the blindingly obvious, but I don t think we can afford to minimize it. There have been far too many stories of Americans failing to complete business transactions because our brusque, to-the-point style of business offended the other party. If we consider this type of thing multiplied by the difficulties of two governments interacting successfully, it is easy to see why international affairs is such a difficult subject.

In my view, it is of paramount importance to understand and respect the other persons viewpoint, even if I don t agree with it. Liberalism does tend to teach the idea that every person has intrinsic worth, and that we have no moral imperative to impose our viewpoint on others.

Realism, on the other hand, tends to see international relations in terms of the state, not individuals. It also suggests that the state will act in its own best interests.

I believe that international structure refers to the means by which we remain in contact with each other around the globe. This includes a worldwide communication system, a worldwide transportation system, a worldwide distribution network, a worldwide manufacturing network, whereby workers in one country work for employers in another, and of course the intricate policy structures that are in place between nations, both economically and diplomatically.

In my opinion, the more we know about each other and the more open we are, the better off we will be. The international structure, which is rapidly bringing us closer, is a good thing.

The key actor in any international scenario is the United States. When America sneezes, the world catches a cold. Other economies that are extremely strong include, as always, Germany and Japan, despite a crippling recession. The emerging Chinese economy is going to play a huge part in the markets of the Pacific Rim, while the European Union, though still experiencing growing pains, will eventually become a sound and extremely competitive entity. Russia and the other states that made up the Soviet Union, when they succeed in their efforts to transition to a free-market economy, will be a powerhouse. They have the population and the expertise to become, once again, a superpower. I believe that these economies will grow strong and become important in the world market because it simply makes more sense for countries to try to improve their trade relations than it does for them to try to become entirely self-contained and self-sufficient.

Unfortunately, I see the primary motivating factors in international relations as being related either to profits or national security. I am of the opinion that American corporations are out of control, and should not be allowed to continue their current rampage for profits.

The world has never been a stable place, but the overt threats represented by men like Hitler and Stalin no longer exist. The so-called evil empire fell in 1989, and the U.S. is sort of scratching around looking for an enemy, but even though we have dismantled many of our weapons and reduced the size of our armed forces, the U.S. is still the major power in the world. We have little or nothing to fear, so our role in international relations is no longer as a military power, but an economic one. I believe that it is always possible to manufacture a threat, because isolationism is a strong trait in the American national character. We are reluctant to get involved in foreign entanglements . However, I believe that the best deterrent we can possibly have to war is not some pie-in-the-sky Star Wars defense, but a solid, working knowledge of other cultures. When we know someone, they become real, not a boogeyman to frighten us into military action. Unfortunately, I also believe that American corporations are rapacious, enriching their executives and stockholders at the expense of the workers. I think this trend of rewarding the bosses, and thus continuing the transfer of wealth from the poor to the rich, will eventually undermine the stability of American business. It is this, rather than any foreign military action, which may spell problems for the United States.

I think a full-scale global war is unlikely, though using U.S. troops as peacekeepers, or intervening in situations that seem to demand action, such as Bosnia, will continue to be a problem for the U.S. In the years since the end of WWII, we have seen numerous smaller conflicts break out: Korea, Vietnam, the Falklands, Somalia, and so on. I think these brush fire wars are the most likely type of conflict we will face in future.

I think cooperation is much more likely than war. Cooperation among nations brings prosperity to all, as markets open and companies are able to sell their goods in a larger venue. I also believe that as trade opens and income rises, many of our problems will disappear; for we will see each other as people, not abstract icons of terrifying strangeness.

I truly think that much of our distress comes from the fact that many people live in poverty, or struggle desperately to stay above the poverty line. If there were a more equitable distribution of wealth, I think many of the problems we face today would simply disappear. Poor and desperate people are often the first to fall victim to any demagogue promising relief and as an advocate of Liberalism, I would like to see people who work hard rewarded for their efforts, rather than being told they have to give up a raise if they want medical coverage, while the boss votes himself a bonus.

In the view of a Realist, the state is the primary instrument of power. It can be depended upon to make rational decisions in its own best interest, though it will use force if necessary.

In my view, the instruments of power are the people, not the state and the rights of the individual should always be paramount.

International affairs is a difficult field, and once which I believe demands a Liberal approach. The Realists, with their clear sight and hardheaded business approach, seem to me to be exactly what we do not need in today s strained international climate.