

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THEORY

Students in Government 5 – a prerequisite for this course – will have encountered the major paradigms in international relations and some of the principal theories nested within them. In this course we will step back from these paradigms to examine their ontological and epistemological foundations. What is knowledge? Does it involve causal or other understandings? How is knowledge acquired? What is theory and what kind of knowledge does it constitute or allow? In what ways do the physical and social domains differ, and what are the implications of these differences for theory, research and knowledge? What kind of knowledge is possible about human beings and their individual and collective behavior?

Whether knowledge claims take the form of formal propositions, informal statements or what Nietzsche called “understandings that go beyond words,” it cannot be entirely self-referential. Knowledge must somehow build on the experience of the world. Theories – which represent one form of knowledge -- justify themselves on the basis of their ability to organize reality in a useful way and to explain or predict physical or social phenomena. Theories of all kinds rely on concepts to organize and describe the physical and social worlds. Concepts are creations of our minds, difficult to define with any precision and controversies rage about their correspondence to any external reality. To explain or predict, theories must engage evidence, which is another problematic category. There is no consensus among social scientists about the nature of evidence or the rules used for acquiring and evaluating it.

Familiarity with key approaches to ontology and epistemology and some of the controversies surrounding them provide the foundation for a more sophisticated understanding and evaluation of key theories in international relations. The first part of the course accordingly addresses the questions raised in the paragraphs above, properly the domain of philosophy of science and social science. The second part focuses on theories and the paradigms in our field. We will examine realism, liberalism and constructivism and also touch on Marxism, feminism, critical theory, post-structuralism, the English school and scientific realism. All of these paradigms are important, but only a few of them have generated general or grand theories of international relations. We will examine some of these theories and the ontological and epistemological foundations of various paradigms.

The principal assignment for the course is mastery of the literature in the syllabus and familiarizing oneself with the key concepts necessary to understand and evaluate international relations theories. I will accordingly base 15 percent of the grade on participation in seminar discussion. The remaining 85 percent will be a research paper. Students will conduct an independent inquiry on a subject approved by the instructor. I append a list of topics to this syllabus but am more than willing to consider additional topics that interest students.

Attendance is required and students unable to make a class should, when possible, notify me beforehand by email. I will announce my office hours in class and can be reached almost any time by email. I am frequently in my office in the afternoon and students are encouraged to stop by independently of my office hours.

Recommended for purchase are Lebow and Lichbach, *Theory and Evidence in Comparative Politics and International Relations*; Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, *The Conduct of Inquiry in International Relations* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011), Richard Ned Lebow, *A Cultural Theory of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), and Richard Ned Lebow, *Constructing Cause in International Relations*. However, it is not required to purchase any of these readings, as relevant chapters will be posted on Blackboard.

TOPIC 1 What is Knowledge?

Reading:

Jackson, *Conduct of Inquiry in International Relations*, pp. 24-40.

Richard Ned Lebow, "What Can We Know? How Do We Know," in Richard Ned Lebow and Mark Irving Lichbach, *Theory and Evidence in Comparative Politics and International Relations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 1-24.

Recommended

Fred Chernoff, *The Power of International Theory: Reforging the Link to Foreign-Policy Making Through Scientific Inquiry* (New York: Routledge, 2005), ch. 2

TOPIC 2 What is Theory?

Reading:

Paul Diesing, *How Does Social Science Work? Reflections on Practice* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991), pp. 3-28, 55-74.

Gary King, Robert Keohane and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 1-33.

TOPIC 2 Is Reality Described or Constructed?

Reading

Gabriel Almond, "Clouds, Clocks, and the Study of World Politics," *World Politics*. 29 (1977), pp. 496-522.

John R. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1995), pp. 1-58.

Recommended

Jens Bartelson, *A Genealogy of Sovereignty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 12-19, 69-78.

Chernoff, *Power of International Theory*, ch. 6.

Jackson, *Conduct of Inquiry in International Relations*, pp. 72-111.

Richard Ned Lebow, *Constructing Cause in International Relations*, ch. 1.

TOPIC 3

What is Knowledge? *Erklärung* versus *Verstehen*

Reading

Paul Diesing, *How Does Social Science Work?*, pp. 104-48.

Donald Puchala, "The Pragmatics of International History," *Mershon International Studies Review*, 39, no. 1 (1995), pp. 1-18.

Recommended

Gary King, Robert Keohane and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry*, pp. 34-63.

Jackson, *Conduct of Inquiry in International Relations*, pp. 41-71.

TOPIC 4

How do We Know?

Reading

Paul Diesing, *How Does Social Science Work? Reflections on Practice* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991), pp. 29-55.

David Waldner, "Transforming Inferences into Explanations: Lessons from the Study of Mass Extinctions," in Lebow and Lichbach, *Theory and Evidence in Comparative Politics and International*, pp. 145-76.

Recommended

Friedrich V. Kratochwil, "Evidence, Inference, and Truth as Problems of Theory Building in the Social Sciences," in Lebow and Lichbach, *Theory and Evidence in Comparative Politics and International Relations*, pp. 25-54.

Ted Hopf, "The Limits of Interpreting Evidence," in Lebow and Lichbach, *Theory and Evidence in Comparative Politics and International Relations*, pp. 55-86.

Brian M. Pollins, "Beyond Logical Positivism: Reframing King, Keohane, and Verba," in Lebow and Lichbach, *Theory and Evidence in Comparative Politics and International Relations*, pp. 87-106.

TOPIC 5 **What is International Relations Theory?**

Reading:

Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Ma.: Addison-Wesley, 1979), pp. 1-78.

Richard Ned Lebow, *A Cultural Theory of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 1-33

Recommended

Alexander L. Wendt, *A Social Theory of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 1-44.

Mark Irving Lichbach, "Theory and Evidence," in Lebow and Lichbach, *Theory and Evidence in Comparative Politics and International Relations*, pp. 261-80.

Steven Bernstein et al, "Social Science as Case-Based Diagnostics," in Lebow and Lichbach, *Theory and Evidence in Comparative Politics and International Relations*, pp. 229-60.

TOPIC 6 **Causation in International Relations**

Reading

Richard Ned Lebow, *Constructing Cause in International Relations*, chs. 1-2.

Recommended

Fred Chernoff, *The Power of International Theory*, ch. 6.

Milja Kurki, *Causation in International Relations: Reclaiming Causal Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

TOPIC 7 War

Reading:

Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, pp. 102-28, 161-93.

Richard Ned Lebow, *Why Nations Fight* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), chs. 1-2.

Recommended

Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), pp. 186-211.

Stuart J. Kaufman, Richard Little and William C. Wohlforth, *The Balance of Power in World History* (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2007).

TOPIC 8 Peace

Reading

Immanuel Kant, "Perpetual Peace," (1795).

G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order After Major Wars* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), chs. 1-2.

Richard Ned Lebow, *Why Nations Fight*, ch. 7/

Recommended

Etel Solingen, "The Political Economy of Nuclear Restraint," *International Security* 19 (Fall 1994), pp. 126-69.

Jack S. Levy, "Theory, Evidence, and Politics in the Evolution of International Relations Research Programs," in Lebow and Lichbach, *Theory and Evidence in Comparative Politics and International Relations*, pp. 177-98.

Andrew Lawrence, "Imperial Peace or Imperial Method? Skeptical Inquiries into Ambiguous Evidence for the 'Democratic Peace,'" in Lebow and Lichbach, *Theory and Evidence in Comparative Politics and International Relations*, pp. 199-228.

TOPIC 9 Constructivism

Reading:

Jackson, *Conduct of Inquiry in International Relations*, pp. 156-87.

Nicholas G. Onuf, *A World of Our Making: Rules and Rule in Social Theory and International Relations* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), pp. 33-52.

Richard Ned Lebow, *A Cultural Theory of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), chs. 2, 10.

Recommended

Alexander L. Wendt, *A Social Theory of International Relations*, pp. 246-379.

Richard Ned Lebow, *A Cultural Theory of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), chs. 8- 9.

TOPIC 10 Counterfactuals

Reading

Richard Ned Lebow, *Forbidden Fruit: Counterfactuals and International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), chs. 1-2

Recommended

Lebow, *Forbidden Fruit*, remaining chapters.

SUGESTED PAPER TOPICS

Does knowledge require knowledge of cause?

Can we establish causation in the social world?

Is David Hume a realist?

Can constitution substitute for causation as the basis for knowledge?

What is the relationship between constitution and cause?

Is "unity of science" a defensible position?

Do differences between the physical and social worlds require different approaches to knowledge?

Offer a defense or critique of scientific realism.

Evaluate the Vienna School and their project.

Offer a critical assessment of Karl Popper's intellectual trajectory
 Offer a critical assessment of the deductive-nomological model
 Offer a critical assessment of probability theories of cause
 Offer a critical assessment of equilibrium-based theories
 Conduct empirical research into the use of readings required in US graduate scope and methods courses
 Defend or critique the ontological and epistemological assumptions of neopositivism
 Defend or critique the ontological and epistemological assumptions of constructivism
 Evaluate the differences and promise of "thin" and "thick" approaches to constructivism
 How do we decide what constitutes evidence?
 What are the differences, if any, between explanation and prediction? To what extent are they feasible goals for IR?
 What is the difference between prediction and forecasts? Which is the more appropriate goal for IR?
 What are the implications of reflexivity for IR theory?
 What kind of knowledge is possible in a world in which all concepts are reifications?
 To what extent do all causal claims require consideration of counterfactuals?
 What are the implications of emergent properties for IR theory?
 If fact and fiction are not distinct categories, can science be distinguished from polemic?
 Write a critique of Wendt's theory of international relations
 Write a critique of Lebow's theory of international relations
 How has Morgenthau been interpreted and misinterpreted over the decades and what does this say about the field of IR
 Analyze and critique the way the concept of cause is used in any other discipline.
 Offer a critique of the ontological and epistemological foundations of the realist paradigm
 Offer a critique of the ontological and epistemological foundations of the liberal paradigm
 Assess the ontological and epistemological foundations of the Democratic Peace research program