

Title: Psychological Realism International Relations

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Speaker:

Name not given

So yeah I was here, the last time I was here I guess 23 years ago, 24 or 23½, was the night that Bill Clinton was elected in the United States. I remember I was staying with a friend in a dormitory down I guess in this vale area, this is the best of my recognition or remembrance and I remember staying up all night listening to BBC call the election, but it's been a long time since then!

Anyways, thanks very much for coming, thanks for Nick for being willing to set this up, last minute I kind of gave him very little notice, I said I was going to be in the UK and I was thinking of coming to Birmingham and could he set up a talk and he very hospitably did so.

So the motivating question of the talk in this portion of the book is essentially what is realpolitik and how come is it, it's part of a broader book on rationality in international relations, but also non-rational ways of thinking among foreign policy decision makers.

So we spent a lot of time of course in international relations discussing realist theory and not very much at all about discussing realist practice. So what do we mean by realpolitik? It's actually something that you have a hard time

finding if you peruse the various realist theories of the last couple of decades, Waltz, Mearsheimer, Waltz, whoever you want to talk about.

So what is realpolitik? It could be that it's just simply following the dictates of realist theory but of course neorealist theory, the structuralist theory tells us that the systemic constraint of anarchy, right, does not determine state behaviour as ante but rather punishes or rewards it, exposed, and spends therefore basically no time on what exactly realpolitik is, right. In Waltz's famous terms, realpolitik I guess could be considered foreign policy and therefore kind of outside the purview of this theory.

So therefore really if we really want to know what realpolitik is we have to go back into so called classical realist theory which of course I guess is just anything before 1979 I guess. And what that tells is that realpolitik is the pursuit of egoistic interests under structural constraints. So in other words though, realpolitik is instrumental rationality. The very definition of instrumental rationality is the efficient pursuit of interests given one's environment or obstacles.

Now it might seem trite but classical realism tells us that instrumental rationality of this type requires rational thought. What is known in other literatures as procedural rationality, which differs from instrumental rationality. Instrumental rationality is the pursuit of interest given obstacles, procedure rationality is marked by a particular way of thinking, right, marked by I think two features. Objectivity, or at least approximate [3.14] or an approximation of, as well as deliberation. So instrumental rationality is the sense where the use of rational thought to get what one wants, putting that rationality to use as an instrument.

But of course rational thought can be used for all kinds of other purposes, to consider the nature of the universe, right, it isn't always put to use to secure one's interest however that might be defined. So when you look through this classical realist literature, particularly through the modern lens, through one

has experienced, gone through this kind of structural revolution in realist theory, we see some striking things and one of them is that *realpolitik* in classical realist tradition or in that literature, it's highly psychological, it's predicated on a particular cognitive style. This is very striking because the structural realist term told us for all these years don't worry about decision making, don't worry about foreign policy, don't worry about domestic politics.

And there's also another kind of striking observation or something that pops out at you which is that we should not take rational thought and therefore *realpolitik* for granted and that's another way of saying classical realism is more prescriptive than it is descriptive, it's telling us what to do rather than describing what is. It tells us we should only really expect *realpolitik* from those who have a rational cognitive style or better said, we expect to see a relatively more realistic foreign policy from those who are relatively more rational in their thinking and relatively more egoistic in their foreign policy preferences.

And a case I want to make to you today is that combination actually. One of the takeaways from the talk is that combination is quite rare. Rarer than we might think and I think that it's certainly rarer than we might think if we identify as realists. And I try to bring this home through a kind of detailed study of the case of Bismark, who of course is the *realpolitik* or the realist par excellence.

So let's start with defining *realpolitik* using realist theory, particularly its classical variant. Like I said, the pursuit of egoistic interest in light of constraints using rational thought, OK. Well the assumption of state egoism in foreign policy terms at least, right, shouldn't as a core element, a constitutional element of *realpolitik* I don't think should be controversial. It's of course sometimes really difficult to determine just how we define egoism though. We maximise some things but self interested, well what is that power, glory, security, all of these things of course could enter into that equation and I'm not going to try to definitively say it should be one or the

other or all. In fact, just the point of different emphases by different realist scholars historically.

My point is we can relatively easily, despite this variation, distinguish egoism from a more what I would call pro social set of preferences, what's good not just for the state or for the nation or for the country as compared but also that would be egoism as compared to what's good for the community of democracies or the catholic church or international communism or human rights or I should say cosmopolitan sense of human rights. There are plenty of other preference functions if want to use that term, right, that are not so egoistic, there's all kinds of variation of egoism empirically international relations.

So I won't belabour this particular point, what I want to focus more is that realism is the maximisation of egoistic interest in light of structural constraints. And all realists, not just systemic realists, not just the neorealist, stress constraints. And here I'm drawing from a really excellent article by two authors, [7.15] and Baron entitled Elder Abuse in which they show that the classical realists are just as interested in structure as the modern neorealist, they just use different terms. Things like necessity and here's a quote from [], he writes of the 'environment of the state, this is the situation of constraint in which the state finds itself in the face of threats either from within or without and which forces it to adopt defensive and offensive measures of a quite specific kind', right, so this essentially just what neorealists are talking about.

The most important constraint of course to all realists is the distribution in power and I'll come back to that later.

So when we combine this pursuit of egoistic interest in an environment that constraints, we have instrumental rationality, in fact it's the very definition of instrumental rationality. This of course explains the realist focus, or I should say the classical realist focus, on concepts such as prudence and pragmatism

and doing the best one can, one cannot have it all, one must be realistic, adopt one's interests to one's constraints.

Now the classical realist identify a psychological precondition for behaving in such a manner, rational thinking, which has two core elements, objectivity and deliberation, those are the elements of what I call procedural rationality, right, which is necessary conditioned or a necessary condition for instrumental rationality. And we see this objectivity and deliberation all over the place in classic realist thought, I'll just give you a couple of quotes. 'Political realism wants the photographic picture of the political world to resemble as much as possible its painted portrait', this is Morgan Dow, Carr says the realist will 'embark on that hard, ruthless analysis of reality which is the hallmark of science', right.

And this of course means accepting the hard truth that one cannot have it all. It's about avoiding wishful thinking and of course this is very clear in the very famous book by E H Carr, *The 20 Years Crisis*, which of course juxtaposed the realist to the utopian. The utopian is the one who believes what one wants as opposed to what is.

Now there's all, if you read through this, it's very striking or it's really hard to miss, although a lot of people have I guess, the psychological character of these writings, right. So here's Morgan Dow again 'the insight and the wisdom of the statesman gauge accurately the distribution and relative strength of opposing forces'. Right, so he's talking about the distribution of power as a constraint, right, but he's also saying that you need a particular rational thinking style to do that.

[Mynica 9.50] writes of the intelligence of the state, right, the statesman in power, it has to discern the right course, etc. So we see this all over the place. I'm happy to share a draft of the paper if you want more evidence of this. What we also though see is this all deeply prescriptive, so not only does realpolitik require rational thinking, we can't take this for granted. So here

again, Morgan Dow, 'we cannot conclude from the good intentions of a statesman that his foreign policy will be either morally phrase worthy or politically successful, it stands to reason that not all foreign policies have always followed so rational objective in unemotional a course'.

In fact, it might be quite rare, the exception than the rule here is again Morgan Dow, 'political realism presents the theoretical construct of a rational foreign policy which experience can never completely achieve', right, he's aware that 'actual foreign policy does not or cannot live up to the demands that he himself has set' and I think this is kind of amazing, given the way we kind of think about realism, I guess especially since the structural term.

So the second part of the paper after going through the kind of core or making those two observations about classical realist theory that might strike some of us in the modern day as, well it might strike us as surprising, the second part is to show the resemblance between these classical realist insights and the modern cognitive psychology on rationality. So it's become commonplace in psychology to differentiate between two decision making systems, right. These are so called dual processing accounts of judgement.

So we have on the one hand system one processing, this is the kind of thinking that we that's automatic, intuitive, unconscious, reflexive and impulsive, right, in fact in some ways it's not thinking at all because it's not self conscious or deliberative. And this is thought to be the system that guides us in most of our daily lives, right, those are the vast majority of our decision making can be traced back to this system one processing. And it's only infrequently overridden by our so called second system, our system two, and this is what we tend to think of as rational thought. This system is deliberative, it's effortful, meaning we have to make an effort to do it, it doesn't come naturally, it's reflective, systematic, analytic, conscious and explicit.

It's sometimes considered a hot system, sorry a cold system as opposed to the system one processing which is described as hot and more emotional in

character and this fits our commonsensical understandings of cognition and rationality as being unemotional.

System two processing requires both objectivity and deliberation and not coincidentally these elements, there are those two attributes are opposed to, that the two phenomenon of which critics of rational choice make such frequent use. Biases and heuristics respectively, right. So the rational thinker is one who tries to develop the most accurate understanding of the world around him, that's another way of saying he's free of bias, right. And instead of relying on intuitions or shortcuts, heuristics, the rational thinker employs careful deliberation, right.

So the biases and heuristics or heuristics and biases literature are just so commonplace now in psychology, right, basically says that people don't act rationally very often and what that means is they don't deliberate very hard and they don't perceive things objectively.

Now what else does psychological research tell us? Well it tells us that individuals vary in degree to which they are guided by system two processing. This is particularly the work of Stanovich and West. The original heuristics and biases literature essentially was meant as a broad-brush to say that human beings aren't nearly as rational as we would like them or think that they are and the Stanovich and West contribution has been to say yes that's probably true but there is substantial variation.

So researchers find a lot of variation in what's called epistemic motivation. Essentially our commitment to thinking rationally, which as I have noted, requires a kind of conscious effort on our part, right, precisely because our automatic default mechanism, right, is to make intuitive quick and rapid judgements without a lot of deliberation.

So a number of studies have actually shown that procedural rationality of the kind exhibited by those who had this so called epistemic motivation is actually

a pre-condition for instrumentally rational behaviour, right. So for instance, a lot of these studies who that if we look and if we ask people how they would describe their own thinking style and we find that those who describe their thinking as more cognitive deliberative marked by system two what we would call procedurally rational thought, they tend to avoid the heuristics and biases that we find so commonplace amongst people in the aggregate, right.

Actually I have a forthcoming piece in which a colleague and I arranged a laboratory experiment of undergrads, asked them essentially both how egoistic they would describe themselves as well as how rational their thought process was, although we didn't call it that, and found that those who described themselves as [15.40] and as having more rational thought process actually behaved like [] theorists expect people would in a strategic environment and the others didn't nearly perform as well if we define the standard as the equilibrium condition of a formal model.

OK. So now of course the purpose today and the purpose largely of this book is to essentially figure out is this something that can be said not just of undergraduates but also at the highest reaches of government and so the main expectation here is those who combine that egoistic orientation here were thinking in terms of their foreign policy preferences, what I want or the foreign policy I want is what is good for my state and who cares about anyone else. If you have that egoistic orientation you combine it with a rational cognitive style, you're more likely to undertake the instrumentally rational behaviours that we often see in the international relations literature and which are identified by classical realists as the prescriptively normative, if not the most empirically common types of behaviour.

So the first task in this kind of project is to measure the cognitive style of individuals, right, independent of their behaviour, in a sense measure their rational thoughts, their degree of rational thought. And so I judge in this case Bismarck along a number of markers of system two thinking self consciously

objective, deliberative rather than impulsive, conscious rather than automatic or intuitive, self consciously cool rather than emotional and hot.

And this self conscious becomes important because system two, as I mentioned before, serves as an override function over one's default judgements. That is everyone makes decisions based on system two, everyone has impulses, everyone often times acts according to intuition and the marker of the system two thinker is often to recognise that fact and work against it.

It's another way of saying though that there's no such thing as a truly rational thinker. There are only degrees to which people better approximate this ideal and I think this is a much more fruitful way of thinking about rationality than either assuming no one has it or assuming unproblematically that everyone does.

Now these are essentially, this is the measure of the so called independent variable, if that pleases you, and we want to see whether those, one combined with this egoistic preferences are associated with a set of behaviours that mark instrumental rational behaviour and here we're thinking of I think of four things in particular, there are others in the larger book I'm writing, but for this purposes we'll talk about four.

First, utility maximisation, right, pros and cons being weighed and traded off against one another. Importantly one recognises value trade offs and ranks one's preferences and sometimes makes sacrifices from some ideals, a realist would call is the vital interest for others.

Second, situational judgements rather than general rules of thumb. General rules of thumb, general principles of conduct, these are heuristics that people use to simplify their deliberative thinking making process, right. They can be, although are not always, right, symptoms or I should say the product of system one processing. As opposed to thinking very hard about a particular

decision making problem that one faces, right. When one does this, one is led naturally towards situational judgements. Decisions without any all purpose rules.

Third, long term thinking. The very definition of the logic of consequences, which is how we think about as rational thought, as instrumental rational behaviour, it's decision predicated on looking forward to what happens, judging what the long term consequences of one's actions will be and therefore sacrificing often times short term interests to secure long term goals, right. This requires of course control over one's impulses which system two provides, it's designed to provide that.

And fourth, the kind of last dependent variable, the last thing that we expect from someone who combines this egoism with this rational thought is a strategic understanding, which is to say given interdependence amongst, in this case, nation states or political units, securing what we want requires knowing what others want and what they think, right. Or at least approximating or thinking or deliberating hard about that. That of course requires seeing the world through their eyes, which is often times very difficult in adversarial relations when our wishful thinking, the way that we want to think of ourselves often does not overlap with how others think of us.

So in the paper I show that all these are evident in both the psychological literature on instrumental rational behaviour but also that classic realist literature also describes these as the good prescriptive, the rights things to do for someone who thinks rationally.

OK. So I'm going to skip over the part in which I establish Bismark's egoism, right, his national egoism, national's kind of the wrong word because of course we're talking about the very word nationalism and national is very loaded in Bismark's terms so we can think of it as state egoism or country egoism. In any case, we'll skip over the point which I establish that Bismark was a Prussian egoist, right. And we'll also skip over the part in which I show

that he's procedurally rationalist because this is pretty uncontroversial, people kind of agree about Bismark's decision making style, it's one of the least controversial aspects of the paper.

I think much more interesting is the degree, the extreme degree to which this combination isolated him from virtually all others in Prussian politics at the time. Even those Prussian conservatives whose ideology and whose preferences often times he shared. In other words, and this is the kind of inspiration for the title of the talk, is *realpolitik* was extremely rare, right. And The Prince Among Men, right, the prince of course this reference to Machiavelli by some, you know, certainly one of the first realists or one of the most famous realists, right. But often times himself making a prescriptive argument to tell the prince what to do rather than what he was already doing.

So Bismark's egoistic approach was fixated, that is the thing that he focused most on, his key egoistic goal was challenging Austrian influence in Germany, right, which in the wake of the Napoleonic wars was a set, essentially dozens of states, principalities, kingdoms, etc., loosely organised in something called the German Federation, or the Bund, which was set up, yeah in the wake of the Napoleonic wars. The Austrians led by the Habsburg Empire were the greatest obstacle to Bismark's goal of Prussian [23.05] eventually German unification under Prussian [], all other obstacles to that goal were the medium sized German states of Hanover, Saxony, Bavaria, Von Wurttemberg as well. None of them were particularly eager to live under Prussian [] in a unified Germany.

Now Bismark owed his political rise to support from the Prussian conservatives who were opposed to liberal reforms that Prussia made under the threat of revolution in 1848. However, he separated from them on foreign policy in a kind of dramatic way, particularly after his appointment as envoy to this Bund, which was based in Frankfurt.

This was Bismark's first major political appointment and when he went to the Bund he started making an argument in favour of I would say Prussianists assertion vis a vis the Austrians, right.

Now the conservatives, his patrons, feeling threatened by liberal movements that favoured national self determination and democracy, they wanted conservative solidarity and of course therefore Bismark's policy of assertion of Prussian interest vis a vis Austria threatened to undermine the conservative solidarity based on a common commitment to legitimist principle right of governance, right.

The national movements which were liberal, right, in Germany to be a liberal, to be pro-democracy, was also to believe that Germany should be unified on national terms based on a constitution that derived from the popular will as had occurred in France, right. This of course was deeply threatening to the Prussian conservatives who were not interested at all, even in a unified Germany that put the Prussian king as the emperor if that meant that his rule was predicated on the national will.

So they disliked Bismark's foreign policy agenda, Bismark called them romantic conservatives and explicitly contrasted his egoism with theirs. The only sound basis for a large state is egoism, this is the famous speech, and not romanticism. This is what distinguishes a large state from a small one, it's not worthy for a large state to fight a war, it's not in its own interests.

And so what we see here is this rationalist terminology adopted by somebody all the way back into the 1850s, right. He writes a close friend in 1861 shortly before he becomes the minister president, essentially the prime minister of Prussia 'the system of solidarity of the conservative interest of all countries is a dangerous fiction, we arrive at a point where we make the whole unhistorical guardless and lawless sovereignty swindle of the German princes into the darling of the Prussian conservative party. Our government is in fact liberal domestically and legitimist in foreign policy'.

So basically Bismark here is complaining that essentially by protecting all the German princes against the assertions are the democratic assertions of the people in those states, right, they were essentially constraining Prussians' own egoistic interest.

So now that is to say the differences between Bismark and [26.50] patrons is partially over the degree of egoism to which Prussian foreign policy, well the degree of egoism that should mark Prussian foreign policy, but we should also note here there's a stylistic difference as well, so it's both the difference between an egoistic and a more pro social broader conception of what is the Prussian national interest but it's also a stylistic difference, which is it to say, or I should say a cognitive difference that's stylistic in nature.

In many ways, Bismark [27.24] agrees with everything that the Prussian conservatives believe and want. What he does though is admit to himself that there are trade offs between what's good for legitimist principles and the very anarchical government [in a whole] and what's good for Prussia. And this is most evident in a series of exchanges he has with his political patron, someone by the name of Leopold Von Gerlach, and this was a series of exchanges that he had over Bismark's advice to the king to invite Napoleon III for a visit to Berlin so as to create maximum flexibility in foreign policy.

Basically what Bismark is that the Prussians play footsie with Napoleon, he doesn't want an alliance, right, but rather wants to convince the Austrians and the smaller German states that Prussia is capable of such an alliance, so that they can't take for granted Prussian support giving them more leverage in matters that were of most concern to Bismark, those that involved what was going on with Germany.

So of course for the Prussian conservatives, they won't even discuss this kind of visit, even though it has of course no material -, would not necessarily have any material consequences whatsoever, but merely to think about talking to

Napoleon III, right, is to give sucker to the principle of legitimists of popular rule, Napoleon III of course is a dictator but he is a dictator who ruled by virtue of the rule of the people and of course could not establish his dictatorship or his crown on the basis of aristocratic lineage and therefore is threatening to, ideologically threatening to all of the legitimist powers really the most important being the wholly alliance powers of Austria, Russia and Prussia.

So Bismark of course has the same set of preferences, has no love for democracy, in fact was brought in in 1862 despite his foreign policy reviews to crack down on the Prussian parliament which was engaged in a constitutional struggle with the Prussian monarchy and he writes to Gerlach 'the principle of the battle against the revolution I acknowledge to be mine also' meaning substantively we are agreed, 'but I do not consider it possible to carry out every principle in politics as something whose remotest consequences break through every other consideration and which forms to a certain extent the only trump suit in the game', in other words what's going on here is to some degree someone who has egoistic preferences versus those conservatives who have a large or a broader conception of Prussian interests.

But it's also we can push that point too after, it also seems what's going on here is that Bush, Bush! Why did I say that! [Laughs] Is that Bismark is engaging in a consequentialist utilitarian process of judgement that's symptomatic of his rational cognitive style and which he's weighing things against one another, he says 'there is no trump card', when there's a trump card you're making [30.41], there are certain taboos, in this case talking to Napoleon, he's saying we can't make decisions like that and we have to think about what is ultimately the lesser evil, which is a term he actually uses in these exchanges.

So bringing it to the point and basically the book is interested much more or mostly in the lead up to and the final showdown with Austria, as envoy to the Bund during the Crimean and Franco-Austrian wars of the 1850s, he advocates taking advantage of the Austrians' preoccupations. In the Crimean

war of course they're fighting Russia, in the Franco-Austrian war they're fighting Austria. In both of those cases he's basically saying what's use the fact that Austria is resource constrained and it's distracted and use that as a point of leverage so essentially we can expel them from the Bund, if not formally, at least informally, so essentially to secure Prussian, [31.52] and Germany and this is a famous quote 'great crises make the weather favourable to Prussia's expansion if we exploit them [furiously 31.58] and perhaps ruthlessly', right.

The king at this point, Frederick Wilhelm IV could not countenance such a move against a fellow monarchical power and he contrasts his approach with that of the illegitimate Bonaparte, he tells Bismark 'a man of Napoleon's sort can commit such acts of violence but not I', right. So basically the conservative solidarity is constraining the egoism of the foreign policy of the king and Bismark thinks, of course Bismark is not appointed yet as his prime minister, but Bismark thinks this is detrimental for Prussian interest.

We see the same resistance to Bismark's agenda, his advice, based on conservative solidarity when he becomes minister president in 1862 when he attempts to use the Schleswig-Holstein crisis, this is a crisis with Denmark over the fate of these two duchies, Schleswig and Holstein, Bismark wants to use this as an opportunity for [anarchisation 33.07] but of course gets nowhere with the conservatives he's actually opposed by a coalition of both conservatives and liberals, the liberals don't want [anarchisation] because they believe in the principle of national self determination and Schleswig and Holstein should become a separate country and absorbed into the German bund, right.

The conservatives believe that there's no historical claims on these duchies, so therefore Prussian [33.39] is essentially off the table. And Bismark later says one of the greatest difficulties that he faced at this time was this 'punctilious, conscientiousness and the hesitation of the old King William', this is of course the successor to Frederick Wilhelm IV, 'who never wanted to []

anything that seemed in the slightest bit unconstitutional or that was not [] with the most stringent estimation of righteousness and truth and faith'.

So here we have again an egoistic foreign policy agenda battling a conservative and more pro social one. Interestingly though, and this is how we know it's not just about a difference in preferences, that there is an important element of how these guys thought, their cognitive style.

When Prussia eventually does go to war with Austria, which occurs in 1866, the pattern completely reverses following Prussia's overwhelming success on the battlefield. This was a war that many conservatives did not want. They called it a fratricidal war, again this shows the degree to which they felt an affinity that extended beyond Prussia, that Prussia was not just -, or could not pursue a pure egoistic agenda but had to consider the interests of others that were like them, their brothers in this case.

But the Prussians' decisively defeat the Austrians, as many of you know if you know German history, at the battle of Koniggratz, which ends any chance of Austrian victory and the question then becomes how far are the Prussians going to push their mastery of the Habsburgs.

Now Bismark's rationality I argue guides him not to exploit this Prussian success as perhaps a crude understanding of realism [35.25] they would do, but rather to engage in a very strategic act of constraint. So Bismark wants to limit the war aims of the Prussians to the expulsion of the Austrians from northern and German affairs and thereby allowing the creation of a small but unified German state in northern Germany, which comes to pass, it's called the northern German federation and it lasts from 1855 til the eventual unification of Germany in 1871.

Bismark wants to restrict German aims merely to that. He does not want to make extensive [anarchisations]. The king though and the military have different plans. The king of course who had resisted this fight with Prussia's

brothers, now in the heat of the moment wants to continue the fight, he wants to seize Vienna, perhaps even march on to Hungary. Here he's thinking about essentially a collapse of the Austrian empire.

So he proposes this striking list of [anarchisations] that he wants from Austria and its allies, bohemia, Austrian [36.35], [], east Friesland, Hanover, part of Saxony in addition to Schleswig Holstein and only then Austria's expulsion from the Bund, right.

So now the king had, by all accounts, been emotionally aroused by the conflict, which is to say he's not acting based on system two thinking. And we see this most evidently in the fact, or that the consequence of this is and the most obvious is that he's [37.06] the basic tenant of all instrumentally rational thinking. He does not have consistent preferences. He doesn't want to fight the Austrians to begin with and when the war starts all of a sudden he wants to crush them.

And Bismark later pithfully says 'my greatest difficulty was first to get the king into bohemia', which is where they fought, 'and then to get him out again', right. And so in their fights about how and when to end the war, Bismark is all sober and deliberative thinking and the king is all righteous and emotional indignation. This is I think system two thinking versus system one. He writes to his wife 'if we don't exaggerate our claims and don't believe that we've conquered the world, we can arrive at a peace worth the effort but we're as quickly intoxicated as discouraged and I have the thankless task of pouring water into the effervescent wine', right.

So before the problem was we shouldn't do this and now he's saying everyone thinks we can do too much and he's worried about biting off more than he can chew. So we see this in a number of different ways and these are essentially our markers of instrumental rationality. He's concerned with the long term relations with Austria. He later writes 'it was my object in view of our subsequent relations with Austria as far as possible to avoid cause from

mortifying reminisces as it could be managed without prejudice to our German policy', right.

And basically he's described, or what he's worried about is that if he pushes it too far he'll make an enemy, a permanent enemy out of Austria, right, which will deny a possible move on the chessboard later when he might need Austria's help in future alignments of the European balance of power.

Bismark is also concerned not just about how Austria will think about this but also how other European powers will think about this, he's worried about disturbing too much the equilibrium on the continent, particularly the fear in London, Paris and Moscow. He complains again to his wife he has the responsibility of 'reminding people that we don't live alone in Europe but with three powers who hate and envious'.

William's thinking by all accounts, not just Bismark, it's emotional impulsive rather than calculating and deliberative, senior military officer writes at the time that it looks as it is point of honour, which is the [anarchisations] is the stumbling block into getting [39.35] with the Austrians. Bismark describes his efforts to get the king to listen to reason, 'I replied that we are not there to sit in judgement but to pursue the German policy, Austria's conflict and rivalry with us was no more culpable than ours with her our task was the establishment or initiation of a German national unity under the leadership of the king of Prussia'.

So what this shows is first Bismark's tremendous objectivity, right, his ability to avoid the temptation of what psychologists call 'my side bias' which is we think we're the aggrieved party, we're the good guys, they're the bad guys. Bismark is essentially saying they could have done the same thing to us, right, and we're no better than them. And in thinking about things in that way we lose our objectivity and we get emotionally aroused and push our gains too far, which are ultimately not in our long term interests.

Bismark says that Prussia must be dispassionate at this moment. He tells the king he regarded the principle retaliation as no sound basis for our policy since even where our feelings had been injured, it ought to be guided not by our own irritation, but by consideration of its object. So basically abstract a way from the short term emotional feelings, bring down the heat, think in a more cold and calculated way, right, and when one does that they're going to realise that [anarachsation] is not the way to go.

So following threats of resignation, the king finally relents after an intervention by his son, the crown prince, and he does so by writing Bismark a nasty note, he writes 'inasmuch as my minister president has left me in the lurch in the face of the enemy, I find myself reluctantly compelled after such brilliant victories on the part of the army to bite this sour apple and accept so disgraceful a piece'.

So of course the sour apple is the perfect metaphor for realpolitik, right, because realpolitik is about seeing things realistically and recognising that one cannot have it all, to be realistic is to recognise that one can't have it all, so of course the apple is going to provide some kind of sustenance, but often might not taste good, you cannot have it all. And this is of course what Wilhelm I is so upset about.

So just to conclude, Bismark here is opposed on all sides, of course the liberals hate him for various reasons that we won't let him go into but he is simultaneously restricting freedom of press and cracking down on all kinds of democratic rights while he's doing all this in Prussia, so they never liked him, but yet at the same time he also has very little support amongst the conservatives and his ability to get what he wants basically relies on his influence with the king, who has a very different decision making style than him.

I think this is really striking that Bismark, if when we think about realism we think of this as an all-purpose and universal theory of international relations,

and yet at the same time if that were true, Bismark wouldn't be Bismark, right, he wouldn't be extraordinary.

And really what we see here is more the classical realist inside that realism depends on rationality and is actually quite rare and I think if we can show that if the most successful realist arguably in history, right, is quite rare this tells us a lot about the utility of realism as a theory of international relations.

And I'll leave it there.

[applause]

END OF RECORDING