First term Seminar 2014-2015

Contemporary Debates in International Relations Theory

Organised by Jennifer Welsh

Tuesdays, 11.00-13.00, Seminar Room 3, Badia Fiesolana

Please register with adele.battistini@eui.eu

1. Course Syllabus

This course focuses on ideas about, and explanations of, international relations, concentrating mainly (but not exclusively) on the major theoretical approaches in the academic study of international relations since 1945. The key theories and approaches to be examined include: realism and neo-realism; theories about war, security and the use of force in international relations; classical liberalism, globalization, and transformation in world politics; theories about inter-state co-operation and transnationalism; the concept of international society; constructivism and the impact of law and norms in international relations; neo-Marxist and critical theory approaches to international relations; and normative theory and international ethics. The seminar should be seen as a core on which students build, not as complete coverage of all developments in the subject. It seeks to provide not only an overview of the key theoretical debates, but also a ‘toolkit’ of concepts that students can use to analyse international relations. Throughout the course, an emphasis will be placed on the need to marry empirical analysis and normative reflection in the study of international relations.

2. Seminar Content

The ten topics this term are:

1. Theorizing in International Relations
2. Traditions of thought about International Relations
3. Classical Realism
4. Neo-realism
5. Liberalism and Liberal Institutionalism
6. Constructivism
7. International Society
8. Critical Theory and Post Structuralism
10. TBD (to be discussed with course participants)

3. Teaching Arrangements

The seminar is taught in two-hour sessions. At each meeting there are two short oral presentations by students on the topic questions (of no more than 10-15 minutes), followed by
Students who wish to take this seminar for credit must meet Department attendance requirements, complete all required readings, and participate actively in seminar discussions. Students have the option of writing a research paper for the class, and if they wish to take this option they should discuss their proposed topic with Professor Welsh well before the Department’s due date for term papers. Anyone wishing to audit the class must fulfill all requirements expected of other students.

*If you want to write a term paper for this seminar, please send a copy by email to the seminar’s professor as well as to the organizing secretary. Once the paper is approved, she will update your credit award in your academic records.*

**GENERAL BACKGROUND READING**


*Please note that we are reading a number of chapters from the Oxford Handbook of International Relations denoted OHIR below and you therefore might wish to purchase a copy of the book.*


Burchill, Scott, Andrew Linklater (eds.), *Theories of International Relations* 3rd edn. 2005).


**JOURNALS**


***NOTE: All readings in bold are required readings for each session, other readings are recommended.***
WEEK 1: WHAT IT MEANS TO DO IR THEORY

This seminar deals with questions of theory at a general level. The questions raised here have no definitive answers but are subject to on-going contention and evolution in the field – and in the course.

1. Is it possible to do “science” in international relations?
2. What is (or should be) the relation between the practical/empirical and the conceptual/theoretical in IR theory?

Christian Reus-Smit and Duncan Snidal. ‘Between Utopia and Reality: The Practical Discourses of IR.’ OHIR, Chapter 1.
Peter Katzenstein & Rudy Sil. ‘Eclectic Theorizing in the Study and Practice of IR.’ OHIR Chapter 6.
Patrick Jackson, The Conduct of Inquiry in International Relations. Chapters 1, 2 and 7.
Kenneth Waltz, Theory of International Politics (1979), chs. 1, 4.

Hollis, Martin & Steve Smith, Explaining and Understanding International Relations (1991)

WEEK 2: TRADITIONS OF THOUGHT ABOUT INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

This class will begin by examining the thought (and subsequent reception) of perhaps the most widely cited classical theorist of the post-Cold War era, Immanuel Kant. Then it will then consider the merits and problems of approaching the study of international relations through the study of traditions.

1. Was Kant a ‘Kantian’?
2. What problems are involved in the construction of traditions or patterns of thought in international relations?

Habermas, J., ‘Human rights, international law and the global order: Cosmopolitanism 200 years later: Kant’s idea of perpetual peace, with the benefit of 200 years' hindsight’, in Bohman, J., and Lutz-Bachman, M. Perpetual Peace: Essays on Kant’s Cosmopolitan Ideas (1997).

Clark, Ian and Neumann, Iver (eds.), Classical Theories of International Relations (1996), chapters 1 and 4.
Doyle, Michael, ‘Kant, Liberal Legacies and Foreign Affairs’ Philosophy and Public Affairs, volume 12, 3 and 4 (Summer and Fall 1983). Also his Ways of War and Peace (1997), chapter 8.

Jahn, Beate ed., Classical Theories of International Relations (Cambridge: CUP, 2006), chapters 1, 3, 4 and 8.


**Question 2**


Beitz, Charles, Political Theory and International Relations (1979), part 1


**WEEK 3: REALISM**

This seminar discusses the general realist understanding of international order and its critique of interwar idealism.

1. What are the primary arguments that Carr mounts against the liberals of the interwar period?
2. How does Morgenthau generate his ‘laws’ of international politics, and what do they consist of?


Smith, Michael, Realist Thought from Weber to Kissinger (1986).

WEEK 4: NEO-REALISM

This seminar discusses the differences between classical realism and neo or structural realism, and the nature of neo-realism’s explanatory approach. It also deals with the particular neo-realist focus on the balance of power.

1. ‘For classical realists conflict stems from human nature, while for neo-realists conflict stems from the nature of the international system.’ Is this an accurate assessment of the differences between classical and neo-realists?

2. Does the ‘balance of threat’ approach (Walt) undermine the scientific aspirations of neo-realism?

Question 1

Waltz, Kenneth, Theory of International Politics (1979), esp. chs. 5-6.

Donnelly, Jack, Realism and International Relations (2000).
Niebuhr, R., Moral Man and Immoral Society (1932), esp. ch.4.

Question 2


**WEEK 5: LIBERALISM AND INSTITUTIONALISM**

This seminar will look at classical liberalism and its account of war and change in international relations and contrast these writings with contemporary analytical liberalism. It will also examine liberal institutionalism’s response to neo-realism and its analysis of inter-state cooperation and the origin of institutions.

1. To what extent does Moravcsik transform liberalism from an ideology into a theory?
2. How successful is institutionalism in explaining international cooperation?

**Question 1**


**Question 2**

**WEEK 6: CONSTRUCTIVISM**

This seminar will assess the contributions of constructivism to the theory of international relations, particularly through the ‘state centric’ approach of Wendt. It will also examine constructivist claims about the origins, evolution, and impact of norms in international relations.

1. How convincing is the argument that ‘anarchy is what states make of it’?
2. What are ‘norms’ in international relations, and how do they matter?

**Question 1**


Hurd, Ian, ‘Constructivism’, *OHIR*, Chapter 17.


Boli, John and George Thomas (eds.), *Constructing World Culture* (1999).


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Seminar and Reading List


**Question 2**


Hurrell, Andrew ‘Norms and Ethics in International Relations’ in Carlsnaes et al, *Handbook of International Relations*.


**WEEK 7: INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY**

This seminar will introduce the concept of ‘international society’ (its foundations, its membership, and its primary institutions). It will also examine whether/how ‘English School’ theorizing about international society has contributed to historical understanding of the evolution of international society.

1. In what ways do international society approaches represent a challenge to realism?

2. Does English School theorizing help us understand the evolution and expansion of international society?
Question 1


Question 2

Keene, Edward, *Beyond the Anarchical Society: Grotius, Colonialism and Order in World Politics* (2002).

Bell, Duncan (ed.), *Victorian Visions of Global Order: Empire and International Relations in Nineteenth-Century Political Thought* (2012), especially chapters 1, 3 & 4.
WEEK 8: CRITICAL THEORY AND POSTSTRUCTURALISM

1. What is "critical" about Critical Theory? Can it reveal progressive possibilities immanent within the society of states?

2. How can poststructuralism’s concern with subjectivity, identity, power, and discourse connect to the categories and concerns of IR?

**Question 1**


**Question 2**

Burke, Anthony, ‘Postmodernism’, *OHIR*
Lawler, Peter, ‘The Ethics of Postmodernism’, *OHIR*

Booth, Ken, Steve Smith and Marysia Zalewski (eds.), *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond* (1996), Part IV.
Special issue of *Review of International Studies*, April 2007 (‘Critical International Relations Theory after 25 Years’)

WEEK 9: NORMATIVE THEORY AND INTERNATIONAL ETHICS

This seminar will address ethical approaches to understanding international relations. The discussion will focus on two issues that have been central to normative theorising: how justice claims are grounded; and the right and/or duty of humanitarian intervention.

1. How can claims about international justice be grounded?

2. Is humanitarian intervention a legitimate exception to the general prohibition on the use of force in international relations?
Question 1

Bell, Duncan, ed., *Ethics and World Politics* (2010), chapters 1, 4 and 8.
Nardin, Terry, ‘International Ethics.’ *OHIR*, Chapter 34.


Question 2

Pattison, James, *Humanitarian Intervention and the Responsibility to Protect* (2010), Chapter 1, 2, 3 and 7.


WEEK 10 (TB)