



Course information 2026-27

IR2209 International Political Theory

General information

MODULE LEVEL: 5

CREDIT: 30

NOTIONAL STUDY TIME: 300 hours

MODE: Locally Taught, Independent Learner Route and Online Taught

Summary

IR2209 offers an introduction to international political theory (IPT). The course adopts a global, comparative, and historical approach exploring how international thought within and beyond Europe sits within global intellectual history, responding to world events, frequently shaped by patterns of imperialism, violence, and resistance. Students will be introduced to the main debates on the purposes and value of international thought; its relationship with international theory; and methods of interpretation and critique, including juxtaposing texts from different places and times. The course deals with debates and themes prompted by individual thinkers and key texts and considers their location within the disciplinary history of International Relations, and the prevailing IR 'canon' including realism, liberalism, and critical theory. Students will develop in-depth knowledge of individual thinkers and key texts. Topics covered include: sovereignty, empire, law, and war; revolution, violence, decolonisation, and justice; race, gender, class, and ecology.

Conditions

Please refer to the relevant programme structure in the EMFSS Programme Regulations to check:

- where this course can be placed on your degree structure; and
- details of prerequisites and corequisites for this course.

You should also refer to the Exclusions list in the EMFSS Programme Regulations to check if any exclusions apply for this course.

Aims and objectives

The aim and objectives of the course are to:

- To develop student knowledge of international political theory beyond the ‘isms’ (realism, liberalism, constructivism, post-colonialism) towards individual thinkers, key texts, and themes.
- To cultivate a critical awareness of how International Relations theory intersects with and borrows from international political theory and international political thought.
- To broaden the field of international political theory to thinkers beyond men from Europe and North America.

Learning outcomes

At the end of this course and having completed the essential reading and activities students should be able to:

- Describe and compare some of the existing texts in International Political Theory, and discuss themes, concepts, and ideas contained within them.
- Recognise prominent themes in the historical development of international political thought relating to (for example) questions of order, power, community, race, gender, or subjecthood.
- Differentiate between International Political Theory and the International Relations discipline, as well as identify connections between IPT and IR Theory.
- Demonstrate deeper knowledge of key thinkers who have written on international thought, including an ability to interpret and critique some of their ideas.
- Use IPT to analyse and interpret historical and contemporary issues in world politics.

Employability skills

Below are the three most relevant employability skills that students acquire by undertaking this course which can be conveyed to future prospective employers:

1. Complex problem-solving
2. Persuasion and negotiation
3. Creativity and innovation

Essential reading

For full details of the essential readings, please refer to the reading list on the course page.

Assessment

This course is assessed by a three-hour and fifteen-minute closed-book written examination.

Syllabus

Topics covered include:

1. International Relations Theory and International Political Theory.
2. Sovereignty, law, and war: Grotius in the colonies.
3. Hobbes, the state, anarchy, and savagery.
4. Kant and perpetual peace.
5. Global revolutionary thought: Marx, Hegel, Haiti.
6. J. S. Mill, liberalism, and empire.
7. Interwar internationalism and the first great debate.
8. Empire, race, and anti-colonial thought.
9. Realism as an intellectual project.
10. Decolonisation: Fanon, Césaire.
11. Concerning violence.
12. The international thought of the Cold War: Modernisation theory and dependency theory.
13. Gender, sexuality, and social reproduction.
14. Planetary crisis: Environmentalism and the end of International Relations?
15. The future of International Political Theory.