Theories of International Relations

Objectives. This course is designed as an introduction to contemporary theories, debates, and major scholarly traditions in international relations. As the "core" course offered in this field, the intention is to provide a general, but not elementary, overview. We begin with a broad overview of the discipline, surveying the changing fashions and debates in both theories and methods. Most of the course explores eight traditions in international relations scholarship, five "mainstream" (realism, neo-realism, society of states, neoliberalism, and liberalism) and three critical (marxist, constructivist, post-structural, and feminist). Our primary concern is to examine and assess each approach's foundational assumptions, method and scope of the problem defined, understanding of the units of global politics, how it conceptualizes international institutions, and the relationship between agency and international structure. We conclude by examining the issue of strategic interaction, being particularly attentive to how to think about the social context of interaction.

Requirements. The class format will place a premium on discussion; therefore, it is expected that everyone will come prepared to discuss these materials in an informed and critical manner. There are a set of general questions posed at the top of each week's reading list, and the assumption is that this will both guide your reading of the required materials and provide a set of questions for some of the week's discussions. The questions, however, provide only a set of suggestions for, but do not determine, the seminar's content for that week.

For each week after the first two sessions, several topics are identified on the syllabus. Each student must select two of these topics and write a short, four to five page, typed, double-spaced, critical, "thought piece" for each, based on readings presented on the syllabus. Papers are due no later than the time of the class session for which the topic is assigned. Each paper will account for 25% of your course grade. As members of a graduate seminar the expectation is that you are active participants; accordingly, 10% of your grade will be based on discussion. Finally, there will be take-home essay worth 40% of your grade. The final will be distributed in class on December 11 and will be due on December 18.

Office Hours. My office is in 415 North Hall, and I have office hours on Thursday from 1:30-3:00. I am happy to make an appointment for those who cannot make these hours. My telephone number is 263-2036 and my email address is mbarnett@polisci.wisc.edu.

Calendar. The following is the list of class dates and topics to be covered over the semester:

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March 22     Constructivism: Critical
March 29     Marxism
April 5      Critical and Poststructural Theory
April 12     Feminism
April 19     Imagining International Space
April 26     International Change
May  3       What Theory of International Relations Theory?

Course Readings. Most of the readings consist of articles and book chapters. You will find these readings in a course pack available at the Student Copy Center in the basement of the Union; they also are available in the department's reading room. I have ordered a number of the books that can be purchased at the University Bookstore.

January 18. The Discipline of the Discipline

This week provides a broad overview to the study of international relations as a discipline; offers a set of organizing themes and concerns that have motivated students of the field; and review various themes. Think about: how has the historical development of the discipline of international relations shaped its contemporary character?


Martin Wight. 1966. "Western Values in International Relations," in Herbert Butterfield and


Jannuary 25.  Realism

Realism represents the oldest and the dominant paradigm in international relations theory. In fact, its dominance is reflected by the simple fact that all other approaches that we will examine in this seminar define and situate themselves in opposition to realist thought. This week we will read some of the classics of the realist thought. Questions for the week include: What is entailed by being a realist? How does a realist see international politics? What constitutes the core of having a realist vision of international politics? What are the limitations of a realist view of the world?

*Michael Doyle, Ways of War and Peace, Part One.


**Short Paper Topic #1**: How Useful is the Concept of the "National Interest"?


**Short Paper Topic #2**: Should (Have) Nuclear Weapons Transform(ed) the Character of the States System?


**Short Paper Topic #3**: What is the Nature of Power in Realist Thought?

Short Paper Topic #4: What Is Gained and Lost by Expanding the Concept of Security?


Short Paper Topic #5: How Useful is the Concept of Balance of Power?


Short Paper Topic #6: How Should We Think About the Peloponnesian War?


Short Paper Topic #8: How Should We Think about Unipolarity?


Short Paper Topic #9: What is the American in American Realism?

Short Paper Topic #10: Why Not Appease?


Short Paper Topic #11: What is Asia’s Future?

February 1. Beyond Classical Realism

Neo-realism represents an attempt to make realism "scientific" by offering a deductive theory of international politics. In the readings for this week we will examine and evaluate neo-realism, with particular attention to the benefits that might be gained from a more self-conscious "scientific" approach. Questions include: What is the relationship between neorealism and realism? What does neorealism gain over realism by its more "scientific" approach? what is lost? What are the big questions that neo-realism can answer?


Short Paper Topic #1:  Does Neo-Realism Need to Account for Nationalism?


Short Paper Topic #2:  What Conditions Produce Stability in the International System?


Stability," World Politics, 16.


Short Paper Topic #3: Can Neorealism Save Itself After the Cold War?


Short Paper Topic #4: Does the Offense-Defense Distinction Matter for System Stability?


Short Paper Topic #5: If the U.S. Is So Bad, Why is there no Balancing?


Short Paper Topic #6: What is So Good About Multilateralism and Bad about Unilateralism?

Short Paper Topic #7: Are Alliances Formed by Ideologies?

February 8. Neo-Liberal Institutionalism, I: Foundations

Over the last few years political science in general and international relations in specific have "rediscovered" institutions. Institutional analysis has been applied to a myriad of substantitive issues in international relations, but are generally unified by the understanding that institutions can help self-interested states both overcome collective action problems and encourage cooperation in an anarchic and insecure environment. What are the limitation of institutions for affecting cooperation? In response to the charge that institutions - and not anarchy - may be important for understanding interstate behavior, neo-realists have presented a countercharge. This week will look at the foundations of neoliberal institutions, with particular attention to its roots in economic theorizing.

Weaknesses," World Politics, 44, 3, April, 466-96.

Short Paper Topic #1: What is the nature and role of learning in transforming international politics? How useful is this idea?


Short Paper Topic #2: Are States Seekers of Relative Gains?


Short Paper Topic #4: How Does the Concept of Multilateralism Add to our Understanding of International Order?


Short Paper Topic #5: What Role for International Institutions in Resolving Ethnic Conflict?

**Short Paper Topic #7**: What is the Nature of Power in Institutionalism?

February 15. Neo-Liberal Institutionalism, II: Recent Developments

The previous week examined the foundations of neo-liberal institutionalism, with particular attention to functionalist and rationalist logic behind institution building and the prospects of cooperation. This week we examine recent extensions and developments of institutionalist analysis. By no means is this a reasonable sample of the impressive developments that have occurred over the last few years; instead it is intended to consider different ways in which the institutionalist foundation has expanded in response to empirical anomalies, logical-analytical difficulties, and worldly developments.


Short Paper #1: Is the European Court of Justice More than the Sum of Its Parts?


Short Paper #2: What are the Domestic Roots of Multilateralism?


Short Paper #3: What Does it Mean to have a Rationally Designed Institution?


Short Paper Topic #4: Do Institutions Minimize the Security Dilemma?


Short Paper Topic #5: Less Filling? Tastes Great? The Neorealist-Neoliberal Debate?

1. David Baldwin, ed., Neo-Realism and Neo-Liberalism: Baldwin .chap. 1; Stein .chap. 2; Axelrod and Keohane .chap. 4; Grieco .chap. 5; Keohane .chap. 11; and Grieco .chap. 12.
Short Paper Topic #6: How Might Neoliberal institutionalists incorporate ideas?

1. Robert Keohane and Judith Goldstein .1993.  Ideas and Foreign Policy, Cornell University Press. Read the following chapters: Goldstein and Keohane .chap 1; Hall chap. 2.

Short Paper Topic #7: Do International Organizations Promote Peace and Democracy?


Short Paper Topic #8: What is a “Fair” Institution and Does it Matter?


Short Paper #9: How Do Ideas Diffuse?

and Institutional Change in Asian Integration,” International Organization, 58, Spring, 2,
February 22.  Society of States

The Society of States approach offers a "British" view of the structure of global politics. How does this approach differ from neo-realism? What is entailed in adopting an international societal perspective, and how might this affect international relations theory? How is order understood in this view?


Millennium 34, 1.  Articles by Tim Dunne, System, State and Society: How Does It All Hang Together?"; Emanuel Adler, Barry Buzan's Use of Constructivism to Reconstruct the  
English School: 'Not All the Way Down"; Barry Buzan, 
European Journal of International Relations, September, 6, 3, 395-422.  
Difussion," European Journal of International Relations, 9, 1, 87-114. 
pp. 327-352. 
Theory, Washington: Pinter. 
Macmillan. 
Martin's Press. 
Order and Violence: Hedley Bull and International Relations. Oxford University Press,  
38-64. 
Perspective on World Society," European Journal of International Relations, December, 7,  
4, 423-441. 
Richard Little .1995.  "Neorealism and English School: A Methodological, Ontological, and  
Theoretical Assessment," European Journal of International Relations, 1,1, pp. 9-34.  
Way?" Review of International Studies, 21, 2, April, 183-96. 
York: Oxford University Press. 
RIS, 22, 339-60.  
239-274. 
David Armstrong .1993.  Revolution and World Order: Revolutionary States in International


Chapter 2, "The Society of States," pp. 18-34.


Short Paper Topic #1: What is the Grotian Tradition?

1. Read the following in Hedley Bull, Benedict Kingsburg, and Adam Roberts, eds. .1990. Hugo Grotius and International Relations, Oxford University Press:


Short Paper Topic #2: What is Meant and Implied by Intervention?


Short Paper Topic #3: Is the Future Medieval?


Short Paper Topic #4: Does International Society need an “Other”?

1. Iver Neumann and Jennifer Welsh .1991.  "The Other in European Self-Definition: An


March 1. Liberalism

The last few years have witnessed a resurgence of liberal theorizing that are more explicitly micro-oriented and value-oriented. Although closely associated with Kant's classic Perpetual Peace, in fact the liberal tradition is much richer and varied than Kant and the renewed focus on the democratic peace. What are the different orientations that are situated under "liberalism"? How does liberalism differ from its "neo" progenitor? What kind of research agenda is associated with and flows from its assumptions? What is gained and lost in the way that liberalism is being brought into international relations theory?


Michael Doyle, Ways of War and Peace, Part II.


Short Paper Topic #1: Are Democracies Pacific? Choose five of the following:
1. See the following in International Security, 19, 2, Fall, 1994: Christopher Layne, "Kant or Cant: The Myth of the Democratic Peace"; Daniel Sprio, "The Insignificance of the Liberal Peace."


Short Paper Topic #2: What is the relationship between economic interdependence and war?


Short Paper Topic #3: Do Liberals have a conception of power?


Short Paper Topic #4: Why Do Nations Behave?
1. Read the following article in the symposium in the Michigan Journal of International Law, 1998, 19, Winter:

Short Paper Topic #5: Can We Toss Out The Liberal without Losing International Law?


Short Topic #6: What Sort of State Do Liberals Like?


Short Topic #7: Can Peace-loving Democracies Also Kick Butt?

March 8. Constructivist Approaches, I: Foundations

The term "constructivism" derives from Onuf's World of Our Making (1990), and is used to denote those approaches that are unified in their understanding that the world is socially constructed. That is, this week's readings attempt to analyze what people "know" about international life, what they take as given, and how this knowledge appears objective and real. Or as Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann argue in The Social Construction of Reality: "How objectivity of the institutional world, however massive it may appear to the individual, is...humanly produced". p. 60. In this first week we want to examine the roots of constructivist theorizing, primarily though not exclusively from sociological influences. In this first week we will examine early statements, which are now referred to as conventional; next week we will examine those that draw from more critical and poststructural approaches.

* Alexander Wendt 1999.  A Social Theory of International Politics, Read chaps 1, 3, 6, 8.


Short Paper Topic #2: What Does Constructivism Tell Us About Sovereignty?

Short Paper Topic #3: What is at Stake in the Agent-Structure Debate?

Short Paper Topic #4: Why Can’t I Hire A Private Army Anymore?

Short Paper Topic #6: Culture and War: Is Anarchy What States Make of it?

Short Paper Topic #7: Are Regions Socially Constructed?


Short Paper Topic #8: Where does Legitimacy Come From?


Short Paper Topic #8: Why Comply?

March 22. Constructivism, II: Recent Developments

In this week we want to examine several recent developments in constructivist thinking, with particular attention to how constructivists might think about action and persuasion, the construction of state identity and interests, and processes of normative transformation.


Jutta Weldes. 1999. Constructing National Interests: The United States and the Cuban Missile Crisis, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.


Vendulka Kubalkova, Nicholas Onuf and Paul Kowert, eds., 1998. International Relations in a


Masato Kimura and David Welch. "Specifying 'Interests': Japan’s Claim to the Northern Territories and Its Implications for International Relations Theory," ISQ, 42, 2, June, 213-44.

Short Paper #1: How Should We Think About Medieval Europe?


Short Paper Topic #3: What Can Sociological Institutionalism Tell Us About International Politics?


Short Paper #4: How Should Constructivists Think About Identity?


International Relations, September, 7, 3, 349-397.

Short Paper #7: Why Outlaw Bad Things?


Short Paper #8: Did ideas and that little NGO with a fax machine end the Cold War?


Short Paper Topic #9: What are Epistemic Communities and How Do They Shape World Politics?


Short Paper Topic #11: Can International Organizations Socialize Their Members?

Short Paper Topic #12: Where do Collective Identities Come From?


Short Paper Topic #13: How Do Great Powers Deal with Success and Defeat?

2. Deborah Larseon and International Organization
March 29. Marxist Theory

There is no single Marxist perspective, and particularly so for the study of international relations. For our purposes Marxist approaches can be distinguished by their attention to production categories and economic forces and substantially determinative of for understanding international life. It is useful, however, to distinguish various schools of thought, including Gramscian and classical traditions. How does a Gramscian perspective depart from a classical marxist perspective? Can a Gramscian approach be usefully transferred from the domestic to the international system? How do Marxism offer a different conception of the central actors of international relations? What is the relationship between class and state? What produces systemic stability? how does this differ from neo-realism's account? What is considered meaningful change in the international system?

1. For the classical Marxist perspective.

*Michael Doyle, Ways of War and Peace, Part III.


2. For the Gramscian-inspired perspective
3. For the World-Systems Perspective.


Short Paper Topic #1: How is the End of the Cold War Viewed Through a Marxist Lens?


Short Paper Topic #2: What is the Marxist Approach to Globalization?
April 5. Critical and Poststructural Theory

1. What are the hallmarks of international relations, critical style?


2. Habermas, Public Spheres, and Communicative Action


Short Paper Topic #1: What Happens When Force Meets Communicative Rationality?


Short Paper Topic #2: To what kind of critical theory of international politics does a poststructural orientation lead?


Short Paper Topic #3: How Does Foucault Help Us Understand Third World Development?


Short Paper Topic #4: How Does Poststructuralism Problematize the Concept of Security?


Short Paper Topic #4: How does poststructuralism affect our understanding of the conceptual
foundations of international relations theory: sovereignty?


Short Paper Topic #5: How Do Critical and Poststructural Theories Imagine Power?

April 12. Feminist Approaches

What constitutes a feminist theory of international relations? What is distinctively feminist? Is it the objectives of inquiry? is it the method? What does it mean to say that gender, rather than class or states, is the category of analysis? What happens to our understanding of world politics as a consequence?


Marysia Zalewski. “Where is Woman in International Relations? To Return as a Woman to be Heard,” Millennium, 27, 3.
Jill Stearns. 1998. Gender and International Relations, Rutgers University Press. Read Chapter One, “Gender, Feminism, and International Relations.” Read Chapters 1, 5.
Adam Jones. 1996. “Does ‘Gender’ Make the World Go Round? Feminist Critiques of International Relations,” RIS, 22, 405-29. And see the exchanges between Jones and
Terrell Carver, Molly Cochran, and Judith Squires, in RIS, 24, 2, April, 1998, 283-311.

Short Paper Topic #1: Is War a Man Thing?

Short Paper Topic #2: How is Development Gendered?


Short Paper Topic #3: How Is Gender Being Mainstreamed?

April 19.  **Reimagining International Space**

Anarchy’s disciplinary power is manifest in its ability to create a view that states are the dominant actors in international politics, that the state exhausts authority in world politics, and that space is defined by the state’s territorial boundaries, including the presumption that power radiates outward from the capital city to the hinterlands and that all loyalties and obligations are exhausted by the state. Over the last two decades, in part because of globalization and in part because of new intellectual developments, IR scholars have drawn from a variety of disciplines to reimagine the nature of international space. This move has called for nothing less than a remapping of the discipline, suggesting that space is defined not by legal demarcations alone but by various kinds of overlapping networks and exchange relationships. IR is still an American discipline, though, so political science and the nature of the state still guides much nonstatist thinking.


**Short Paper Topic #1: What Happens when Populations on the Move Meet Fixed States?**


Short Paper Topic #2: Do Transnational Networks Depend on the State?

Short Paper Topic #3: What is Global Civil Society and What Does it Do?

Short Paper Topic #4: Feudalism, Westphalia, and What Else?
4. Read the following in International Studies Review, 2, 2, Summer, 2000: Caporaso, Changes in the Westphalian Order; Hendrik Spruyt, “The End of Empire”.

Short Paper Topic #5: How is Space Organized in an Empire?
April 26. International Change

Although international relations theories might have a status quo bias to the extent that structural and systemic theories presume that meaningful change - a change of the system and not only in the system - is rare, many of the most headline-grabbing events have caused international relations scholars to attempt to understand how such change was possible. Each of the theories that we have examined in this survey course have a different understanding of what counts as change and what drives it. Two major events, decolonization and the end of the Cold War, have inspired international relations theorists to test the limits and the insights of existing theories.


1. Decolonization


Short Paper #1: What Caused the End of the Cold War?

May 3. Can We Have Theory in International Relations Theory?

There have been a number of "Great Debates" about the nature and limits of social scientific inquiry into international politics. These debates reflect broader issues in the philosophy and methodology of social science, but given the ample representation of this literature within international relations scholarship per se, most of the following readings are drawn from the latter. Guiding questions for the week include: What are the possibilities for international relations theory? Why, if at all, should we be attentive to paradigmatic differences? What sort of methodological approach is most conducive to the task of theory-building? What sorts of theories should scholars of international relations attempt to build?

A. On the possibility of theory.

*Steve Smith. 1996. "Positivism and Beyond," in S. Smith, K. Booth, and M. Zalewski, Beyond Positivism, NY:


B. On paradigms

C. How Should We Test Our Theories?
