

# INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THEORY

THIRD  
EDITION

Oliver Daddow



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# **INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THEORY**

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Sara Miller McCune founded SAGE Publishing in 1965 to support the dissemination of usable knowledge and educate a global community. SAGE publishes more than 1000 journals and over 800 new books each year, spanning a wide range of subject areas. Our growing selection of library products includes archives, data, case studies and video. SAGE remains majority owned by our founder and after her lifetime will become owned by a charitable trust that secures the company's continued independence.

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Oliver Daddow is Assistant Professor in British Politics and Security at the University of Nottingham. His research interests are in interpretivist international relations, British foreign policy – especially Brexit and the Europe question – and discourse analysis. He is the author of *Britain and Europe Since 1945: Historiographical Perspectives on Integration* (Manchester University Press, 2004) and *New Labour and the European Union: Blair and Brown's Logic of History* (Manchester University Press, 2011). He edited *Harold Wilson and European Integration: Britain's Second Application to Join the EEC* (Frank Cass, 2003). With Jamie Gaskarth he edited *British Foreign Policy: The New Labour Years* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), and with Mark Bevir and Ian Hall he edited *Interpreting Global Security* (Routledge, 2014). He has written book chapters and peer-reviewed journal articles across his research interests, including in *Government and Opposition*, *International Affairs*, *International Relations*, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, *Journal of European Public Policy*, *Political Quarterly*, *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* and *Review of International Studies*.

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This book began life at the British International Studies Association Conference at St Andrews in December 2005. It was during a chat with David Mainwaring in the publisher's exhibition that we spotted a potential gap in the market for a pedagogically inclined book aimed at students new not just to the study of IR in general but to the increasingly diverse field of IR theory in particular. I can safely say that had that conversation not taken place this book would certainly not have been written – such are the fortuitous vagaries of academic life. This latest edition has been produced following further discussions with my editors at Sage, Amy Jarrold and Natalie Aguilera. Natalie was an equally inspirational editor on the second and this edition. My thanks to everyone at Sage who, as usual, worked on the manuscript on my behalf, especially Katie Forsythe, my diligent Senior Production Editor and David Rudeforth, my indexer for the book. A host of anonymous reviewers gave some excellent feedback on the second edition. They suggested refinements in the way I covered the existing material and proffered some novel ideas on new material that would aid student learning about each theory. I hope they will feel I have done their suggestions justice.

Adrian Gallagher read through some of my first stabs at trying to summarize these theories in a couple of thousand words and his astute comments were most helpful, particularly on the detail of English School theorizing. Thanks, finally, to all my various cohorts of students who have, over the years and probably to varying degrees, both enjoyed and suffered my sometimes clunky attempts to distil the complexity of this subject matter into manageable sized chunks for academic consumption. The lecture and seminar room is where one finds out what works to clarify things, and crucially what does not work, and this book is the product of that constructive and enjoyable process of teaching and learning. Many elements of both formal and informal feedback on my teaching have helped me refine this text enormously. Magnus Evjebraten, Matthew Breeds and Chris Hills were particularly helpful in the early stages.

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# INTRODUCTION: WHY YOU SHOULD BUY THIS BOOK

I have written this book with one very clear mission in mind: to help students new to the study of International Relations Theory (IRT) find their way in to what can be a fascinating subject of study at university level – but one that requires a good deal of thought and engagement with lots of complex material. Everyone has a view on the major issues in international relations today, whether it be the war in Iraq, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Brexit, the election of Donald Trump, or the Middle East Peace process. Theorists in International Relations try to make sense of these developments by collecting evidence from past and present, spotting patterns and connections, developing models, and creating generalizations about how **states** act to secure their interests in an increasingly globalized world. Understanding how and why theorists do this is the principle task for any student of International Relations, and this book will help you do just that.

IRT can be a beguiling field of study for two reasons. First, because of the sheer number of theories on offer, all claiming to tell the ‘truth’ about international events, about what makes the world of international affairs ‘tick’. How do we know which **theory** is ‘best’? Second, there is no getting away from the fact that IRT can and often is difficult for new students because, although many of you will come to it from a Politics or History background, and will have a handle on some or all of the issues being studied, few of you reading this book will have dealt with the issues from a theoretical vantage point before, especially if you are studying at undergraduate level. It is important to remember, therefore, that you are not alone if you find yourself struggling with theory. No one gets it overnight. Success in academia comes in increments and is sometimes a slow process; you may encounter setbacks and difficult periods. An element of bloody-mindedness is certainly required! But if you stick with your studies in IRT you will reap the rewards. Many school- and college-level courses deal with issues in international relations such as **globalization**, war and peace. What sets apart university-level courses is the ‘theory’ element. If you can get to grips with theory early on at university you should go very far.

A note on terminology: ‘International Relations’, written with capitalized ‘IR’, denotes the formal study of international relations. In other words, There is a discipline of International Relations which studies international relations going on ‘out there’ in the world. In different universities, courses in IR go by the names ‘international politics’, ‘global politics’ or ‘world politics’, each containing varying amounts of theory. This book abbreviates International Relations Theory to IRT.

And this is why IRT is such a fascinating and rewarding field of study. We might not realize it when we watch news reports about international terrorism, American–China relations, the crisis in Syria, or the death of Fidel Castro in Cuba, but a form of theory underpins all political and media coverage of global politics. Politicians, the commentariat and news media tell us which **actors** are important, frame how they are interacting on the global stage, speculate on their motivations for doing so, and debate the impact of decisions made and treaties signed for the future shape of world politics. Sometimes the discussion centres on routine, day-to-day decisions, at other times policy-makers are responding hastily to a crisis. The point is that in selecting to present the views of a few actors, in a certain way, and with an editorial slant that can cue you, the consumer of news, to view some actors or causes more sympathetically than others, theoretical choices have been made. After reading this book you will, I hope, be in a better position to ‘see through’ some of the dominant ways in which the world is simplified for understanding through these significant but often hidden theoretical choices. As a result, the book should help you discover how and where you can acquire the skills of critical engagement with the world around you on your course in IRT. And let’s face it, if students of politics and international affairs cannot take a critically informed perspective on those who govern us around the world, who can?

The book has therefore been written for the newcomer to IRT. It helps you manage your learning and is structured in such a way to make it easy to dip in and out of. It can be a scary prospect beginning the study of new subjects. There are long reading lists to plough through, unfamiliar concepts and technical language to learn, difficult ideas to digest, and many new ways of thinking to master – all in a relatively short space of time. The volume of reading and depth of information required to succeed can be overwhelming for any student. This book should help you manoeuvre your way through the intricacies of IRT in three ways. First, it summarizes the main components of the theories you are likely to encounter on your course. Second, it shows how all these theories interrelate and influence each other in an emerging dialogue over time. Third, it introduces the background to each theory and gives you a clear sense of how this apparent jumble of ideas and approaches all ‘fit’ together in the discipline, as it has developed over the years. The book provides you with a clear overview of your IRT course that will allow you to fill in the detail as and when required. Furthermore, it offers practical advice and guidance on dealing with assessed essays and exams, including tips on avoiding plagiarism.

## HOW TO USE THE BOOK: TAKING OWNERSHIP OF YOUR LEARNING ABOUT IRT

This book is designed to help you succeed in your undergraduate or postgraduate level course in IRT. Theories of IR will crop up in many and sometimes unexpected places during your degree programme; they are not only studied on courses specifically called ‘International Relations Theory’. Theoretical perspectives will likely feature in courses variously titled International Politics, International Relations since 1945, World Politics since 1945, the Contemporary World Arena, Globalization, Foreign Policy Analysis and Methods in International Relations. Any module on International Security or Security Studies is also likely to have a strong theoretical component based around debates between Realists and ‘the rest’, on, for example, the utility of nuclear weapons as security guarantors in the modern world. Theoretical issues underpin the material on all these

courses, and this book should therefore be useful whether your course is specifically on IRT or whether you need it as a handy introduction to the theories that crop up on cognate Politics and IR degree-level modules.

The principal aim of the book is to help you appreciate how to learn effectively about IRT, and in so doing it should help you succeed at coursework assignments, pass your exams, and overall to get the best out of your course in IRT. It has been designed and written to provide you with an accessible guide to the topics, themes and issues you will encounter on a typical IRT course. It discusses the ways of thinking, writing and presenting evidence your tutors will be looking to see when they assess your written work and/or oral presentations (depending on the mode of assessment for the module you are on). I have not written the book to be another textbook on IRT – there are plenty of very good ones on the market already. Nor is this book meant to be read instead of textbooks, academic journal articles, books and other readings for your course. Given the succinct nature of my coverage of the theories, this book should be read as a basic introduction *before*, and, if necessary, *alongside* the more advanced and in-depth scholarship which you will undoubtedly need to engage with to impress your tutors. They will be encouraging you to go beyond textbook treatments of all the subjects you encounter at university level. The introductory nature of my coverage, together with the skills element of the book, means that you should also find it useful to return to this book as you near the end of modules dealing with IRT, as you begin preparing for essays, exams and other assessed work. In sum, I hope this book is both primer and refresher, and that it is easy to navigate in and out of when you need to support your learning about IRT.

Students of IR and IRT are well served by a host of textbooks coming at the subject from a range of perspectives. These textbooks, in turn, synthesize many long and often complex writings from academic research monographs and articles published in scholarly journals, where you will find the latest cutting-edge research on the subject. This book is intended to support the information and learning skills you develop by reading the main course texts and that ‘original’ theoretical and empirical work on IRT. It will familiarize you with the basics of the discipline and give you an ‘insider’ (tutor) perspective on how to prepare and deliver effective essays and exam answers. In terms of the key skills tested in such assessments, the book helps you organize your thoughts, critically analyse evidence from a variety of sources, plan persuasive and logical arguments, and express those arguments clearly in speech and writing.

The aims of this book are:

- To introduce you to the subject matter of International Relations.
- To survey the key theories of International Relations.
- To provide help in developing the essential skills needed to meet the learning outcomes on courses in International Relations that have a theory component.
- To act as a study aid alongside the textbook and more advanced reading you should be doing on your course.

There are many different theories of IR and it is rare to find a course that covers all of them. The time allowed at universities to deliver individual modules is very tight indeed and your

tutor will have to make choices about which theories to teach you and which to leave out or cover only briefly. Tutors will not be expecting you to know everything about every theory, but they will be looking for a serious engagement with the theories they do cover with you. I would strongly advise you to consult the information about your particular course in IRT as soon as it is available, and to compare what you will cover on your course with the contents of this book. You will then only need to concern yourself with the chapters of the book that are directly relevant to your studies. Concentrate your efforts mainly on the theories that are relevant to the course you are studying but feel free to branch out where you feel you wish to go: wider reading is a very under-rated concept in the modern university and students who go that extra mile always stand out from the crowd!

There are many more theories in the study of International Relations than there are weeks in the average semester to study them all. Make sure that you know from the beginning of your course which theories you need to know in detail, and which are either not covered or less important to the overall make-up of your studies. Knowledge of other theories is useful but not a prerequisite for success, so plan your time and channel your energy and reading time wisely.

## NAVIGATING YOUR WAY AROUND THE BOOK

This book is divided into three parts. Part I gives you an orientation to the field of IR and IRT across three chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the contested subject matter of IR, including some history on the development of the discipline. It argues that if you grasp the reasons for scholarly disputes over the object of study and how to study it, you will quickly understand why so many theories about IR have flourished over the years. Chapter 2 begins by introducing why academics use theory. It moves on to debate why it is important to study IR theoretically and how we evaluate all of the theories on offer. Chapter 3 introduces the fundamental concept of **anarchy** in IR, looks at how theorists have tried to break down the subject matter of IR, and shows you how to think like an IR theorist by considering what it is that IR theorists do. By the end of Part I you should be comfortable with what to expect of a whole or part course in IRT, and to have begun thinking about the big questions that animate scholars working in this fascinatingly diverse discipline.

Part II is the real nitty-gritty of the book, in which I present an overview of the main theories you will encounter when you study IRT. You may cover some, you may cover them all, so feel free to pick and choose the relevant chapters as you see fit. Chapter 4 explores Liberalism, Chapter 5 considers Realism, while Chapter 6 introduces the updated variants of each of them, Neoliberalism and Neorealism. Chapter 7 delves into English School theory and Chapter 8 summarizes Social Constructivism. After that we move to theories that deal with issues in IR overlooked or ignored by these earlier 'mainstream' theories. Chapter 9 is on Marxism, Chapter 10 covers Critical Theory, Chapter 11 examines Feminism, Chapter 12 introduces Poststructuralism, Chapter 13 examines Postcolonialism and, finally, Chapter 14 considers Green International Theory. By the end of Part II you should have a solid foundation of knowledge about each theory of IR and know where to look to find more detail about them.

Each chapter in Part II contains the following features:

- In order to highlight key points in each chapter I have inserted a series of ‘Tips boxes’ (example below) which will help you remember the most important issues raised in each chapter.

Remember, this book should not be seen as a substitute for the coverage of the theories you will get from lectures, seminars and course readings but as an accompaniment to them.

- I have also included hints in the form of ‘Common pitfall’ boxes. These come from my experiences of teaching IRT and watching how students learn about it (or not, as the case may be!). Avoiding these pitfalls will help you enormously.
- Scattered throughout the book are ‘Taking it further’ boxes (see p. 7), where issues of particular significance within the discipline are developed in a little more detail than in the body text. I hope these will be useful in stimulating you to read more widely around the issues they raise.
- For each of the chapters on the substance of IR theories I have provided a list of key terms associated with those theories. You might wish to keep a list of these terms in a high profile place in your course notes, adding to them weekly. A constantly growing inventory of all the different definitions and interpretations placed upon key terms by IR academics will help you in two ways. First, it will help you understand the ‘language’ scholars use to debate issues in IR and IRT. Second, you will generate a stock of informed, original and critical reference material for use in your coursework and exam essays. Learning pithy definitions of key terms from established scholars goes a long way.
- I have provided a series of ‘Questions to ponder’ at the end of each of the chapters, together with a brief overview of how you might wish to set about tackling each one. Thinking about how you carve up essay and exam questions is a real skill to develop at university. My summary of what tutors look for should help you appreciate where you need to be in your written work in terms of evidence, argument, structure and communication.
- At the end of each chapter there are ‘References to more information’. These are lists of sources you could read to deepen your understanding of the issues raised in the chapter. Your tutor will doubtless provide you with an extensive reading list for each theory so the two together should give you plenty to go on. I have tried to include less well-known sources along with the canonical texts. It is usually obvious from the title what the book or article is about, but for some entries I have included a few pointers by way of explanation.

Part III is all about study skills. It offers advice and practical guidance in study, writing and revision skills so that you can present your knowledge in the most effective possible way in university level essays, exams and other coursework assignments, such as individual or group presentations. Chapter 15 helps you get the best out of theory in lectures and tutorials. Chapter 16 discusses the difficult process of planning and writing academic essays. It encourages you to appreciate the importance of essay structure and

modes of argumentation, and gives you practical steps to help deliver well-balanced, well-argued and clearly structured answers. Chapter 17 illustrates the main points from the previous chapter by giving examples of best practice from real IRT essays I have marked in the past (and, yes, the students are still living to tell the tale). It ends with tips on avoiding the serious academic offence of plagiarism.

Developing good essay technique is vital for succeeding at courses in IRT. The ingredients of a good coursework essay are the same that go into cooking up a good exam answer.

Chapter 18 covers the two things you need to do to succeed at exams: revise effectively and clearly communicate your thoughts in writing under severe time pressure. By the end of Part III you should be in a position to prepare robustly argued, finely balanced, critically informed and academically sound coursework submissions. You should also be in a position to reflect on how to make the most of your revision time and how to do the very best you can in an exam on IRT. At the end of the book, you will find the Glossary, References and Index. New terms appear in bold throughout the book and their meaning is clearly explained in the Glossary.

## RUNNING THEMES

There is a wide assortment of IR theories, all of which claim to make sense of the subject or at least some significant aspect of it. Throughout your course you will be exposed to, and expected to engage with, aspects of all these debates about the functions and value of theorizing international relations. Here are five of the most common dimensions of the debate about theory you will probably encounter:

1. **The nature of theory** – while there are many elements of overlap, there is no single view common to all scholars of IR on what theory *is*. The word ‘theory’ is often used interchangeably with terms like ‘approaches’, ‘perspectives’, ‘traditions’, or even ‘images’. The absence of a commonly agreed vocabulary indicates the depth of the real and ongoing disputes over what ‘makes’ a theory and when a particular body of writing is sufficiently well developed to constitute a distinct theory of IR.
2. **Ontology** – What is ‘out there’ to be studied, or the object of study. The problem, issue or set of events different theorists are trying to explain will necessarily affect both what bits of IR they study and the nature of the evidence they bring to bear to develop, test and refine their theory. The question of **ontology** is therefore vital: do you think different theorists are viewing the same world (do they share an ontology of IR), or are they ‘seeing’ different worlds (are their ontologies of IR at odds with each other)?
3. **Epistemology** – or the theory of knowledge. The stuff of international relations is not as tangible and easy to put under a microscope as, for example, atoms are for physicists, molecules are for chemists, or fingerprints and bodily fluids are for Crime Scene Investigators. IR theorists often involve themselves in quite heated disputes

about **epistemology**: what counts as reliable evidence about a particular problem area. Theoretical debates in IR often revolve around a critique by writers in different theoretical traditions of the evidence used by writers in competing traditions. Putting these writers into dialogue in your essays and exam answers is *the* best way of accumulating marks for being 'critical'.

4. **Logic and argument** – IR theorists use narrative arguments to try and persuade readers of the strength of their case. This process usually has two dimensions to it. First, the theorist has to construct a theory that flows logically from the ontological assumptions s/he has made about what was being studied and the evidence gathered: the theory must have *internal* logic. Second, the theorist will often also question the ontology, epistemology, simplifying assumptions, interpretations and evidential base of other theorists: this is the *external* dimension where rival theories look outward to try to shore up their claims to analytical accuracy by knocking down rival theories.
5. **Positivist/normative divide** – returns us to disputes about the nature of theory. For **positivists**, the study of the social sciences can proceed using the same methods as in the natural sciences to produce generalizations, predictions and laws about IR. **Normative** theorists question the applicability of methods drawn from the natural sciences and tend to be more open about the agendas to which they write and the uses to which their theories might be put in the 'real world' of politics and public policy.

'Theory' is a disputed term. Think about how each writer you study either defines the word in their work or what they would implicitly understand 'theory' to mean. You should soon see how they might position themselves in unfolding disciplinary discussions about the uses, nature and foundations of theory. Keeping different definitions of 'theory' will be top priority if you choose to build an inventory of key terms in IRT and their definitions.

## TAKING IT FURTHER

IR is a huge field of study globally. Naturally a course on IRT will reflect the intrinsic diversity of the field. It is testament to the scale of the task at hand (theorizing the world, to put it simply!) that we have so many theories asserting that they afford an objective, 'scientific' account of the broad sweep of international relations. Investigating the subject at university level will provide you with a flavour of the main debates that have shaped the field as well as the latest cutting-edge research. The onus is on you to do as much wider reading as you see fit to expand your knowledge base and follow up on the aspects of IR and IRT that interest you the most. To this end I have interspersed the book with 'Taking it further' sections covering material that may well lie outside the scope of your course, but which add depth or a new dimension to the themes we cover in the main text. Taking things further in this way is useful in three ways. First of all, following up wider debates and points of interest will help you understand more about how the individual theories you examine on your course fit together to make the discipline of IR.



### COMMON PITFALL

Many students tend to ‘play it safe’ and concentrate only on the essential textbook reading for their course. It is advisable to go that extra mile and seek out the original academic readings that get quickly summarized in the textbooks as a way of helping you develop your critical capabilities and familiarity with the original IRT texts.

Second, you will learn more effectively about this subject – any subject for that matter – if you spend time thinking seriously about the underlying disputes about how to study a subject, what ‘counts’ as evidence, and how to present your findings appropriately in an academic context. Reflecting on what you have learnt and reading around a topic will help you better understand the material you cover on your IRT course, as well as helping you think through the big philosophical and theoretical issues associated with research and debates in politics and the social sciences more generally. Reading what scholars have had to say about how to study IRT will help you come to a position within these debates and help you articulate and justify your opinion in essays and exams.

The third reason is perhaps the most important to you at this stage of your studies: showing your module tutor that you have *actively engaged with IRT*. An active and informed dialogue with yourself and your peers about the nature, value and role of IRT will come across clearly to your tutor when they mark your work. The average student might know what some of the theories say about IR, whereas the better student will be able to dissect the assumptions of each theory and be able to critique the theories using information they have taken from wide reading around the subject. Even better students will know the gist of what key writers say, and be able to put writers from different theoretical traditions into conversation with each other. In exams you will not necessarily be expected to show the same level of depth and critical capability, but you will need to take a stance on a given issue or theory and justify your interpretation with logic and evidence from key writings. Trying to gain an overall impression of the recurring debates that animate the discipline will help develop your intellectual abilities no end.

It is important not to forget that the theorists whose work you study have been influenced by events in the world at their respective times of writing. Try to identify the influence of practice on theory when you read academic books and articles. We will unpack some of this context specific material in the chapters on each theory, as well as in the history of the discipline section in Chapter 1.

### QUESTIONS TO PONDER

As you plough through the lecture and seminar readings for your course in IRT it is advantageous to consider the kinds of IRT-related questions you might have to answer in exams or essays during and/or at the end of the module. Essay questions with deadlines will usually be available at the beginning of your module, but if they are not included in your course resources from the outset, your course tutor may be willing to let you have