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Seminar: Social Theory and International Relations

Monday 13-16h, Unicom, (InIIS), room 7.2210

Master International Relations: Global Governance and Social Theory

VAK: 08-351-2-MA IR-MC2

Final Version, May 25, 2020

Course description

This class has two goals: First, it shall render students familiar with social theoretical bases of main strands of IR theory (realist, liberal, critical). Second, it shall show how current theoretical debates and empirical research in IR are inspired by further social theories. These will include liberal institutionalism, pragmatism, postcolonial studies, and critical historical approaches.

Most of the sessions will therefore combine basic reading on key concepts and authors with additional reading in which these concepts can be seen “at work”. Credit points are acquired by oral presentations, jointly or individually and a longer term paper.

How we proceed

The general idea and conviction behind this design of the class is the understanding of IR as being part of a long tradition of reflections on social and political phenomena. The “big ideas” of society, politics and history still stand behind the major positions in IR theory.

The aim of this is that social theory and theories of international relations are just not studied as “dead knowledge” but as intellectual approaches to render the world intelligible. We will look at the architecture of theories and their usage as analytical approaches by adding empirical material in order to see what we find valid or contestable.

This will enable us to critically assess theories and schools dealt with in this class. All the suggested theories have their merits and shortcomings, and students should select those for preparation that they have a particular interest in.

Apart from helping each other to come to terms with complex contents, the central question of all sessions will be what the implications of theories might be for the understanding and study of international politics. Also, we will use one example in each session for such a usage.

My suggestion is to use this class for preparation of research: We will have a classic and a more contemporary text on each subject and these will be read in a division of labor manner. After the first five sessions, we will change the format. For presentations, students shall form small teams of max. three in order to prepare a session. This shall include empirical material that allows us to weigh and discuss the pertinence of IR theories and their anchorage in social theories. I expect you to research interesting material for that presentation by yourself and to present in a manner that others can follow and that it would encourage discussion.

Please make sure you prepare enough copies of handouts for your presentation. If you send a file to me three days in advance, I can take care of this.

Corona-clause:

As we will not resume in the (physical) class room, I replace the oral participation by three short tasks that each student has to do individually. For that purpose, I will define a question or several for each session. Such questions will be on the Powerpoints for each session. Students then would have their own choice of which three to pick, but these must not be from the same session.

Please note that all presenters are nevertheless required to send in a short summary of the additional reading they would present in class. It should also discuss these texts in a critical manner. You could discuss this in all kinds of directions: Is what it says convincing? How does it relate to other theoretical strands? What would the main arguments mean for selected current issues of international politics?

Each team is free to design a session along its own ideas and they can call me in at any stage and assign me any role. **Please consult with me at least a week before the session on how you would like to organize the session.** Each session, however, should contain a summary of main arguments of the respective theoretical school and the presentation of some empirical material that allows for a debate of its validity and/or limits.

Those not preparing a session are supposed to have read the mandatory text. If there is more than one mandatory read, we will occasionally divide the seminar in two sections, A and B, so that only one text is mandatory but we will have a broader base for discussion. If your surname starts with a K or later letter in the alphabet, you are in group B. If it is A-J you are in group A.

Assignments and Grading

6 CP = Small paper (70%) + presentation (30%)
or: two position papers (70%) + presentation (30%)

9 CP = Term paper (70%) + presentation (20%) + position paper (10%)

See also "corona clause" above

Rules for position paper: This is a paper of about 800 words on one of the sessions' topics. The paper is due at the beginning of that session and shall follow the MAIR style sheet regulations. It shall reproduce the contents of texts rather briefly, the main part must consist of a position, which is an argued standpoint about the relevance of a topic for our understanding of international politics. You may consider this as a preparation for your term paper.

Rules for a small paper: A small paper has a length of about 1.500 words and would deal with one session's topic in a critical manner. It is not enough to summarize the readings' content. Additional material that you have to research independently needs to be included. The small paper should have an argument, i.e. a statement that is argued for by material of whatever source. Both purely theoretical as well as empirically based arguments are welcome. Other than the topics of sessions, you may write on a topic of your choice if I approve that topic.

Rules for the term paper: Term papers should focus on one of the discussed theoretical strands, with a general evaluation of its value for our understanding of international relations. This could be done in an empirical testing mode or in a purely theoretical

perspective. Other theories can be subject of term papers as well, in this case you would need my agreement. Text layout: 1.5 spaced, hyphenated justification (*Blocksatz*); font size 12-13. Late submission will result in reduction of grades, according to the M.A. program stipulations. Term papers are due on **August 31, 2020, 8 p.m. MET**. Late submission will result in reduction of grades, according to the M.A. program stipulations. The MAIR “style sheet” is the mandatory formal standard for all written material in the program. The length of term papers should range between 4,000 and 5,000 words. I welcome hard copies in addition to the digital version. Please send the printout as well as the file (doc[x] or pdf) to Claudia Herold (herold@uni-bremen.de) at InIIS.

Overview

- 1 Open discussion: Theory, Stages and Functions (Guzzini; Schmidt)
- 2 Basic vocabulary: Max Weber and political sociology

Part I: Classical paradigms of IR

- 3 Realism again? Morgenthau and critics (Morgenthau, Tickner)
- 4 On progress (Kant, Mueller)
- 5 Marxism again? (Luxemburg, Strange)

Part II: Other strands, then and now

- 6 On eternal recurrence (Nietzsche, Luttwak)
- 7 Liberalism again? Rationality and negotiation (Mill; Abbott/Snidal)
- 8 On organization (North, Lenin)
- 9 Is there a global IR? (Bilgin; Acharya)
- 10 On the republic (Arendt, Owen)
- 11 Decolonization
- 12 Feminist IR
- 13 Final discussion and advice on term papers

Content of sessions and suggested questions

Session # 1 March 9 Social Theories and Theories in International Relations

Theory has a history too, and so has any academic discipline. We will use an overview text to talk about the relation of social and political theory with International Relations as an academic discipline. The so-called “great debates” will be touched upon as well as the main influences that have shaped Western IR over the last sixty years. This will include questions of philosophy of science as well as of political theory. In this session, work in small groups, joint discussion and inputs from the teacher will be combined.

Mandatory Reading: Guzzini 2013.

Session # 2 March 16 Max Weber and the early stages of political sociology

This session will introduce into (often forgotten) basics of social theory and political sociology. We will study the basic vocabulary of Max Weber's political sociology and we will discuss its applicability and limits for the study of international relations nowadays.

The mandatory reading for this session is long and at times a dry read. Please make sure you get the main definitions of social action, social relationship, power, domination, legitimacy, institution, as we will use the session to establish some basic vocabulary that we can relate to in further sessions. You will find the definitions at the beginning of each § in the text. Don't be irritated about the use of §-signs, Weber uses forms of legal studies in this text.

Mandatory reading: Weber ([1920] 2004: 311-358)

Presenter: Klaus Schlichte (with group discussion)

PART I: CLASSICAL PARADIGMS OF IR

Session # 3 March 23 Realism again? Morgenthau and critics

Realism still is considered to something like the standard theory of international relations. Also, it has attracted most criticism, as all kinds of other theories had to delineate themselves from it. We will use this session to re-assert some core ideas of realism, but we will also look at some more recent criticism of it.

Reading: Mandatory: Morgenthau [1954] 2006; chap. 1; (only presenters: Tickner 1988 or Wendt 1992)

Presenter:

Session # 4, March 30 On progress

Despite all kinds of criticism, both from the right and the left, liberal ideas are not dead, of course. The idea of progress is central to liberal thought, and we will use two texts here to re-assess the reasons of that expectation. Is it just a hope or can we hint to empirical evidence that might indicate fundamental change for the better in international relations? If so, what would we look at in order to find causal explanations for such a development to take place? Presenters can either have a look at war statistics and their interpretation, at the development of international law or at the role of international institutions in order to launch our discussion on observability of progress.

Reading: Mandatory: Kant 1784 (Pres.: Mueller 2009)

Presenter:

Session # 5 April 6 Marxism again? (Luxemburg and Strange)

Marxism was the core inspiration for critical IR since the beginning of the discipline. Soon many varieties emerged, ranging from state dogmas as in the case of Stalinism and Maoism to the very diverse schools of Western Marxism. In this session we will look back at core arguments of a lesser known variety of theories of imperialism, Rosa Luxemburg's version, and contrast this with a more recent prominent school of thought in IR, critical IPE.

Presenters could look at world market structures, the role of private corporations in world politics, the global flows of people, money or goods and their political effects, etc.

Reading: Mandatory: Strange 1994 (Pres. Luxemburg 1913; chap. 28 + 32)

Presenter:

No session on April 13 (Easter Monday)

PART TWO: OTHER STRANDS, THEN AND NOW

Session # 6 April 20, On eternal recurrence (Nietzsche, Luttwak)

Friedrich Nietzsche is perhaps the most contested author of all. While many consider him to be a proponent of racist and a-social thought, his works have also inspired major critical theorists of the 20th century like Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Max Weber, and realist thought in IR. Nietzsche is very skeptical of progress, and has a particular view on modern moral values. We will look into his ideas and see what a realist position in IR makes of it. Is Luttwak's argument in accordance with Nietzsche's position? Presenters could look at the role of great powers, the distribution of power in the international system or at earlier stages of international politics for a diachronic comparison with the present. Or they could look at the history of human rights, the genealogy of humanitarianism etc.

Reading: Mandatory: Nietzsche [1887] 2006, 1st and 2nd essay; Pres.: Luttwak 1999.

Presenter:

Session # 7 April 27 Liberalism again? Liberty and the liberal order

There is growing discussion on whether we really live in a "liberal world order", and, if so, whether it is currently endangered. In this session, we will go back to one of the foundational texts on what liberty is and where its limits lie. The work of John Stuart Mill is, however, just one variety among many. In a second step, we will look at what is expected from a change of power relations in the international system with regard to the "liberal order".

Reading: Mandatory: Mill 1859: 6-18; 60-85 (Pres.: Abbott/Snidal 1998)

Presenters:

Session # 8 May 4 On organization: North and Lenin

There are countless theories on organizations, and in most of them the state has a role as a primary model. In this session we will look at two of them and relate them to the image of the state that dominates most IR theories. In this session we will use two competing theories on how to think about the state and the question of organization more generally. Lenin developed his own rather rigid interpretation of the socialist state and the role of the party that became extremely influential in large parts of the world in the 20th century. North, a Nobel prize winner, has a much more formal theory. Presenters could pick single states or groups of states in order to see whether we can interpret their trajectories along these lines of reasoning.

Reading: Mandatory: Lenin 1917; (presentation: North 1981)

Presenter:

Session #9 May 11 Is there a global IR theory?

Edward Said (1978) Achille Mbembe (1992) and Pinar Bilgin (2010) are among the most often quoted authors of a post-colonial critique of "Western" ideas about how the world is structured. Some of them did not aim at contributing to the discipline of IR proper, but there is an ongoing debate on the relevance of their thoughts for the discipline, its main assumptions and even its (limited?) global coverage. What is this criticism about? Would we

agree? Presenters could pick speeches of Western politicians or political science textbooks and let us see in how far we would detect a need for “decolonization”. Or is it all old wine in new bottles, if we look at concepts of “African socialism” (cf. Nyrere 1968), for example?

Reading: Mandatory: Bilgin 2010 (A) Acharya 2014 (B)

Further reading: Said 1978, Mbembe 1992; Nyrere 1968 (select)

Presenters:

10 May 18 On the republic

In this session we will cross the boundary to political theory in which Hannah Arendt is a highly influential and respected seminal author. Not being a Marxist, she has a pretty critical view on the merits and shortcomings of “bourgeois” political ideas that still dominate our thinking. What does she say about the circumstances of the emergence of these political ideas and about their validity? To what extent are these ideas related or bound to particular contexts? We will combine this reconstruction of Arendt’s thought with a discussion on what basic political conceptions are used in IR theories and research today.

We will discuss two texts:

Reading: Mandatory: Arendt; (Pres.: Owen)

Presenter:

11 May 25 Decolonization

In current IR debates, the issue of “decolonization” has become a prominent theme. It is not just about the époque but also about the efforts, to invent the discipline anew without the inherited bias that stems from its inception in the imperial/colonial age.

In this session we will do both: we will first look into a classic text on decolonization.

Fanon’s text became a kind of manifesto for anti-colonialists, but it is also a reference in postcolonial studies and political activism around “decolonization” of culture.

Reading: Mandatory: Taylor 2012; (Pres. Fanon 1965, 35-95)

Presenter:

June 1 no session – Pentecost Monday

12 June 8 Feminist IR

Parallel to the emergence of feminist movements in the 19th century and its historical diversification, feminist criticism of how international politics is done have emerged. Very roughly, one might distinguish between liberal and radical feminism in the first stage of this diversification. But meanwhile, feminist approaches in the analysis of international relations have become much more diverse, including epistemological and ontological questions. We might read two texts here, in a division of labor, and getting a third one presented.

Reading: Mandatory: Tickner 2006 (Pres. Sjoberg 2012)

Presenter:

13 June 15 Final Discussion and Expectations about Term Papers

In the last hour of this session, we should try to summarize and evaluate what we have read, talked about and debated in this course. Where do social theory and IR fit, where are loopholes and gaps, and what kind of social theory or other ideas could enhance our understanding of international politics? What questions remain open?

We will also use this session for preparing the term papers. What are expectations to meet, what kind of topics might work, what else needs to be taken into account?

General Reading:

For background information on key terms and on schools of thought in IR theory and social theory, I find the following works very helpful:

Burchill, Scott / Devetak, Richard / Linklater, Scott et al. 2009: *Theories of International Relations*, 4th ed., London: Palgrave.

Carlsnaes, Walter et al. (eds.) 2013: *Handbook of International Relations*, London: Sage.

Harrington, Austin (ed.) (2004): *Modern Social Theory*, Oxford: Oxford UP.

Joas, Hans; Knöbl, Wolfgang (2009): *Social Theory. Twenty Introductory Lectures*. Cambridge, CUP.

General resource: Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (online, <http://plato.stanford.edu/>)

Literature for sessions:

Acharya, Amitav 2014: *Global International Relations (IR) and Regional Worlds*, in: *International Studies Quarterly*, 58, 647-659.

Arendt, Hannah 1955: *Elements and Origins of Totalitarian Rule*, New York: Knopf, Chapter 5: The political emancipation of the bourgeoisie, OR:

Arendt, Hannah 1963, *On Revolution*, New York: Viking Press, chapter 6: The revolutionary meaning and its lost treasure. (presenters' choice)

Barnett, Michael / Finnemore, Martha 1999: 'The Politics, Power, and Pathologies of International Organizations.' *International Organization*, 699-732.

Bartelson, Jens 2015 'Sovereignty as Symbolic Form', in Halvard Leira & Benjamin de Carvalho (eds.) *Historical International Relations*, Vol. 3, London: Sage.

Bilgin, Pinar 2010: 'The "Western-Centrism" of Security Studies: "Blind Spot" or Constitutive Practice?', in: *Security Dialogue*, 41, 6, 615-622.

Buzan, Barry / Acharya, Amitav 2017: 'Why is there no Non-Western International Relations Theory? Ten years on', in: *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, 17, 3, 341-370.

Cox, Robert W. (1986): *Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory*. In: Keohane, Robert O. (ed.): *Neorealism and Its Critics*. New York: Columbia University Press, 204-255.

Enloe, Cynthia 2014 *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases*, Berkeley, Cal.: University of California Press.

Fanon, Frantz 1965: *The Wretched of the Earth* (first Paris 1961), New York, NY: Weidenfeld.

Guzzini, Stefano 2013: 'The ends of International Relations theory: stages of reflexivity and modes of theorizing', in: *European Journal of International Relations*, 19, 3,

Hookway, Christopher, "Pragmatism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2016/entries/pragmatism/>

Kant, Immanuel 1784: 'Idea for a universal history from a cosmopolitan point of view (several editions)' > <https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/ethics/kant/universal-history.htm><

Lenin, Vladimir I. 1917: *The Economic Basis of the Withering Away of the State*, Chap. 5 of "State and Revolution" (various issues, also available online)

Luttwak, Edward N. 1999: 'Give War a Chance', in: *Foreign Affairs*, 78, 4, 36-44.

- Luxemburg, Rosa 1913: The accumulation of capital, (first: Berlin 1913) (online: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1913/accumulation-capital/index.htm>)
- Mbembe, Achille 1992: Provisional Notes on the Postcolony, in: Africa: Journal of the International African Institute, 62, 1, 3-37.
- Morgenthau, Hans 1954: Politics Among Nations. The struggle for power and peace, New York.
- Mueller, John 2009: War has almost ceased to exist: an assessment, in: Political Science Quarterly, 124, 2, 297-321.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich [1887] 2006: On the Genealogy of Morality, ed. by Keith Ansell-Pearson, Cambridge, Mass.: CUP.
- North, Douglass C. 1981: Structure and Change in Economic History, New York: W. Norton.
- Nyerere, Julius 1968: Uhuru na Ujama: a selection from writings and speeches, 1965-1967, Oxford: OUP.
- Owen, Patricia (on Arendt) (presenters choice)
- Putnam, Robert D. (1988): Diplomacy and domestic politics: the logic of two-level games. In: *International Organization*, 42, 3.
- Said, Edward 1978: Latent and Manifest Orientalism, in: Said: Orientalism. Western Conceptions fo the Orient, pp. 201-225, London: Routledge.
- Schmidt, Brian C. 2003: *On the History and Historiography in International Relations*, in: Carlsnaes et al., Handbook of International Relations, London: Sage, 3-22.
- Sjoberg, Laura 2012: Gender, structure, and war: what Waltz couldn't see, in: *International Theory*, 4, 1, 1-38.
- Strange, Susan 1994: Wake up, Krasner, the world has changed!, in: *Review of Political Economy*, 1, 2, 209-216.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty 1988: Can the Subaltern Speak?, in: Cary Nelson / Lawrence Grosberg (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Sylvester, Christine et al. 2011. "The Forum: Emotion and the Feminist IR Researcher." *International Studies Review* 13(4): 687-708.
- Taylor, Lucy 2012: Decolonizing International Relations: Perspectives from Latin America, in: *International Studies Review*, 14, 386-400
- Tickner, J. 2006: Feminism meets International Relations: some methodological issues, in: Ackerly, Brooke A. / Stern, Maria / True, Jaqui (eds.), *Feminist Methodologies for International Relations*, Cambridge: CUP, 19-41.
- Tickner, J.A. 1988: A Critique of Morgenthau's Principles of Political Realism. A Feminist Reformulation, in: *Millenium* 17, 3, 429-440.
- Weber, Max (2004 [1920]): Basic Sociological Concepts, in: Whimster, Sam (ed.) *The Essential Weber. A reader*, London: Routledge, 311-358.