

Social Theory and International Relations

MAIR, University of Bremen/Jacobs University

Spring/Summer 2023

(Abridged version 06/03/2023)

Instructor:

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Office hours:

Wednesdays 16-18

Online & in person (office 7.2030, InIIS)

Meeting times:

Tuesdays, 10:00-13:00

7.2210 (InIIS - Mary-Somerville-Str. 7)

Please book all office hour appointments in

this link: <https://calendly.com/kkusic>

About the module:

This module will help students to see how social theories can be used to understand and explain international political life. The module builds directly upon two previously completed seminars: *Actors, Institutions and Global Governance* and *Modern Social Theory*. While the former covered major IR theoretical traditions, the latter provided an overview of important strands and thinkers in social theory. This course will equip students to recognise meta-theoretical assumptions in both theoretical and empirical work, and encourage them to think about their own approaches for the final paper and the MA thesis.

Rather than being organised by particular theories or thinkers, this module is divided into three parts which introduce different concepts, issues, and processes of international politics. The first part examines how we might think about theory and international relations and equips us with the tools needed for the rest of the term. In the second part, we think about particular issues that structure international political life and our ways of studying it. And in the final section, we examine three phenomena around which much of international political, social, and economic life are organised. These are not exhaustive topics, but illustrative examples of how we can use different theoretical approaches to study IR.

All of the session topics can be approached with different theoretical backgrounds and tools. Short in-class lectures will introduce the theoretical background of the topics, while the readings and discussions will provide different examples for in-depth study.

Classroom expectations:

The course is designed to encourage students to both participate and shape its trajectory. Because we are dealing with theoretical paradigms, reading and class preparation is essential. In addition to assessed work (see below), I also expect you to come to each classroom session having actively read, and prepared to discuss, the assigned readings. I would also encourage you to bring in topics of interest — from the media, other courses, or elsewhere — that you think are relevant to the specific topic.

Learning materials:

All mandatory readings and the PPTs of the in-class lectures will be available on Stud.IP. The lecture notes, however, will not be uploaded, so class attendance is encouraged.

Assessment:

Large load (9 CP):

1. Five position papers – 25% of the final grade (1.5CP) – June 6
2. Book review – 25% of the final grade (1.5CP) – May 26
3. Final essay – 50% of the final grade (3CP) – Aug 31

Small load (6 CP):

1. Five position papers – 50% of the final grade (1.5CP) – June 6
2. Book review – 50% of the final grade (1.5CP) – May 26

Position papers:

Students have to submit five short (500–700 words) position papers on seminar topics. There are two options:

1. The 'Standard' position paper uses one or more of the texts assigned for the seminar. The paper should reflect on the themes from the assigned texts, but you are also allowed (but not required) to introduce additional literature. It should not summarise the texts, but show your own position in relation to them. You can also address differences and agreements between the texts. This paper could be written in several ways. You could express your own position in relation to the themes (these should not be simply 'opinions', but developed arguments). You could also use it to raise questions that seem unclear or unfinished. Finally, you could use it to record summaries and your reactions to the texts which might be helpful later in your academic life and beyond.
2. The 'From the media' paper uses the assigned readings to reflect on anything from the media that you are engaged with. This might be news, long-form journalism in text or podcast format, books, TV shows, etc. This is an opportunity to 'test' how the readings can shape (or even change) how we understand different dimension of international political, social, and economic life. This paper might require a bit more creativity than the

'Standard' one. It could also serve as a 'testing ground' for longer applied papers where you will be expected not only to understand a particular theory, concept, or approach, but also to use it to create new insights.

The position papers should be emailed in PDF format with the usual MAIR formatting requirements. You should title them SURNAME_#1-5 (e.g. Kusic_1), with the number corresponding to which of the five position papers it is, and use the same for the email subject line. They are due two hours before the seminar (e.g. if you are writing a position paper for the seminar on religion and secularity, you should upload it by 8am on May 2). You should have five position papers uploaded by June 6 as the final session is not eligible for a position paper.

The grade for the position papers is cumulative, i.e., I will not give you individual marks for the five position papers, but will evaluate your effort for the whole semester. I will provide some feedback after the first submission, and you can come to office hours to discuss your progress at any time. This is recommended around the submission of the third paper, so you have time to address any possible problems for the second half of the submissions.

Book reviews:

You are required to write a book review of 1000-2000 words. You will notice that a lot of knowledge production today happens through peer-reviewed journal articles. Since they have particular and peculiar requirements and limitations, a monograph remains a unique and important way to present and engage with an argument in depth. A book review will present the main ideas and arguments of the book, position it within the wider literature related to the topic, and highlight some limitations and/or paths for further research. You can also write an extended review of multiple books (up to 3) with the word limit increasing to 2000-3000 words. Please see me to discuss options if this is something that you are interested in.

I have assembled a list of books that you might consider on Stud.IP. You are also free to choose a book based on your own interests, but please check with me first if a particular title is eligible for a book review. When looking for books, a good idea is to start from the 'best book' awards of many IR organisations (EISA, BISA, ISA) and their working groups/sections.

The book review is due during reading week and should be submitted by email by 5pm on May 26. It should follow the MAIR formatting and citation guidelines, and be submitted in PDF format, titled SURNAME_Book Review.

Final papers:

The Final paper should be 4000-5000 words and can take two forms. It can be either an extended literature review on your own topic of interest (or the topic of your MA thesis) or it

can be a 'normal' research paper. There are pros and cons to both, which we will discuss in class. You should come to office hours if you are having trouble deciding (or grasping the difference between the two). You are free to follow your interests in deciding on the topic, but it is usually a good idea to discuss it with me during office hours.

You are required to prepare an abstract and short outline of your paper for our last session on June 12. We will use these to review the course and the discussion will help you prepare for the writing of the paper.

The papers are due on August 31, 2023, at 17:00. Please follow the MAIR formatting and citation guidelines, and send them in PDF format titled SURNAME_Final Paper.

Seminar overview:

<u>#</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>
1	March 14, 2023	What does theory do?
2	March 21, 2023	Who gets to theorise? (on ZOOM)
3	March 28, 2023	What is 'the international'?
4	April 4, 2023	Who makes international political life?
5	April 11, 2023	Race and ethnicity
6	April 18, 2023	Gender and sexuality
7	April 25, 2023	Class and capitalism
8	May 2, 2023	Religion and secularity
9	May 9, 2023	Human and more-than-human
10	May 16, 2023	War (and peace)
11	May 23, 2023	READING WEEK (book reviews due May 26)
12	May 30, 2023	Development
13	June 6, 2023	Climate crisis
14	June 13, 2023	Wrap up & presentation of final paper ideas