

SEMINAR IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Political Science 530

Portland State University, Winter 2023

[David Kinsella](#)

[Department of Political Science](#)

Office: [Urban Center Building](#), 650L

503.725.3035 | kinsella@pdx.edu

Office Hours: Wednesday 2:00-3:00, in person or [via Zoom](#),
and by appointment.

Description

The course surveys the main theoretical and analytical approaches encountered in the study of international relations (IR). Our primary emphasis is on topics related to international security, organization, and law. We delve into a few topics in international political economy, but fuller examinations of IPE are offered in other seminars. We cover much of the same substantive ground as [Contemporary Theories of World Politics](#) (PS 542), but this course is structured around a different and more extensive reading list and is conducted in seminar rather than lecture format.

The first part of the course covers scholarship representative of two long-standing theoretical traditions in international relations, and one relatively new one: realism, liberalism, and constructivism. We then examine some analytical issues relevant to theory and research in the field, including the application of the rational choice framework. Next, we turn to competing perspectives on international ethics: who are the holders of rights and obligations in international society? Finally, we consider some of the wide-ranging critiques of mainstream international relations -- both theory and practice -- offered by contemporary critical thinkers.

The organization of topics is both thematic and chronological -- thematic in that each week's reading and discussion focuses on a particular perspective, tradition, or approach in international relations; chronological in that competing approaches have often unfolded in critical response to scholarship of the previous generation.

Learning Objectives

The general objective of this course is to develop the student's capacity to critically examine theoretical propositions about international relations, consider the applicability of IR theory to real problems in contemporary world affairs, and communicate this analysis to others. This is to be accomplished by exposing students to a body of literature that has helped to shape the contemporary discipline of international relations, including both positive and normative theory, as well as alternative approaches to research. By the end of the term, students should be able to:

- demonstrate mastery of the main theoretical approaches to the study of international relations as a subfield of political science;
- interpret historical and contemporary international issues using appropriate analytic frameworks; and
- articulate normative positions on some key ethical dilemmas in international relations.

Requirements and Evaluation

The main workload consists of assigned reading. Assignments should be read carefully prior to the session for which they are scheduled. As this is a seminar, participation in class discussion is important to the success of the course and everyone is expected to contribute (20 percent of your course grade). During the term, you are required to make one or two brief [presentations](#) on a reading from a supplemental reading list and write two [short analytic papers](#) (15 percent each). The latter are to be critical reviews of the readings assigned for the week (5-6 pages) and are due at the beginning of class. The first essay must review readings from any of weeks 2 through 5; the second essay, weeks 6 through 10. The remaining 50 percent of your grade will be based on a take-home [final exam](#) distributed on the last day on class.

Readings

All assigned readings are available online; there are no books to purchase for the course. Unless the reading includes a link, it is available online from the PSU library. You must retrieve these readings (all journal articles) by logging into the [PSU library website](#) and locating and downloading the article from one of the library's full-content subscription services. If you haven't done this before, or are rusty, there are instructions [here](#). If a link is provided, the reading is accessible only after logging into Canvas.

Conduct, Courtesy, and Student Resources

Students are responsible for being familiar with the PSU [Code of Student Conduct](#), especially the section concerning academic misconduct -- that is, plagiarism or other forms of academic dishonesty. If you are unsure of the definition or consequences of academic misconduct, feel free to consult with me.

Because they are distracting to others, cell phones may not be used during lecture and should be silenced at the start of class. Laptops and tablets may be used to take notes, but not for email, web browsing, or social media. Electronic devices may not be used to photograph, video, or stream course lectures or discussion, but lectures may be audio recorded with permission of the instructor.

PSU's policies require faculty members to report any instance of sexual harassment, sexual

violence, or other forms of prohibited discrimination. If you would rather share information about these experiences with an employee who does not have these reporting responsibilities and can keep the information confidential, please contact a confidential advocate (503.725.5672 or [online](#)) or another confidential employee listed on the [sexual misconduct resource webpage](#).

If you have, or think you may have, a disability that may affect your work in this class and feel you need accommodations, contact the [Disability Resource Center](#) to schedule an appointment and initiate a conversation about reasonable accommodations. The [CARE Team](#), hosted by the Dean of Student Life, is available to consult with you regarding any issues of students in distress, including sexual misconduct.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE and ASSIGNMENTS

11 Jan **Introduction**

We start with a discussion of what constitutes progress in a social scientific understanding of world politics. We also consider the historical context in which international relations, as an academic discipline, began to take shape. The discipline's first "great debate" represented competing views among diplomats and academics of how best to secure international stability in the aftermath of the Great War.

- Jack Snyder, "One World, Rival Theories." *Foreign Policy* 145 (2004): 52-62.
- Robert O. Keohane, "Political Science as a Vocation." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 42 (April 2009): 359-63.

18 Jan **Realism I**

Realism has been the single most influential theoretical framework for both the study and practice of International relations. We will consider some foundational thinkers that realists claim as their own (like Thucydides, Hobbes, and Machiavelli) and then turn others who helped shape realist thought in the period after World War II. These early theorists believed that understanding human nature was important for understanding the relations between nations.

- E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations*, 2nd ed. (Harper and Row, 1946), chaps. 4-6. ([Canvas](#))
- Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Addison Wesley, 1979), chaps. 1, 4-6. ([Canvas](#))
- John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (Norton, 2001), chaps. 1-2, 9-10. ([Canvas](#))

25 Jan

Realism II

Power, and particularly military power, is at the core of any realist theory of world politics, and the foundation of a stable and orderly international system is the balance of power. When states fail to balance against the power of a rising state, the ultimate recourse may be global war. But what does the theory tell us about the military primacy of the United States since the end of the Cold War? Is there a counter-balancing coalition in the offing, or has the theory got it wrong?

- Gideon Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Foreign Policy." *World Politics* (October 1998): 144-172.
- Robert A. Pape, "Soft Balancing against the United States." *International Security* 30 (Summer 2005): 7-45.
- Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, "International Relations Theory and the Case against Unilateralism." *Perspectives on Politics* 3 (September 2005): 509-24.
- Brian C. Schmidt and Michael C. Williams, "The Bush Doctrine and the Iraq War: Neoconservatives Versus Realists." *Security Studies* 17 (2008): 191-220.

1 Feb

Liberalism I

Like realists, liberals invoke foundational thinkers, like Locke and Kant, to support a more optimistic conception of human nature and therefore a more hopeful prognosis for stability and peace among states. They championed the League of Nations as an alternative to the balance-of-power system and, despite the League's manifest failures, have sought to understand the ways that international law and institutions can foster international cooperation.

- David Mitrany, "The Functional Approach to World Organization." *International Affairs* 24 (July 1948): 350-363.
- Robert Axelrod, "The Emergence of Cooperation among Egoists." *The American Political Science Review* 75 (June 1981): 306-18.
- Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton University Press, 1984), chaps. 1-7. ([Canvas](#))

8 Feb

Liberalism II

Classical liberalism celebrates the human capacity to observe and reason about the world. Contemporary liberal IR theory posits that free trade and democratic governance -- both placing faith in the free and rational choices of individuals -- contribute to peaceful relations between states. For liberals, the domestic characteristics of states, and not simply the the distribution of power among them, helps to explain the likelihood of war and peace in the international system.

- Andrew Moravcsik, "Taking Preferences Seriously: A Liberal Theory of International Politics." *International Organization* 51 (Fall 1997): 513-553.
- Michael Doyle, "Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs, Part I." *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 12 (Summer 1983): 205-235.
- John Owen, "How Liberalism Produces Democratic Peace." *International Security* 19 (Fall 1994): 87-125.
- G. John Ikenberry, "Liberal Internationalism 3.0: America and the Dilemmas of Liberal World Order." *Perspectives on Politics* 7 (March 2009): 71-87.

15 Feb **Constructivism**

Constructivists suggest that we need to recognize that the interests of states and other actors, as well as threats to them, are socially constructed. This is not to deny that interests or threats are real; it simply means that actors' perceptions of them are the result of ongoing social processes and thus are not predetermined by geography, military capabilities, or other material factors that realist analyses tend to emphasize.

- Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics." *International Organization* 46 (Spring 1992): 391-425.
- Martha Finnemore, *National Interests in International Society* (Cornell University Press, 1996), chaps. 1, 3, 5. ([Canvas](#))
- Ian Hurd, "Legitimacy and Authority in International Politics." *International Organization* 53 (Spring 1999): 379-408.
- Emanuel Adler. "Seizing the Middle Ground: Constructivism in World Politics." *European Journal of International Relations* 3 (September 1997): 319-63.

22 Feb **Rationalism**

Most of the theories we have considered as falling within the frameworks of realism and liberalism approach their subjects from the point of view of rationalism, which also predominates in the field of economics. The individuals or "agents" being studied, whether states, flesh-and-blood decision-makers, or collective entities like insurgencies or multinational corporations, are treated as rational actors with interests and capabilities.

- Thomas C. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Harvard University Press, 1960), chaps. 1-3. ([Canvas](#))
- Andrew Kydd, "Trust, Reassurance, and Cooperation." *International Organization* 54 (Spring 2000): 325-357.
- James D. Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations for War." *International Organization* 49 (Summer 1995): 379-414.
- Stephen M. Walt, "Rigor or Rigor Mortis? Rational Choice and Security Studies." *International Security* 23 (Spring 1999): 5-48.

1 Mar **Ethics and Law I**

Warfare is a primitive form of interaction between states. But war is not an activity ungoverned by rules. In fact, the laws of war are among the oldest rules found in international law. What are these rules and where do they come from? Here we are also entitled to ask: how commonly are they violated? In the context of colonial and internal wars, where the Geneva Conventions have had limited sway, history's answer to this question is a depressing one.

- Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*, 5th ed. (Basic Books, 2015), chaps. 1-6, 8-9, 16-17. ([Canvas](#))
- Alex J. Bellamy, "No Pain, No Gain? Torture and Ethics in the War on Terror." *International Affairs* 82 (January 2006): 121-48.
- Anne-Marie Slaughter, Andrew S. Tulumello, and Stepan Wood, "International Law and International Relations Theory: A New Generation of Interdisciplinary Scholarship." *American Journal of International Law* 92 (July 1998): 367-397.

8 Mar **Ethics and Law II**

How relevant are national borders, morally speaking? What obligations do we have to those in need when they are not fellow citizens? These are questions that must occupy us when we think about justice on a global scale. During times of global crises, like pandemics, which have little regard for border checkpoints, we often come to better appreciate our shared humanity and the sense in which we are members of a global society.

- Brian Barry, "Humanity and Justice in Global Perspective." *Nomos* 24 (1982): 219-252. ([Canvas](#))
- John Rawls, "The Law of Peoples." *Critical Inquiry* 20 (Autumn 1993): 36-68.
- Charles R. Beitz, "International Liberalism and Distributive Justice: A Survey of Recent Thought." *World Politics* 51 (January 1999): 269-296.
- Paul Wapner and Richard R. Matthew, "The Humanity of Global Environmental Ethics." *Journal of Environment and Development* 18 (June 2009): 203-222.

15 Mar **Critical International Relations**

We often take for granted that the myriad advances associated with modernization are also forces for social progress. In the field of international relations, as elsewhere in the social sciences and humanities, this presumption has been subject to sustained scrutiny and criticism, especially since the end of the Cold War. The subject of critique has not been limited to the assumptions upon which our theories are based, but extends to the social scientific mindset that directs us to perceive the world around us objectively. Is that even possible?

- Michael Cox, "Rebels without a Cause? Radical Theorists and the World System after the Cold War." *New Political Economy* 3 (1998): 445-60.
 - Ido Oren, *Our Enemies and US: America's Rivalries and the Making of Political Science* (Cornell University Press, 2002), introduction, chap. 4, conclusion. ([Canvas](#))
 - Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War* (University of Chicago Press, 1995), chaps. 5-7. ([Canvas](#))
-

This syllabus is available online at web.pdx.edu/~kinsella/ps530w23.pdf and all course materials can be linked from this address. Last updated on 9 January 2023.