Learning Objectives

• Explain the value of studying international relations from a theoretical perspective.

• Explain the central tenets of realism, liberalism, constructivism, and radicalism as well as the feminist critiques of them.

• Analyze contemporary international events using different theoretical perspectives.
Thinking Theoretically

• **What is theory?**
  ➢ A theory is a set of propositions and concepts that seek to explain phenomena by specifying the relationships among the concepts; theory's ultimate purpose is to predict phenomena.

• **What does theory do?**
  ➢ Good theory generates testable *hypotheses*: specific statements positing a particular relationship between two or more variables. These statements can, in principle, be tested and falsified by real-world evidence.
Thinking Theoretically 2

• What does theory tell us?
  • Theory can explain why things happen and suggest best courses of action in international relations.

➢ As more and more data are collected, one must be tolerant of ambiguity, concerned about probabilities, and distrustful of absolutes, revising theories when necessary. In the social sciences, including the study of international politics, theories shed light on the object of study but rarely achieve the status of scientific laws.
The theoretical perspectives of realism, liberalism, constructivism and radicalism are sets of theories united by some common themes:

- Common actors such as nation states – governments, laws, traditions, etc.
- International institutions-establish rules meant to govern international behavior.
- Conceptual factors such as norms- acceptable behavior of various actors.

Different theoretical perspectives focus attention on the different factors they argue influence international politics.
Realism: Assumptions

Realism takes a fundamentally pessimistic view of human nature and state behavior. Under realism, conflict is considered to be the norm rather than the exception.

➢ Based on a view of the individual as primarily fearful, selfish, and power seeking. Individuals are organized in states, each of which acts in a unitary way in pursuit of its own national interest, defined in terms of power.

➢ States exist in an anarchic international system, characterized by the absence of an authoritative hierarchy such as a world government. Therefore, states must rely on themselves for security.
Realism: Assumptions

Four of the essential assumptions of realism are found in Thucydides's *History of the Peloponnesian War.*

1. The state is the principal actor in war and in politics in general.
2. The state is assumed to be a unitary actor: once a decision is made, the state speaks and acts with one voice.
Realism: Assumptions

3. Decision makers acting in the name of the state are assumed to be rational actors, who coolly consider the advantages and disadvantages of different courses of action. Rational decisions are taken with the goal of advancing the national interest.

4. A state needs to protect itself from enemies both foreign and domestic. A state augments its security by increasing its domestic capacities, building up its economic prowess, and forming alliances with other states.
Realism: Core Assumptions

- Pessimistic view of human nature
- The international realm is anarchic
  - No central authority
  - No rules or no way to enforce them
- As rational actors, states seek to maximize utility functions through the pursuit of power politics.
- The utility function is often safety, security, and prosperity.
- The security dilemma - the idea that the pursuit of increased security by one state may pose a threat to other states.
Neorealism gives precedence to the structure of the international system over individuals and states as an explanatory factor.

➢ The most important unit to study is the structure of the international system, and that structure is determined by the ordering principle (the distribution of capabilities among states).

➢ Cooperation is difficult under anarchy because of concerns over relative gains and cheating.
Neorealism

Theory of *International Politics*

• Structure of international system over states.
• Stronger states act to preserve and consolidate power.
• Weaker states act to acquire power and to mitigate the effects of more powerful states.
• System lacks an overarching authority.
• International cooperation is unlikely because of the risk states will cheat.
An Ideal Realist Policy?

Offensive realists

• One cannot be certain of another’s intentions.
• States always improve their own relative position of power.
• States may jump on the bandwagon and ally with a known threat.
• Conquest pays: expansionist policy builds relative position of power and intimidates rivals into cooperation.

Defensive realists

• Defensive postures (military, diplomatic, economic) do not directly threaten other states.
• Conquest does not pay: states tend to balance each other against aggressors; few wars benefit those that start them.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>THEORY IN BRIEF</strong></th>
<th><strong>Realism/Neorealism</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key Actors</strong></td>
<td>States (most powerful matter most)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Characteristics of Individuals</strong></td>
<td>Insecure, selfish, power seeking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Characteristics of States</strong></td>
<td>Unitary actors, rational, power seeking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Characteristics of the International System</strong></td>
<td>Anarchic (implies perpetual threat of war)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Beliefs about Change</strong></td>
<td>Possibility of perpetual peace logically precluded; emphasis shifted to managing the frequency and intensity of war</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Major Theorists</strong></td>
<td>Thucydides, Saint Augustine, Hobbes, Morgenthau, Waltz, Gilpin, Mearsheimer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Liberalism: Assumptions

• Liberalism holds that human nature is basically good and that people can improve their moral and material conditions, making societal progress possible.
  ➢ Selfish and evil behaviors are the products of inadequate social institutions and misunderstandings among leaders.
  ➢ Therefore, injustice, war, and aggression are not inevitable, but rather can be moderated or eliminated through institutional reform or collective action.

• The term, liberal in international relations theory is not used in the same way as liberal in domestic politics.
Liberalism: Roots

Roots in thought of the ancient Greeks

- Individuals are rational, able to understand basic laws of nature and human society.
- People have the capacity to improve their condition by creating a just society.
- If a just society is not created, fault lies with inadequate institutions or a corrupt environment.
The origins of liberal theory are found in:

- Eighteenth-century Enlightenment optimism (which held that individuals are rational human beings, able to understand the universally applicable laws governing nature and society).

- Nineteenth-century political and economic liberalism (which argued that democracy and free trade could improve the human condition).

- Twentieth-century Wilsonian idealism (which argued that war is preventable through collective action).
Liberalism: Core Assumptions

➢ The basis of liberalism remains firmly embedded in the belief in the rationality of humans and in the belief that through learning and education, humans can develop institutions to bring out their best characteristics.
Tenets of the Liberal Tradition

• Prominent concept in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries (before World War I)

• Collective security adopted and promoted by U.S. president Wilson
  ➢ Became the cornerstone of the League of Nations (United Nations)

• Two reasons the world is becoming more peaceful over time (Kant)
  ➢ Reciprocity principle: states can learn to cooperate and build international institutions to achieve mutual gains.
  ➢ Identity principle: certain kinds of society or governments are needed to make societies decide to not go to war.
Neoliberal Institutionalism

- Neoliberal institutionalism asks why states choose to cooperate most of the time even in the anarchic condition of the international system.

- Based on the idea of complex interdependence which has three components:
  - States are connected through multiple channels, not just through direct interactions.
  - Hierarchy of issues: security is not the only concern. There are other issues, -economic, cultural, diplomatic, etc.
  - Decline in the use of military force.
Neoliberal Institutionalism: Assumptions

- States are unitary rational actors that pursue self-interest.
- Despite the existence of anarchy, interstate cooperation can arise as states focus on absolute interests.
- International institutions and reciprocity foster cooperation.
- Cooperation emerges not as a result of humanity’s desire for positive change but as a result of self-interest.
Neoliberal Institutionalism: Other Liberal Theories

• For neoliberalism, international institutions such as NATO are critical because they facilitate cooperation by many nations.

• With the end of the Cold War, liberalism has achieved new credibility.
  ➢ The democratic process inhibits aggression, and international institutions that bind democracies together act to constrain behavior.
  ➢ The decreasing frequency of interstate war seems to support liberal theory.
Neoliberal Institutionalism: Other Liberal Theories

Democratic peace

• Liberal democracies do not fight each other; shared norms and culture inhibit aggression.
• A multitude of voices restrains leaders.
• Membership in common international institutions binds democracies.
• Commercial peace: economic interdependence decreases the likelihood of conflict.
• Membership in international institutions has a positive effect on cooperation.
## THEORY IN BRIEF

### Liberalism/Neoliberal Institutionalism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Actors</th>
<th>States, nongovernmental groups, international organizations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics of Individuals</td>
<td>Basically good; social; capable of cooperating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics of States</td>
<td>States are rational; states have relationships (enduring friends and rivals); state characteristics (democratic-liberal, authoritarian-autarkic) matter; actors within states can influence state actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics of the International System</td>
<td>Anarchy abridged by interdependence among actors; an international order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs about Change</td>
<td>Self-interest managed by structure (institutions) leads to possibility of cooperation and peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Theorists</td>
<td>Montesquieu, Kant, Wilson, Keohane, Moravcsik</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Constructivism

• State behavior is shaped by elite beliefs, identities, and social norms.

• Individuals forge, shape, and change culture through ideas and practices.

• Interests at all levels are socially constructed via constant interaction.
Constructivism's major theoretical proposition is that neither objects (such as states) nor concepts (such as anarchy) have any necessary, fixed, or objective meaning; rather, their meanings are constructed through social interaction. For example, they believe state behavior is shaped by elite beliefs, identities, and social norms.
Constructivism

• Individuals in collectivities forge, shape, and change culture through ideas and practices. State and national interests are the result of the social identities of these actors, rather than being rooted in a material reality or unchanging set of preferences.

• Many constructivists emphasize normative structures. What we need to know is the nature of a social identity, and identities change as a result of cooperative behavior and learning.
Constructivism

• Constructivists see power in discursive terms: the power of ideas, culture, and language are as important as material sources of power. Change can thus occur not only through coercion, but also through diffusion of ideas or the internationalization of norms and socialization.
Constructivism

• National interests are ever-changing and the result of social identities of state actors.
• People bring meaning to material structures.
• International organizations can socialize states and individuals to norms.
Constructivism: Power and Change

• Power exists in every exchange, and ideas and identity are its source.
• “Anarchy is what states make of it.”
• Sovereignty as a contested concept: states lack exclusive control; sovereignty is continuously challenged by new institutions and new needs.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>THEORY IN BRIEF</strong></th>
<th><strong>Constructivism</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key Actors</strong></td>
<td>People, elites, cultures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Characteristics of Individuals</strong></td>
<td>Key actors in creation of meaning; bound by education, socialization, and culture; their identities matter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Characteristics of States</strong></td>
<td>Artifacts whose significance is socially constructed through discourse; their identities matter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Characteristics of the International System</strong></td>
<td>An artifact whose significance is socially constructed through discourse; distribution of identities matters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Beliefs about Change</strong></td>
<td>Possible through socialization, diffusion of ideas, or internationalization of norms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Major Theorists</strong></td>
<td>Kratochwil, Hopf, Wendt</td>
</tr>
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</table>
The Radical Perspective: Marxism

- Radicalism - Carries an unavoidable negative connotation. Used in a neutral sense to describe a sharp departure from the norm—such as the state as a necessary form of political association. For Radicals/Marxists/Anarchists believe that the state is the problem.

➢ Assumes the primacy of economics for explaining virtually all other phenomena, including international politics.

➢ Based on the writings of Karl Marx, who developed a theory of the evolution of capitalism based on economic change and class conflict, are fundamental to all radical thought.
The Radical Perspective: Marxism

➢ An important set of radical theory centers on the structure of the global system. That structure is the by-product of imperialism, or the expansion of certain economic forms into other areas of the world.

➢ John A. Hobson theorized that expansion occurs because of overproduction and under consumption in the developed world. This leads to imperialism in less-developed areas and rivalry for markets among developed countries.

➢ Radical theorists emphasize that the domination and suppression that arise from uneven economic development are inherent in the capitalist system, enabling the dominant states to exploit the underdogs.
The Radical Perspective: Marxism

• Marx: economic determinism
  ➢ In capitalism, private interests control labor and market exchanges, which creates controls on the working classes (proletariat)
  ➢ Seeks to explain the relationship between means of production, social relations, and power
  ➢ Core beliefs are evolution from feudalism to capitalism, which brought the bourgeois class to power, and the primacy of economics for explaining phenomena
The Radical Perspective: Marxism 2

• The global system is a hierarchical by-product of imperialism: it seeks system change.

• Hobson
  ➢ Imperialism caused by overproduction of goods and services in the developed world, underconsumption of these by underpaid lower classes in the developed world, and over-saving by the upper classes
The Radical Perspective: Dependency Theory

- Dependency theories: states are constrained by the international economic system and multinational corporations (MNCs); international banks establish, maintain, and exploit dependent relationships.
  - Poorer states are locked into dependent relations with richer states.

- Dependent theorist argue that the relationship between dominant and dependent states is dynamic.
The Radical Perspective: Dependency Theory

• The dominant states are the wealthiest and most powerful. They produce the most profitable and advanced products, have efficient governments, and drive world politics. Ex. The USA.

• The dependent states produce raw materials /cheap labor or goods and services, but do not produce goods as profitable as dominant states. They also have weak and often corrupt governments, and have very little influence on world politics.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Marxism</th>
<th>Dependency Theory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key Actors</strong></td>
<td>Social classes (upper-class bourgeoisie and lower-class proletariat);</td>
<td>Dominant and dominated states; multinational corporations; emphasis on economics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>multinational corporations; emphasis on economics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Characteristics of States</strong></td>
<td>States act on behalf of the bourgeoisie class</td>
<td>Advanced industrialized countries dominate developing countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Characteristics of the International System</strong></td>
<td>Hierarchical; by-product of the expansion of certain economic forms into other areas of the world</td>
<td>Hierarchical; controlled by dominant states</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Result of Current Situation</strong></td>
<td>Imperialism</td>
<td>Underdevelopment in the dominated states</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Major Theorists</strong></td>
<td>Marx, Hobson</td>
<td>Prebisch, Pinto</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Karl Marx

Never ran a company.
Never held political office.
Never oversaw any accounts.
Never even held a job — any job.
Supported throughout his life by his friend Friedrich Engles, the son of a wealthy factory owner.

Considered by many to be the greatest social, political, and economic philosopher of all time.
Feminist Critiques of IR Theory

- Feminist theory has some similarities to constructivism in that it looks at the manner in which world politics is socially constructed, though it does so through the lens of gender.
- It is also similar to Marxism in that both advocate for changes in the way the world operates.
- They argue specifically that social discourse has been dominated by men, and that the exclusion of women's voices affects the questions we ask and how we evaluate the answers.
Feminist Critiques of IR Theory

- The feminist approach can be broken into three themes:
  1. The world would be different if more women were in leadership positions by speculating that women would behave differently than men in positions of power. Highly speculative concept.
     - Would world politics be different if women held more or most leadership positions in states?
  2. Questions how our view of world politics would be different if it had not been developed primarily by men.
     - Is our entire way of thinking about international relations masculinized?
  3. The focus is on the particular problems that women face in world politics.
     - What impact does world politics have on women?
Theory in Action: Russia-Ukraine Conflict

Background of Russia-Ukraine conflict:

- Ukraine part of the Soviet Union until the collapse of USSR in 1991.
- In 2004 NATO expanded its membership east toward the Russian border.
- In 2008 NATO announced support for Ukrainian membership in the organization.
- In 2014 the pro-Russian government was replaced by a pro-western government causing Russia to be concerned that Ukraine will be part of the west sphere of influence and away from Russia.
- Pro-Russian protest broke out in the Russian speaking Crimean region.
- Pushed by Russian propaganda and military, the Crimean region secede from Ukraine.
- Russia annexed the Crimean peninsula.
- The U.S., the E.U. and various other countries imposed sanctions on Russia.
Theory in Action: Russia-Ukraine Conflict

Realists: focus on security interests:

- Russia felt threatened by the west into its sphere of influence.
- Russia tried to prevent the encroachment of the United States and EU into its own sphere of influence.
- Russia aimed to weaken and destabilize Ukraine, preventing it from being a power that the West could use against Russia.
- Russia used military actions as a necessary steps to protect its security.
- Russian willingness to use military allowed it to increase its military power in the Black Sea.
- Increased military cooperation with Turkey and has involved itself in the Syrian Civil war by helping them maintain a cease fire.
The coming to power of a pro-Western government in Ukraine represented a threat to Russia, prompting the Kremlin to destabilize Ukraine.

Ukraine’s desire to align itself with NATO and the EU also clashed with Russia’s interests.

Russia saw Ukrainian desire to join the E.U. as a threat to its economic interest.

By having agreements that facilitate trade between the E.U and Ukraine, meant that the Ukraine will be more dependent on the E.U. and less on Russia.

Since Liberals rely on the importance of international institutions to facilitate connections between states, Ukraine attempts to join the E.U. cause Russia to fell threatened.
Constructivists: focus on the importance of identities:

- The encroachment of the West into the Russian sphere of influence is not, in and of itself, a threat to Russian interests.
- The threat was made real by divergent identities: the prodemocracy identity of the West and the more autocratic leadership of Putin.
- Putin used Russian patriotic sentiments to not only to mobilize pro-Russian identity among the Russian speaking people of the Crimean Peninsula, but among the Russian people who supported the annexation of Crimea.
Key Terms

- **Anarchy** - In the international system there exist no superior authority that can create law, resolve disputes or enforce law and order.

- **Bandwagoning** - (in alliances) siding with a rising power to gain benefits.

- **Constructivism** - a theory that argues reality is socially constructed or created by the interactions within a society. What is “true” is determined by what a society or group defines as true.

- **Dependency Theorists** - Trying to exert control over markets and companies.

- **Institutions** - structures, patterns, and mechanisms for establishing norms, rules, order, and cooperation in world politics.

- **liberalism** - a major theoretical approach to international relations emphasizing the role of individuals, norms, and institutions to explain pattern of cooperation and conflict in world politics.
Key Terms

- **Neoliberal Institution** – When states choose to cooperate most of the time even under the anarchic conditions of the international system.

- **Neorealism** – Power is the most important factor in international relations. In an anarchic system cooperation is difficult and cheating is a distinct possibility.

- **Radicalism** - describes a sharp departure from the norm—one such norm is the state as a necessary form of political association. For Radicals believe that the state is the problem.

- **Realism** - a major theoretical approach to international relations emphasizing the competitive, conflict-ridden pursuit of power and security among states in world politics.

- **Theory** - tools for explaining cause-and-effect relationships among often complex phenomena.