



Exeter College Oxford Summer Program

BEYOND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS Theories and Challenges of Global Politics

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Is politics possible beyond the nation-state? Will wars and conflicts ever become obsolete? This course introduces students to theories of International Relations (IR) and contemporary issues of Global Politics. It explores the historical and conceptual foundations of the field and investigates challenges currently shaping global politics. The course will be divided into two main sections. Following a brief historical introduction to the discipline, we will explore classical concepts and theories of IR, including power and anarchy (Realism), cooperation and human rights (Liberalism), norms and identity (Constructivism), followed by critical perspectives on global politics such as class and dependencies (Marxism), gender and the patriarchy (Feminism), and exploitation and orientalism (Postcolonialism). In the second section of the course, we will investigate pressing global issues like terrorism, AI, and the climate crisis, which have fundamentally altered the conduct of international politics. Finally, the module will conclude with a discussion of future (im)possibilities for global politics. The course is designed to be multidisciplinary and is suitable for students of all disciplines interested in current events, International Relations, political theory, and twentieth-century history. There are no prerequisites, and no previous knowledge of International Relations or political history is required, but it would be an advantage.

TOPICS

- 1. What is IR?** Thinking global politics beyond the now
- 2. History:** From Westphalia to US hegemony towards multipolarity
- 3. Realism:** Power, Anarchy, and Suspicion
- 4. Liberalism:** Cooperation, Global Markets, and Human Rights
- 5. Constructivism:** Making the International
- 6. Marxism:** Hierarchies, Class, and Economic Dependencies
- 7. Feminism and Gender:** International Politics Beyond the Masculine
- 8. Post-colonialism:** Exploitation, Orientalism, and the 'West.'
- 9. The Ethics of Killing in War:** From 'Just Wars' to Terrorism
- 10. Technologies of Warfare, Surveillance and Control:** Drones, AI, and the politicisation of Big Tech
- 11. Planetary Politics?** Environmental Crises, the Anthropocene, and post-humanism
- 12. The Future of Global Politics:** Dystopia or Utopia?

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- To introduce students to IR as it has historically developed from the rise of the modern state system to American hegemony from the perspectives of various theories that have shaped the discipline.
- To reflect upon contemporary issues and challenges in global politics.
- To develop students' critical analysis skills using historically based evidence in the context of political debate and discussion.

TEACHING METHODS AND ASSESSMENT

- 12 x 1.25hr Lectures (15hrs)
- 6 x 1.25hr Seminars (7.5hrs)
- 4 x 1.25hrs paired tutorials (2.5hrs)

Final Assessment: An essay of no more than 3,000 words (40%), a final three-hour written examination (40%), an oral presentation (10%) and participation in seminar discussion (10%).

BACKGROUND READINGS

- Baylis, J. Smith, S. & Owens, P. (eds) *The Globalization of World Politics* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2023).
- Dunne T. Kurki, M. & Smith S. (eds) *International Relations Theories Discipline and Diversity* 5th or 3rd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

LECTURE SCHEDULE

1. WHAT IS IR? THINKING GLOBAL POLITICS BEYOND THE NOW

Considers the contours of the subject matter of International Relations, reviews the evolution of the academic field of IR, and introduces the discipline as a conceptual framework to deepen our understanding of global politics.

Required readings:

- Baylis, John and Smith, Steve (eds.), *The Globalization of World Politics*, Chapters 1
- Carr, EH. *The Twenty Years Crisis* Chapter 2.

Further reading:

- Dunne T. Kurki, M. & Smith S. (eds) *International Relations Theories Discipline and Diversity*, Chapter 1 and 2.

2. HISTORY: FROM WESTPHALIA TO US HEGEMONY TOWARDS MULTIPOLARITY

Examines how the modern state system emerged and evolved into the post-war international order and the US-led contemporary world order.

Required readings:

- Baylis, John and Smith, Steve (eds.), *The Globalization of World Politics*, Chapters 3 and 4
- Carr, EH. *The Twenty Years Crisis*, Chapter 3.

Further reading:

- Watson, Adam, *The Evolution of International Society: A Comparative Historical Analysis* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 198-276.

3. REALISM: POWER, ANARCHY, AND SUSPICION

Reviews the realist school of international relations, considering the continued centrality of concepts such as 'the state of nature', power, anarchy, and the security dilemma.

Required readings:

- Carr, EH. *The Twenty Years Crisis*, Chapters 5 & 6
- Dunne T. Kurki, M. & Smith S. (eds) *International Relations Theories Discipline and Diversity* chapter 4.

Further reading:

- Mearsheimer, J. (2014), *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, New York: W.W. Norton, Chapter 2, pp. 29-54.

4. LIBERALISM: COOPERATION, GLOBAL MARKETS, AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Explores the promise of the liberal approach to IR by focusing on the scope for cooperation among states and the pacifying role of international institutions. Considers the possibility of cooperation 'beyond' the state.

Required readings:

- Dunne T. Kurki, M. & Smith S. (eds) *International Relations Theories Discipline and Diversity*, Chapter 5
- Fukuyama, F. "The End of History?", *The National Interest* 16, Summer 1989. ([link here](#))

Further reading:

- Doyle, M. 'Liberalism and World Politics', *The American Political Science Review*, 80, No. 4, Dec., 1986, pp. 1151-1169. ([link here](#))

5. CONSTRUCTIVISM: MAKING THE INTERNATIONAL

Reflects on how norms, rules, and identities shape the international order and our perceptions of it. Constructivism challenges some of the core assumptions of Realism and Liberalism.

Required reading:

- Wendt, A. 'Anarchy is what States Make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics', *International Organization*, 46, No. 2, Spring, 1992, pp. 391- 425. ([Link here](#))

Further readings:

- Dunne T. Kurki, M. & Smith S. (eds) *International Relations Theories Discipline and Diversity* chapter 10.
- Ole Wæver, 'Securitization and Desecuritization', in *On Security*, Ronnie D. Lipschutz, ed. (NY: Colombia University Press, 1995) 46-86.

6. MARXISM: HIERARCHIES, CLASS, AND ECONOMIC DEPENDENCIES

Discusses Marxism as a critical approach to International Relations by focusing on how capital movement, class relations, economic dependencies, and global hierarchies shape the international order.

Required reading:

- Gunder Frank, A. *Theory and Methodology of World Development The Writings of Andre Gunder Frank*, Edited by Sing C. Chew and Pat Lauderdale chapter 1 'The Development of Underdevelopment' ([link here](#))
- Cox, R. W. (1983). 'Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations : An Essay in Method'. *Millennium*, 12(2), 162-175. ([link here](#))

Further reading:

- Dunne T. Kurki, M. & Smith S. (eds) *International Relations Theories Discipline and Diversity* chapter 8.
- Wallerstein, I. (1991) chapter 7 "Class Conflict in the Capitalist World-Economy" in *Race, Nation, Class*. London: Verso.

7. FEMINISM AND GENDER: INTERNATIONAL POLITICS BEYOND THE MASCULINE

Examines how gender has impacted the construction of international politics and the discipline of IR. Reflects on how feminist theory can deepen our understanding of politics.

Required reading:

- Tickner, J. A. (2001), *Gendering World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press) introduction and chapter 1

Further readings:

- Enloe C. *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases Making Feminist sense of International Politics* (Berkley: University of California press), Chapter 1, 2014.
- Dunne T. Kurki, M. & Smith S. (eds) *International Relations Theories Discipline and Diversity* chapter 11.

8. POST-COLONIALISM: EXPLOITATION, ORIENTALISM, AND THE 'WEST'

Situates colonial and neocolonial hierarchies as crucial for understanding the Western-dominated liberal order. Reflects on how the global south tends to be orientalised by 'the West'.

Required readings:

- Said, E. (1979) *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books), Introduction. ([Link here](#))
- Dunne T. Kurki, M. & Smith S. (eds) *International Relations Theories Discipline and Diversity* chapter 13.

Further reading:

- Cesaire, A. (2000) *Discourse on Colonialism*. New York: NYU Press. (chapter: 'Discourse on Colonialism')
- Chibber, V. (2013) *Postcolonialism and the Spectre of Capital*. New York: Verso.
- Balibar E. and Wallerstein I. *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (London: Verso), 1991.

9. THE ETHICS OF KILLING IN WAR: FROM 'JUST WARS' TO TERRORISM

Considers the normative claims behind conflicts and wars and examines the ethics of interstate killing and contemporary violence, including terrorism.

Required readings:

- Michael Neu (2013) "The Tragedy of Justified War" *International Relations* 27(4), p461-480.

Further reading:

- Baylis, John and Smith, Steve (eds.), *The Globalization of World Politics*, Chapter 29.
- Talal Asad (2007), "Suicide Terrorism" in *On Suicide Bombing*, (New York: Columbia University Press)

10. TECHNOLOGIES OF WARFARE, SURVEILLANCE, AND CONTROL: DRONES AND THE POLITICISATION OF BIG TECH

Reflects on how new technologies of war and surveillance have increased the reach of state power, altered international conflicts, and prompted the emergence of new global actors (i.e. Tech companies).

Required reading:

- Jamie Allinson (2015) 'The Necropolitics of Drones', *International Political Sociology* 9, pp. 113-127.
- Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, Chapter 13 'Big Other and the Rise of Instrumentarian Power' (New York: Public Affairs), 2019.

Further reading:

- David Whetham (2013) 'Drones and Targeted Killing: Angels or Assassins?' in Bradley Jay Strawser (ed) *Killing by Remote Control: The Ethics of an Unmanned Military* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

11. PLANETARY POLITICS? CLIMATE CRISES, THE ANTHROPOCENE, AND POST-HUMANISM

Discusses the interaction between nature and politics, the extent to which the climate crisis has impacted international relations, and the possibility of conceptualising a 'post-human' planetary.

Required reading:

- Kuki, M. *International Relations in a Relational Universe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2020, Chapter 7 'Reorienting the International, the Global, and the Planetary'.

Further reading:

- Harrington, C. (2016). "The Ends of the World: International Relations and the Anthropocene." *Millennium*, 44(3), 478-498. ([link here](#))
- Rothe, D. (2019) "Governing the End Times? Planet Politics and the Secular Eschatology of the Anthropocene" *Millennium Journal of International Studies*, 4 (2) ([link here](#))

12. THE FUTURE OF GLOBAL POLITICS: UTOPIAN HORIZON OR DYSTOPIAN END-TIMES?

The module concludes on the contemporary state of the international order, and speculates on the horizon of international politics.

Required reading:

- Brincat, S. (2009) "Reclaiming the Utopian Imaginary in IR Theory" *Review of International Studies* 35, pp: 581–609. ([link here](#))
- Hochuli, A. (Fall 2025) "Technofeudalism Versus Total Capitalism" *American Affairs* Volume IX, 129–57.

Further reading:

- Peter Frase, *Four Futures Visions of the World after Capitalism* (London: Verso), 2016, Introduction: 'Technology and Ecology as Apocalypse and Utopia'.
- Weldes, J. (eds) *To Seek Out New Worlds: Science Fiction and World Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan), 2003, Chapters 2 & 3.
- Faessel, V, Falk, R and Curtin, M (eds) *On Public Imagination: A Political and Ethical Imperative* (New York: Routledge, 2003), Chapter 24.
- Gill, S. (2019) "A Dialectic of Utopia/Dystopia in the Public Imagination of the 21st Century" in *On Public Imagination*. Routledge.

