

Waltz Memorial Service
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It is a great honor to be here at Columbia today to pay homage to one of the most famous international relations theorists to ever walk the planet. Ken Waltz was not just a major thinker for his times. He wrote books that will be widely read by students of international politics for decades, if not centuries, to come.

There are a number of factors that helped make Ken a seminal thinker. I would like to talk about one of them; a factor that I think is paid little attention but nevertheless mattered greatly for shaping his beliefs and writings.

How any individual thinks about the world is a function of two considerations: first, his or her critical faculties or what can simply be called reason; second, the values and norms we are taught from the beginning of our lives by our parents and the broader society in which we live. This is usually called socialization and it intensely affects how we look at the world around us.

I believe, however, that there is a marked tension between socialization and reason. Specifically, socialization teaches us that there are certain beliefs and practices that are sacrosanct and therefore should not be questioned. Most importantly, for our purposes, it promotes a deep-seated loyalty to the group in which we were raised. Nationalism, of

course, is purveyed through socialization. Think about the well-known saying: “my country, right or wrong.”

However, when we scholars deploy our critical faculties, we are not supposed to be influenced by the values and norms that have been programmed into us. Instead, we are supposed to be ruthlessly rational in assessing how our world **does and should** operate. We are supposed to be concerned with one thing: the pursuit of truth. This means that when we assess our own tribe’s behavior, we put aside our deep-seated feelings and we evaluate it the same way we would evaluate any other tribe. This is what the “science” in political science is supposed to be all about.

In the tug of war between socialization and reason, socialization often gets in the way of our critical faculties, sometimes in harmful ways. Much of this is due to the fact that we undergo significant socialization long before our critical faculties are well developed and ready for prime time. In other words, we are hard wired to see the world in particular ways well before we have the capability to see things for ourselves. Plus the socialization process never stops. So, it is always there as a threat to our ability to reason smartly.

I have been in the academy for roughly 40 years and I have encountered countless scholars with first-rate minds. Ken Waltz is the purest critical thinker I have ever met. When he dealt with any intellectual issue – and when he dealt with other people – he paid little attention to what others

thought was right or wrong. He also paid little heed to conventional wisdoms. And he paid little attention to other people's feelings. He told you what his critical faculties told him was right or wrong, and if you didn't like it, too bad.

This intellectual ruthlessness allowed him to make important arguments that tended to shock the people around him, because they had been socialized to think in particular ways about the key issues of the day and he challenged those accepted wisdoms.

In short, Ken's ability to decisively privilege reason over socialization helped make him a contrarian, and more **importantly but relatedly**, a brilliant scholar who influenced all of us and will influence many more people long after **he and we** are gone. Thank you.