

**Pragmatic Analytics:
An Introduction to Relational Social Science
[FINAL DRAFT course syllabus, 16 July 2018]**

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This course will meet M-F during the second week of the ECPR Summer School.

Course Outline

The purpose of this course is to introduce you to a distinctive style of “thinking politics”: processual rather than substantialist, relational rather than essentialist, configurational rather than case-comparative. Relational analytics have their philosophical roots in pragmatism and parallels with some currents in post-structuralism, and have traditionally been more in evidence in sociology (particularly historical sociology) than in political science and international studies, but the problems of various attempts to explain political outcomes by correlating attributes of units over time and across space have led some scholars to the conclusion that the best solution might be a comprehensive ontological re-visioning of the subject-matter at hand. Instead of looking for essential properties of political actors or universally reliable indicators of future outcomes, a relational sensibility highlights process, emergence, and the myriad ways that concrete social interaction and transaction brings about contingent arrangements of meaningful practice. Primarily a theoretical move, but with some methodological affinities, a relational turn points toward a way to ground social-scientific scholarship in everyday social practices without sacrificing causal explanation or theoretical generality.

In this whirlwind tour of relational thinking, after looking at some of the philosophical and conceptual origins of relationalism, we will focus on three “flavors” of relationalism in the social sciences: the network analysis of social positions, the distinctive style of discourse analysis best characterized as the examination of “words in their speaking,” and practice theory. We conclude the week with an examination of what it means to engage in a configurational analysis, as distinct from the other kinds of (broadly neopositivist) causal analysis on offer in the social sciences.

That having been said, this is neither a technical “research design” nor a “proposal writing” class, but is pitched as a somewhat broader level of theoretical abstraction; it is more ontological and conceptual than it is technically operational. As we proceed through the course, however, you should try not to lose sight of the fact that the point of theoretical reflection is to inform practical research. Treat this course as an opportunity to set aside some time to think critically, creatively, and expansively about the consequences of fundamental relationality for your own research.

Throughout the course we will make reference to exemplary work from Anthropology, Economics, Sociology, and Political Science; students will be encouraged to draw on their own disciplines as well as these others in producing their reflections and participating in our lively discussions. Assigned readings are drawn primarily from international studies and from Sociology, and lectures will seek to illuminate the contexts of these works; seminar discussions will focus on elucidating the arguments

of these texts and their implications for various modes of social-scientific research; in-class workshop activities (and assignments for course credit) will focus on encouraging students to connect the theoretical issues to questions and concerns in their home fields and disciplines, and to their own research projects and interests.

Readings

All required readings should be available through the course website, but feel free to locate them on your own using your own resources. Readings will be discussed in the daily class sessions, and referenced in the daily lectures. Please come to class with the readings read, and with your copies and notes in hand.

Daily Schedule

Monday 6 August

Lecture 1: From entities to processes

Seminar 1: A relational vocabulary

Readings: Mustafa Emirbayer, "Manifesto for a Relational Sociology" (*American Journal of Sociology* 103:2, 1997); Charles Tilly, "International Communities, Secure or Otherwise" (in Adler and Barnett, eds., *Security Communities*, Cambridge UP 1998); Andrew Abbott, "Things of Boundaries" (*Social Research* 62, 1996).

Recommended additional readings: Dewey and Bentley, *Knowing and the Known*; Nicholas Rescher, *Process Metaphysics*; Norbert Elias's essay "The Thinking Statues" (in *The Society of Individuals*); Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*.

Tuesday 7 August

Lecture 2: Positions: social networks

Seminar 2: Ties instead of attributes

Readings: Padgett and Ansell, "Robust Action and the Rise of the Medici, 1400-1434" (*American Journal of Sociology* 98:6, 1993); Nexon and Wright, "What's at Stake in the American Empire Debate" (*American Political Science Review* 101:2, 2007); Nicole Sunday Grove, "Weapons of mass participation: Social media, violence entrepreneurs, and the politics of crowdfunding for war," *European Journal of International Relations* online first (2018).

Recommended additional readings: Hafner-Burton, Kahler, and Montgomery, "Network Analysis for International Relations" (*International Organization* 63:3, 2009)

Wednesday 8 August

Lecture 3: Transactions: relational discourse analysis

Seminar 3: "Words in their speaking"

Readings: Bially Mattern, "Why 'Soft Power' Isn't So Soft" (*Millennium* 33:3, 2005); Krebs and Lobasz, "Fixing the Meaning of 9/11" (*Security Studies* 16:3, 2007); McCourt, "Role-Playing and Identity Affirmation..." (*Review of International Studies* 37, 2011).

Recommended additional readings: Krebs and Jackson, "Twisting Tongues and Twisting Arms" (*European Journal of International Relations* 13:1, 2007); Goddard, "Uncommon Ground" (*International Organization* 60:1, 2006).

Thursday 9 August

Lecture 4: Practices: competent performances

Seminar 4: Rules and rule-following

Readings: Pouliot, "Hierarchy in Practice" (*European Journal of International Security* 1:1, 2016); Adler-Nissen, "The Diplomacy of Opting Out" (*Journal of Common Market Studies* 46:3, 2008); Kustermans, "Parsing the Practice Turn" (*Millennium* 44:2, 2016).

Recommended additional readings: Leander, "The promises, problems, and potentials of a Bourdieu-inspired staging of International Relations" (*International Political Sociology* 5:3, 2011).

Friday 10 August

Lecture 5: Configurations

Seminar 5: Explanation without generalization

Readings: Goddard and Nexon, "The Dynamics of Global Power Politics" (*Journal of Global Security Studies* 1:1, 2016); Adamson, "Spaces of Global Security" (*Journal of Global Security Studies* 1:1, 2016); Tilly, "To Explain Political Processes" (*American Journal of Sociology* 100:6, 1995).

Recommended additional readings: Weber, "The 'Objectivity' of Social-scientific and Socio-political Knowledge"; PTJ, "Causal Claims and Causal Explanation in International Studies" (*Journal of International Relations and Development* (<http://link.springer.com/article/10.1057/jird.2016.13>)).