General Introduction

This course emphasizes a critical approach toward different grand/major theories of international relations (IR)/international politics. The course is designed with two convictions. First, all major theories (sometimes called schools, paradigms, or “isms”) of IR are defective, one way or the other, in light of the fundamental paradigms of social sciences. Thus, we must keep a critical but open mind toward these big theories. Second, despite these defects, however, major theories are indispensable for understanding international politics: all of us use some (crude) form of these major theories as analytical tools when trying to make sense of international politics. Thus, a critical understanding of these major theories (or macro-tools) helps us taking a more critical view toward our own understanding of international politics.

For each session, a lecture, providing a brief historical account of the subject and, lasting no more than 20 minutes, will be delivered. It will then be followed by presentations from 3-4 students on the questions posed for each session. Each student has about 15-20 minutes to make her/his cases on one question. Presentations will then be followed by open discussion on the questions posed and students’ presentations. Additional questions of interest for the students can be added to the discussion when time allows.

The instructor hopes that such a course design will enable students to think independently from and challenge existing theoretical interpretations of IR.

Guide to Good Performance

1. Read the required readings carefully and take notes. You should finish at least 80% of the required readings (about 150-160 pages).
2. Read some of the recommended readings if you can, and especially if you are assigned to do presentations for the session. Carefully consider which argument or interpretation is most plausible, and why.
3. Write down what you have in mind on the questions posed, regardless whether you are going to present or not.
4. Be outspoken and try to challenge others’ points. Silence is not gold here.
5. Re-think and re-formulate your thoughts on the questions after each session, in light of the discussions during the class, and put your more developed thoughts on paper (Laziness will never pay). The questions in the final examination will consist of questions that are derived from (but are different from) these questions posed for each sessions.
6. Do not be late for class, or in turning in your assignments.

Performance Assessment

Students in this course are presumed to have some, but not much, background knowledge about the topics to be discussed. Students who do not have much background knowledge are encouraged to read some general texts (Daughtery 2005).

Students are expected to complete the required readings and encouraged to do the recommended readings prior to class and be prepared to participate in discussions.

For each session, three students are picked to present their thoughts on the questions posed for each session. They must outline their arguments and explain why they have come to the arguments. Students are required to pick their topics for presentations in session 1.

Any student who misses more than 3 sessions of the class will be advised to drop the class. The same rule applies to all students, even though attendance and discussion will not be part of the grade for Ph. D. students.

M. Sc. Students’ performance will be assessed based on the following criteria:
1. Attendance and discussion 10%
2. Two presentations in the Class 20%
3. Two essays (1200-1500 words) on a question posed in the course, and one of the essays can be based on one of the presentations. (Of course, this means that the other essay must be different from the other presentations) 20%
4. Final: The final will a take-home final, students will answer three questions in short essays, each about 1200-1500 words) 50%

Ph. D. Students’ performance will be assessed based on the following criteria:
1. Attendance and discussion 10%
2. Two presentations in the Class 20%
3. Two essays (1500-2000 words) on a question posed in the course, and one of the essays can be based on one of the presentations. (Of course, this means that the other essay must be different from the other presentations) 20%
4. A research article (5,000-6,000 words) that addresses a significant theoretical issue. The article must be theoretically sophisticated enough to pass. Please consult with me before you pick your topic. 50%

Books Recommended for General Reading
The following two books are recommended not specifically for this course, but for your general interest. These two books will provide invaluable intellectual support for your understanding of the world around us, whether you stay in academia or work in other professions.


**General Texts for the Course**

1. James E. Dougherty, Robert L. Pfaltzgraff, Jr., *Contending theories of international relations: a comprehensive survey*. 5th ed., 2004. This is a standard introduction to various strains of IR theories (both macro- and medium-).
3. Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont, *Fashionable Nonsense: Postmodern Intellectuals’ Abuse of Science* (New York: Picardo, 1998). This fun book destroys much of the more radical side of the vast “post-modernist”, “post-structuralist”, and “extreme social constructivist” literature, it will save you enormous amount of time from reading (and more dangerously, being captured by) a huge load of fashionable non-sense, especially from the more cultural French philosophers (e.g., Lyotard, Derrida; Baudrillard). Recommending this book, however, does not mean that I reject all post-modernism, post-structuralism, and (social) constructivism literature.

**Professional Journals**

Please consult the following journals. They mostly focus on theoretical issues, although often with empirical evidences (and relevance).

Outline

1: Introduction
Basic Labels and Notions: international/world politics, international relations.
Levels of analysis: man, state, and system
Theories of international politics
Theories of foreign policy: explaining state behavior.
Nationalism as given, state as the main actor (although other actors matter)
Ethnocentrism as barrier toward knowledge

Required
A brief guide to philosophy of social sciences (Tang 2005-2009)

Why a critical approach toward theory in general

Recommended
Why a critical and a comparative approach toward theory in general

Some Sociology of Anglo-Saxon-dominating IR Theory

2: Realism and Idealism through time, and the structural Revolution

Required
Realism vs. Idealism: Ancient, Classic, and Modern

**The Structural Revolution in IR Theory**


**Recommended**

Classical Texts in Realism (note: they might have been correct, but this does not mean they are or will be correct)


Other Expositions on Idealism and Realism


**The Structural Revolution**

The Coming Collapse of Realism?

Human Nature and Realism: the “French Connection”?

Questions
1. What are the key differences on human nature between realism and idealism/utopianism? Does the structural revolution eliminate human nature from realism? Why and why not?
2. Why has idealism (in various forms) persisted, if according to its realist opponents, that idealism is profoundly misleading?
3. What is the essence of structural revolution? How much has it contributed or hindered the growth of IR as a science (or a discipline)?
4. Does and can realism reject “normative” or “moral” principle per se, in practice or in theorizing? Why? Why not?

A Question on the Sociology of Knowledge
1. Why did realism come to dominate in renaissance or modern world?
2. What is the value of realism and idealism, in academia and in the real world, today?

3. Offensive Realism vs. Defensive Realism

Required
Offensive Realism

Defensive Realism: The Foundation

**The Security Dilemma: A More Rigorous (Re-)Statement**


**Defensive Realism: Development and Elaboration**


**Offensive Realism vs. Non-offensive realism: a more rigorous differentiation**


**Recommended**

**Other Statements on Offensive Realism**


**Earlier and Less Rigorous Statements on Offensive Realism vs. Defensive Realism**


**Getting Realism Wrong? A Debate**


**Earlier and Less Rigorous Statements on the Security Dilemma**


**Questions**

1. What is the central difference between the two realisms? Has the debate been resolved? Why and why not?
2. Is the debate between offensive realism and defensive realism meaningful? Why or why not?
3. Why is the security dilemma a foundational concept in the making of defensive realism?

A more profound question (to be resolved in session 12)

1. Which versions of realism do you think have more validity for two historical periods: pre-1648, post-1648 to pre-1945, and post-1945? Why?

**Questions from Recommended Readings**

1. Did Lego and Moravcsik get realism wrong? Why or why not?

**4. Cooperation in International Politics: The Divergent Point**

between Offensive Realism vs. Non-offensive Realism Theories

**Required**

The possibility of cooperation: offensive realism vs. non-offensive realism


Reassurance as Cooperation-building


Institutions as Facilitators of Cooperation

**Recommended**

The Study of Cooperation with PD Game


Earlier Critique of PD Game as a Model of Cooperation in IR


Structural Approach toward Cooperation and its (further) Discontent


Reassurance: Further Readings


Questions

1. Why is the possibility of achieving cooperation other than temporary alliance when facing common opponents a fundamental divergent point between offensive realism and all the non-offensive realism theories?
2. What is the core logic of cooperation-building via reassurance? In light of Mearsheimer’s denial that cooperation-building via reassurance is possible (Mearsheimer 2006, “Interview”), how can you counter by arguing that cooperation-building via reassurance can really work?
3. What is wrong with structural theories of international cooperation?
Question from recommended reading (for the more capable)

1. In light of the more rigorous logic of cooperation-building via reassurance developed by Kydd (2000, 2005) and Tang (2008), what is wrong with Axelrod’s experiment as a platform for studying cooperation in international politics, in addition to what Tang has pointed out?

5. Liberalism Theories of IR

Required
Kant’s Stone

The Devastating Critique

Democratic Peace: Evidence and Explanation

Recommended
Reading Liberal Peace

Other Expositions of Liberalism

Other Criticism of the Democratic Peace


More on Democratic Peace


Debating Rawls’s “Law of Peoples”


Questions

1. Is it fair for us (whether realists or not) to label liberalism as part of “idealism”, if idealism is to mean “utopianism”?
2. Why does liberal internationalism (or international liberalism) have an imperialistic dimension, in theory and in practice?
3. What does “democratic peace” mean for a liberal theory of international politics? (i.e., Can a liberal theory of international politics remain viable, if “democratic peace” is not real? Why or why not?)
4. What does a liberal theory of international politics imply, other than democratic peace? What does this mean for the theory in IR?

6: International Institutions and Order: “Neoliberalism” and the English School

**Required**

**What is institution?**

**Neoliberalism and its Critics**

**The English School and its Critics**

**A Synthesis?**

**Recommended**

**Debating Institutions**

**Debating English School**

**A History of the English School**

**A (Re-)construction of the English School?**

**Questions**
1. What are the fundamental differences between neoliberalism and realism? Have the differences been resolved?
2. What do you think of some of the realists’ attack against neoliberalism? Contrast Mearsheimer/Schweller-Priess vs. Jervis. After realism’s attack, what is wrong with neoliberalism? What is good?
3. How do norms, institutions (rules) come into exist? What have been neoliberalism and the English school’s answer to this fundamental question? Have they really answered this more fundamental question?
4. Is the English school really that distinct, from neoliberalism and constructivism (discussed below)? (Hint: what is order, whose order, and tackle the question along the pluralist vs. solidarist divide)
A more fundamental question
1. Institutions (as rules) are simply ossified ideas. If this is the case, whose institutions, whose ideas?

7. Culturalism and Civilizationalism

Required

Culturalism: From Political Culture to Strategic Culture

Civilizationalism

Counter-Culturalism and counter-civilizationism.

Recommended

General: Political Culture and Strategic Culture


**Against Huntington**


**Questions**

1. How much does culture and civilization explain when it comes to state behavior? Can culture be the *Ultimate Explanation*? Why and why not?

2. The most devastating admission by Culturalists might have been Iain Johnston’s admission that China’s strategic culture actually differed little from realpolitik (supposedly a Western culture): if two very different cultures produce the same kind of strategic culture, what is left for culture? Can you explain why ancient China (esp. Ming dynasty) and European *realpolitik* were so strikingly similar, without falling back on a cultural explanation?

3. What are the relationships between culture, preferences (over goals and means), norm, and identity? Here, you inevitably come to a problem of (finite) regress (i.e., logic being pushed back one step further and further). Interest (as given by realists)—preferences (goals, motivations; not intentions)—identities—culture. What is wrong with this scheme? What is right with this scheme?

**A More profound questions**

1. What is relationship between culturalist explanation and ethnocentrism?

**Session 8: Constructivism**

**Required**

**Constructivism**


**Critiques of Constructivism: Weak**

**Critiques of Constructivism: Fundamental and Strong**

**Recommended**

**More Constructing: Theoretical and Empirical**

**State as a person and its identity**

**Questions**
1. Wendt claimed that he wanted a “rump materialism” (thus a middle ground between materialism and ideationalism), whereas Adler believed that constructivism stakes a “middle ground” between a “rationalist” stand and “interpretive/reflexive” stand. In your opinion, which middle ground is more critical for understanding international politics? Why so?
2. Does constructivism really occupy a middle ground along the two dimensions noted above? (Hint, a genuine middle ground demands an organic synthesis of the two dyadic approaches). Why? Why not?

3. There is no doubt that constructivism is an improvement over culturalism (and much more so over civilizationism). In your opinion, what are the key aspects that constructivism has improved upon culturalism and civilizationism?

4. At the same time, constructivism suffers some of the same fundamental deficiencies as culturalism and civilizationism. In your opinion, what are these key deficiencies?

9. Copenhagen School, Critical Theory, and Postmodernism

Required

The Copenhagen School

Critical Theory

Post-Modernism vs. Critical Theory

Recommended

All kinds of Security and Securitization


Societal Security: Social Psychology to the Rescue?

Critical Security Studies

Foucault, Postmodernism, and Political Science

Questions
1. What is right and wrong with the Copenhagen School? Did it get to the bottom of the question? (hint, why and what do states/elite securitize?)
2. Why there is no post-modernism (especially Foucault-ism) in political science in general, and IR in particular? Can Foucault-ism offer a solution to the question left behind by the Copenhagen school? Why and why not?
3. The essence of critical theory is to criticize the prevailing social system/norms. Has critical security studies been really that of critical, in the sense it seeks to criticize the prevailing international institutions/system?
4. Nobody disputes that “critical theory” has an emancipatory goal from its Hegelian-Marxist origin, thus a utopian goal. If this is the case, what have been the progresses made by critical security studies over the utopian thinking so fiercely attacked by Carr, Niebuhr, and Morgenthau?

A More Fundamental Question
1. Why utopian thinking has been so persistent-it always comes back in a new name (old wine in a new bottle)?

10. Social Psychology of International Politics-I

Required Readings
Ethnocentrism and Intergroup Relations

Motivated Biases

Learning: Overview

Perception and Misperception in Learning from History

Prospect Theory: Loss Aversion and endowment effect

Recommended

Ethnocentrism, Prejudice, and Group Psychology

General Overview

**Prospect Theory**


**A Misguided Application of Prospect Theory**


**Learning from History**


**Questions**

1. What are ethnocentrism’s implications for international conflict and cooperation?
2. How do leaders learn from history? How do you learn? Who will learn better, you or leaders? Why?
3. Which is more difficult, learning from one’s own experiences versus learning from others’ experiences? Why?
4. Can you identify some common “motivated biases” from leaders’ rhetoric and behavior?

**11. Social Psychology of International Politics-II**

**Required**

**Reputation for Resolve in Conflict**


**Fear and Trust**


**Emotions in International Politics**


**Uncertainty in IR**


**Counterfactual Thinking in Learning**


**Recommended**

**Reputation for Resolve**


**Uncertainty in IR**


**Fear, Prestige, Interest, and Trust in International Politics**


**Human Nature and IR Theories**


**Counterfactuals in IR**


**Questions**

1. Given the central of fear for one’s survival at the group level in international politics, what things can states do to alleviate their fear about each other?
2. Why is concern for reputation (for resolve) an important driver of escalation? What kind of roles reputation will likely play in international cooperation?
3. The psychology of counterfactuals holds some very interesting (and perhaps depressing) implications for our learning from history. What are they?

**12. Social Evolution of International Politics: Emerging Paradigm**

**Required**

**Overview**


**Biological Evolution versus Social Evolution**


**Applications of Social Evolutionary Theory in IR: Structural Level**


Applications of Social Evolutionary Theory in IR: State-level

Recommended

Understanding Evolution

(Semi-)Evolutionary Interpretation of History at Macro-level

Evolutionary Thinking at the State Level

Various Evolutionary Thinking in International Politics: Reviews
Sociobiology in International Relations: A Debate


Questions

1. In light of the evolutionary approach toward human society, what does “human nature” mean now? Can IR theory (or any social theory) really get away from “human nature”, however defined?
2. Has the evolutionary interpretation resolved the debate between offensive realism and defensive realism? Why or why not?
3. What is the general challenge posed by continuity and change in human society (and nature)? Do you think a social evolutionary framework offer some powerful explanations?

A More Fundamental Question

1. Can you justify my claim that SEP is the ultimate paradigm in social sciences? Why cannot a non-evolutionary interpretation do better?

13. Theories of Foreign Policy

Required Readings

Overview of (Realism) Theories of Foreign Policy


Theories of Foreign Policy in Conflict: expansion vs. under-balancing


Theories of Foreign Policy in International Cooperation

**Toward a General Theory of Foreign Policy Change**


**Recommended**

**General**


**Specific Theories**


**Questions**

1. What are the challenges, thus problems for generalizing, theories of foreign policy? Is a general theory of foreign policy possible?
2. What are the differences, if any, between explaining a particular policy and explaining a particular change in foreign policy?

14. **Theory of Region and Regionalism?**

**Required**

The Classic Tradition

A New Direction?

A Deeper Problem

Recommended
General Text

Debating Kang’s Thesis
Background Readings on Kang and European System


Questions

1. There is no doubt that region has become an important variable for understanding state behavior and international outcomes, especially after the end of the Cold War. Why is region important now, and why has it been (relatively) neglected before the end of the Cold War?
2. There is no doubt that the literature on regionalism has been mostly in the neoliberals and constructivism tradition. What is the strength and weakness of such a stand?
3. Almost everyone within the regional/regionalism literature focuses on regional order and regional institutions as a key variable for explaining regional peace and war. In light of Khong (2005)’s critique of the English School, what is the danger of relying on regional order and regional institutions as a key explanatory variable for regional peace and war?

15. Game Theory (“Rational Choice”) Approach toward IR

**Required Reading**

**War**


**Peace/Cooperation**


**Against Rational Choice: Normative and Epistemological**


**Recommended**

2. Harrison Wagoner, Who is Afraid of Rational Choice Theory? On line paper
3. *International Security*, 24/2 (Fall 1999), the debate on rational choice theory of war.

**Questions**

1. What is wrong with the Fearon-inspired rational choice theory of war?
2. What is the value for a “rational choice” theory of war? What is the value of a rational choice theory of cooperation?
3. Can rational choice theory provide a robust and inclusive theory of foreign policy (i.e., state behavior)? Why or why not?
4. To use Alberto O. Hirschman’s understanding on social sciences (from the first session), what additional criticisms can you advance against the “rational choice” approach toward war and peace?

**More Fundamental Questions**

1. In scientific enterprise, should knowledge *always* take priority over logical beauty? Why or why not?

**16. Systemic Complexity: Some Challenges in Theorizing IR**

**Required**

- Human Society as an extremely complex system: ontology and epistemology

- Human Society as an extremely complex system: methodology

**We Shape Society via Theorizing**


**Recommended**

We Shape Society via Theorizing

**Questions**

1. Use the foundational paradigms of social sciences to dissect one or two major IR theories, and then elaborate on their relative strength and weakness.
2. What are some of the most important drawbacks if one does not grasp all the foundational paradigms of social sciences? Illustrate your arguments with cases from IR theory.