

Introduction

Not all writers have looked to human nature as the explanation of conflict among states. They have recognised that most humans are both competitive and co-operative; have social as well as aggressive impulses; and that those impulses anyway have many outlets that are unrelated to war or to relations among states. Above all, most individuals have little or no influence on the way their states behave; and the few who do act in a collective rather than a personal role.

For these reasons most writers, especially in recent times, have been inclined to attribute the character of international conflict to the nature of *states* rather than to that of individual human beings. International relations, by definition, are conducted by states, not by individuals. Thus a considerable amount of the writing undertaken on the subject has been devoted to analysing the character and motives of states. Just as political philosophers, seeking to consider the nature of the political institutions required to establish a viable social and political order, have traditionally begun by examining the nature of “man”, so students of international relations have begun by examining the nature of states.

There are a number of obvious questions to be asked. Do all states respond in similar ways to similar challenges or threats, or are there marked variations? If so, what are the reasons for these variations? Do the policies pursued by states depend on their geographical situation, their historical experience, or their relative size and power? Do they depend on the nature of the domestic political system: how far they are autocratic or democratic, whether many or few have influence on the decisions that are reached? Or are the character and motives of the decision-makers themselves the paramount influence or the national interests of the state? More generally, are the actions of states dependent mainly on the *internal* character of states, or do they depend primarily on the character of the international system as a whole? These are only a few of the questions that have been asked by writers on this subject through the ages.