

Kenneth Waltz: An Intellectual Biography

By Paul R. Viotti

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Reviewed by Özgür Öztürk, Aksaray University

Kenneth N. Waltz was one of the leading figures in the field of international relations. His inventions of the three images of international relations and the international system structure are widely considered to be his most important contributions to the field. Even after his passing in 2013 at the age of 88, his writings continue to shape and shove our understanding of international politics, just as “structures shape and shove” state behaviors.¹ Given Waltz’s impact on the field, delving into his intellectual biography proves to be valuable.

In 2011, Paul R. Viotti, a student of Waltz during the 1970s, who has since become a prolific scholar in the field, agreed with Waltz that he would write Waltz’s intellectual biography. As part of this agreement, Viotti conducted four interviews with Waltz. However, Viotti’s plans for further interviews were disrupted by Waltz’s passing two years later. Notwithstanding this, Viotti persisted with the project by delving into Waltz’s daybooks spanning from 1957 to 2002, examining his files at the Columbia University office, reviewing some 1,500 pages of letters exchanged between Waltz and his wife, Helen, during the Korean War, and conducting interviews with scholars who had personal acquaintance with Waltz and/or had academic interactions with him. In 2023, Viotti completed his project by publishing a 261-page book with 12 chapters. Vi-



otti presents a comprehensive and insightful account of Waltz’s intellectual journey in his book, *Kenneth Waltz: An Intellectual Biography*, covering his life from childhood to his passing.

Waltz’s boyhood is the focus of the first chapter, while his time at Oberlin and his experiences during the Second World War are covered in chapter 2. The author uses these chapters to illustrate how Waltz’s German and Protestant background, as well as his military experience, influenced his future intellectual development. The author contends that “the Protestant (and very German) work ethic had clearly become core to him” (p. 18). The author further contends that his time in the army service from 1944 to 1946 (he would again serve in the military from 1951 to 1952) significantly impacted the subject of his Ph.D. thesis at Columbia University, which focused on the causes of war. In chapter 3, the attention is on Waltz’s return to Oberlin to finish his bachelor’s degree after serving in the army. This is where he gained exposure to political philosophy and obtained a degree in economics and political theory in 1948. Chapters 4 and 5 center on Waltz’s time at Columbia and during the Korean War, when he completed his doctoral dissertation and transformed it into a book, *Man, State, and War*. Chapters 6, 7, and 8 center on Waltz’s time at Swarthmore, Brandeis, and Berkeley from 1957 to 1994, during

which he released three significant books and other important articles. In chapter 9, Waltz's political theorist side is explored, while chapter 10 centers on his structural explanation of international politics in the *Theory of International Politics*. In chapter 11, the author contends that Waltz became a luminary to his followers but a lightning rod to his critics. The final chapter concentrates on Waltz's retirement and his final days. In this chapter, the author mentions Waltz's contemplation of international political issues during his retirement days, referencing his "controversial *Foreign Affairs* article on why Iran should 'get the bomb'" (p. 189).

The book effectively portrays Waltz's early years, his time as a student, his academic career, and his retirement, serving as an insightful biography. In the book, readers can discover how Waltz evolved from being raised in a Lutheran family to becoming a Kantian intellectual. The book reminds readers that it is possible to be both Kantian and materialist. Accordingly, "Waltz saw the ideational and material typically operating in tandem" (p. 4). The book also illustrates how William T. R. Fox, known as "the superpower" among graduate students (p. 38), influenced Waltz's intellectual journey. First, the author underlines that "had Fox not directed Waltz to prepare for the doctoral exam on the international relations field as a whole, he likely would not have entered the field" (p. 55). Second, Fox focused on the uses of power, which later influenced Waltz's emphasis on the significance of power relative to other states as a critical factor in power calculation. Hence, the author argues that Fox's "influence was perhaps more significant than Waltz (was) prone to acknowledge" (p. 38). The book also demonstrates Helen's contribution to Waltz's thesis by analyzing the letters exchanged between Waltz and his wife during the Korean

War. Specifically, the author underlines that Helen "combed libraries and bookstores so she could send him relevant books and articles, reading some and sending him notes on others" (p. 46). Last but not least, the author emphasizes Waltz's lifelong opposition to U.S. military interventions and foreign wars, influenced by William Graham Sumner's writings. In this context, the author emphasizes that "Waltz was highly critical of what he saw as excessive U.S. defense spending during and after the Cold War" (p. 6).

All influential books are open to criticism, and Viotti's latest is no exception. In this regard, two points should be highlighted. First, the author highlights Waltz's impact on realism but neglects to incorporate his views on neo-classical realism. A careful reader of Waltz knows that his *Theory of International Politics* is not about foreign policy but about international outcomes. The author accurately underlines this point multiple times in the text (pp. 10, 57, 135). He also emphasizes that "Waltz leaves to others the tasks of developing a theory of foreign policy and one that links such a unit-level theory to his systemic theory of international politics" (p. 160). At this juncture, the reader may be curious about Waltz's perspective on neo-classical realism, which is seen by some as "the logical and necessary extension of structural realism."² The author simply states that Waltz views the inclusion of unit-level factors as fundamentally reductionist. However, neo-classical realism should have been given more attention for the insights it provides. A possible explanation of this gap is that Waltz passed away in 2013 and the author was unable to conduct further interviews. Second, the author devotes too much space to Waltz's theory and this inclination results in repetitive content for the reader. The author justifies this choice with his concern of accurately conveying

Waltz's writings to the reader. Given the importance of Waltz, the author's decision may seem reasonable.

Kenneth Waltz: An Intellectual Biography provides an illuminative reading of Waltz's early life, academic life, and retirement years. The book's plain and fluent language makes it attractive to both students and scholars who

focus on international relations, as well as to those with a casual interest in this subject.

Endnotes

1. Kenneth N. Waltz, "Structural Realism after the Cold War," *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (2000), p. 24.
2. Brian Rathbun, "A Rose by Any Other Name: Neoclassical Realism as the Logical and Necessary Extension of Structural Realism," *Security Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (2008), pp. 294-321.

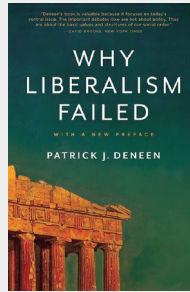
Why Liberalism Failed?

By Patrick J. Deneen

New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2018, 248 pages, \$19.00, ISBN: 9780300223446

Reviewed by Habtamu Alebachew Legass, Sakarya University

Patrick J. Deneen's *Why Liberalism Failed* critically analyzes liberal political philosophy and its impact on contemporary society. Patrick J. Deneen is a political theorist and author known for his critical perspectives on modern liberalism. He served as an associate professor of political science at the University of Notre Dame and has written extensively on topics related to political theory, democratic culture, and the history of political thought. His book explores the shortcomings of modern liberalism, focusing on how its pursuit of individual freedom has led to systemic failures, including increasing inequality, declining trust in government, and growing disillusionment among citizens. Deneen argues that liberalism's promises of securing rights and limiting government have faltered, resulting in expanded state control and a widespread sense of powerlessness. The book contends that the failures of liberalism are not due to deviations from its principles but are instead the result of its adherence to its own ideals.



By fostering economic and social inequalities, liberalism has contradicted its original intentions, leading to widespread discontent and a loss of legitimacy.

The book consists of 7 chapters, beginning with an introduction that addresses the decline of liberalism. The first chapter highlights the concept of unsustainable liberalism. It discusses the historical rise and global appeal of liberalism, which is rooted in the commitment to liberty and the longing for human freedom. The introduction sets the stage by discussing liberalism's rise and global appeal. Rooted in a commitment to liberty and individual freedom, liberalism has historically been attractive to those suffering under arbitrary rule. The chapter traces the origins of the desire for liberty back to ancient Greece and Rome, where virtue and self-rule were essential in countering tyranny. However, modern liberalism departs from these traditions, challenging established norms and seeking to disman-