

CONF 601: Theories of Conflict and Conflict Resolution
CRN: 12902
Thursdays, 4:30-7:10pm
Arlington: Founders Hall 476

Dr. Daniel Rothbart
Professor of Conflict Analysis and Resolution
Director, Masters Program
Office: S-CAR: Truland 701H
drothbar@gmu.edu
Phone: 703-993-4474

Description

What are the causal factors, mechanisms, and structures that generate conflict? What are the conflict consequences, that is, the impact of the protagonists' interactions among those engulfed in the tumult? How do conflicts get resolved, or at least evolve into recognizable patterns of relations among conflict protagonists, stakeholders and others? These three questions regarding the conflict causes, consequences, and resolution-evolution motivate our exploration of conflict theories. Our inquiry requires that we dig beneath the surface of this or that conflict-related event, probing into its inner meaning, beliefs and assumptions of the conflict protagonists, and far-reaching consequences, intended or not. Particular attention will be given to conflict dynamics, focusing on what happens to the protagonists and their supporters before, during and after hostilities.

The course addresses the following topics:

Unit 1– power, tyranny, and injustice,

Unit II– the mind, instinct, and violence,

Unit III– society, culture, and identity,

Unit IV– injustice, power, and voice.

Course objectives:

1. To understand the primary theories of protracted conflict that seek to explain their causes, sources, and mechanisms.
2. To apply their theories to contemporary conflicts, recognizing that the complexity of conflicts calls for a multiplicity of conflict theories.
3. To critically evaluate the conflict theories, assessing their strengths and weaknesses for explaining contemporary conflicts and for understanding the conflict dynamics.
4. To develop skills for theory-making for insight into the elements of protracted conflict.
5. To demonstrate the currency of conflict theory to conflict analysis and practice.

Required Textbook:

Lewis A. Coser. 1956. *The Functions of Social Conflict*. [New York] Free Press of Glencoe [1964, c1956]

Articles and Book Chapters:

All additional readings should be accessible through the GMU's blackboard at <https://gmu.blackboard.com/>. To use the blackboard, allow pop ups, enter you GMU e-mail username and password and choose CONF601 from the menu.

GMU EMAIL ACCOUNTS

Students must activate their GMU email accounts to receive important University information, including messages related to this class.

Course Schedule and Readings:

Week 1: Conflict theory: Why, what, and how.

Required Reading:

Sandra Cheldelin, et. al., "Theory, Research and Practice"

Unit I: Power, Tyranny, and Injustice

According to theorists in this unit, state power is essential for the protection of the citizens. But many critics of this notion see that power tends to convert rulers to tyrants, creating systems of increasing inequality, and causing extreme suffering among the general population. Genuine liberation cannot be achieved through liberal reform but requires a complete dismantling of the systems of state power. The authority of state governments is shaken by revolutionary forces that seek to protect the rights of 'man', the proletariat class, and those who are disenfranchised from power.

Week 2 Realism in International Relations

Required Reading:

Machiavelli. *The Prince* Chapters XIV-XV, XVII- XVIII, XXV

Hobbes. Leviathan. Chapter X: "Of Power, Worth, dignity, Honour, and Worthiness."
Chapter XIII "Of the Natural Condition of Mankind".

Hans J. Morgenthau. "A Realist Theory of International Politics."

Optional Reading:

James Dougherty and Robert Pfaltzgraff, Jr. From Realist to Neorealist and Neoclassical Realist Theory.

Week 3: Inequality and Liberation

Required Reading:

Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Second Book

Week 4: Marxism and Conflict Analysis/Resolution

Karl Marx, The German Ideology

Karl Marx, Manifesto of the Communist Party

Optional Reading:

Stevenson and Haberman, "Marx: The Economic Basis of Human Societies"

Unit II: the Mind, Instinct, and Violence

Violent conflict can also find its source in psychic reactions to oppressive social forces that prevent fulfillment of instinctual needs. In Unit II, we probe models of the mind's inner workings, identifying the mysterious forces that drive groups to violence as a means relieving their suffering and satisfying their elemental needs.

Week 5: Psychoanalysis

Required Reading:

Sigmund Freud, Civilization and its discontent, pp. 104-122.

Vamik Volkan. 2004. *Blind Trust: Seven Threats of Large Group Identity*, pp. 23-55.

Vamik Volkan. 1997. *Bloodlines: From Ethnic Pride to Ethnic Terrorism*. Chapter 3, pp. 36-49,

Optional Reading:

Stephen A. Mitchell and Margaret J. Black: *Freud and Beyond, A History of Modern Psychoanalytic Thought*, Chapter 1.

Week 6: Relative Deprivation

Required Reading:

R. Gurr. "Psychological Factors in Civil Violence"

R. Gurr. "Relative Deprivation and the Impetus to Violence," in *Why Men Rebel*,

Optional Reading:

Chris Hedges. "Introduction" in *War is a Force that Gives Us Meaning*.

Week 7: Basic Human Needs

Aristotle, *Politics*, Book 1 part II and Book 2 Part VII

A.H. Maslow. 1943. "A Theory of Human Motivation"

John Burton. "Introducing the Person into Thinking about Social Policies."

Roger Coate and Jerel Rosati, "Human Needs in World Society"

Optional Reading:

Richard E. Rubenstein. 1996. "Basic Human Needs: Steps Toward Further Theory Development"

Unit III: Society, Culture, and Identity

We move from the inner workings of the mind to the external forces of society, culture and identity groups of various kinds. Such forces create the conditions of relative deprivation and systematic injustice. The need to respond to such maladies is cast as essential for collective survival, understood as a matter of life or death. In such cases the conflict dynamics are framed in terms of normative dualities between justice/injustice, right/wrong, and good/bad.

Week 8: Culture and violence

Required Reading:

Clifford Geertz. 1973. "Thick description: toward an interpretive theory of

culture”, in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*

Kevin Avruch and Peter Black, “Conflict resolution in intercultural settings.”

Galtung, “Cultural Violence”

Optional Reading:

Kevin Avruch. 2012. “Culture Theory, Culture Clash, and the Practice of Conflict Resolution”, in *Context and Pretext in Conflict Resolution: Culture, Identity, Power and Practice*

Week 9: Functionalism and Social Conflict

Required Reading:

Lewis A. Coser. 1956. Chapters 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7. *The Functions of Social Conflict*

Week 10: Identity, Difference, and Conflict

Required Reading:

Celia Cook-Huffman, “The role of identity in conflict”

Rothbart and Korostelina, “Moral Denigration of the Other” in *Identity, Morality, and Threat: Studies in Violent Conflict*

Thomas Boudreau and Brian Polkinghorn, “Reversing the destructive discourses”

Optional Reading:

Michael Toolan, “Preliminary Orientations” in *Narrative*

Week 11: The politics of dignity, recognition and justice

Required Reading:

Martin Luther King, “Letter from the Birmingham Jail”

Charles. 1992. “The Politics of Recognition”

Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking Recognition,”

Unit IV: Injustice, Power, and Voice

Many conflicts find their source in systems of domination that are interwoven seamlessly in our lives. In this unit we examine the promises and failings of modern society, focusing on its pernicious character that, presumably, contaminates social relations and alienates each individual from him- herself. Special attention is given to the intersection of power and institutions of truth associated with many institutions, even humanitarian organizations such as the United Nations.

Week 12: Morality, Justice, and Human Rights

Required Reading

Charles Taylor, “Inescapable Frameworks: from Sources of the Self

Kevin Avruch, “Culture, Relativism and Human Rights,”

Peter Singer, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality.”

Optional reading:

Martin Buber, Part II, from I-Thou

Week 13: Post-Modernism

Required Reading

Vaclav Havel. 1994. “The Need for Transcendence in the Postmodern World.”

Michel Foucault. “The Body of the Condemned”

Michel Foucault, “Truth and Power”

Week 14: the future of conflict theory

Required Reading:

Richard Rubenstein, “Education in Conflict Analysis and Resolution”

Course Requirements:

1. Course participation. You are expected to come to class having studied the required readings, indicated above, and prepared to participate in class discussion. Your grade for participation represents 10% of your course grade.

2. Exam #1. This exam will address the course content – required readings, class notes, and class discussion – from weeks 1 to 4. The exam will be distributed during class of session #4 [week #4], and due back during class time of session #5 [Week #5]. The grade for your exam will comprise 30% of the course grade.

3. Exam #2: This exam will address the course content from weeks 1 to 7. This will be distributed during class time of week 7, and due back one week later, week 8. The grade for your exam will comprise 30% of the course grade.

4. Exam #3. This is a cumulative final exam, addressing the content of the whole course. This will be distributed during class of week 14 and due one week later. The grade for your exam will comprise 30% of the course grade.

HONOR POLICY

Students must adhere to the guidelines of the George Mason University Honor Code (See <http://oai.gmu.edu/the-mason-honor-code>). The principle of academic integrity is taken very seriously and violations are treated gravely. What does academic integrity mean in this course? Essentially this: when you are responsible for a task, you will perform that task. When you rely on someone else's work in an aspect of the performance of that task, you will give full credit in the proper, accepted form. Another aspect of academic integrity is the free play of ideas. Vigorous discussion and debate are encouraged in this course, with the firm expectation that all aspects of the class will be conducted with civility and respect for differing ideas, perspectives, and traditions. When in doubt (of any kind) please ask for guidance and clarification.

Three fundamental and rather simple principles to follow at all times are that: (1) all work submitted be your own; (2) when using the work or ideas of others, including fellow students, give full credit through accurate citations; and (3) if you are uncertain about the ground rules on a particular assignment, ask for clarification. No grade is important enough to justify academic misconduct.

Plagiarism means using the exact words, opinions, or factual information from another person without giving the person credit. Writers give credit through accepted documentation styles, such as parenthetical citation, footnotes, or endnotes. Paraphrased material must also be cited, using MLA or APA format. A simple listing of books or articles is not sufficient. Plagiarism is the equivalent of intellectual robbery and cannot be tolerated in the academic setting. If you have any doubts about what constitutes plagiarism, please see me.

Student Services

Writing Center:

The George Mason University Writing Center staff provides a variety of resources and services (e.g., tutoring, workshops, writing guides, handbooks) intended to support students as they work to construct and share knowledge through writing. (See <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu>). ESL Help: The program was designed specifically for students whose first language is not English who feel they might benefit from additional, targeted support over the course of an entire semester. (See http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/?page_id=10).

University Libraries:

University Libraries provides resources for distance students. (See <http://library.gmu.edu/distance>).

Counseling and Psychological Services

The George Mason University Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) staff consists of professional counseling and clinical psychologists, social workers, and counselors who offer a wide range of services (e.g., individual and group counseling, workshops and outreach programs) to enhance students' personal experience and academic performance [See <http://caps.gmu.edu>].

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA), also known as the "Buckley Amendment," is a federal law that gives protection to student educational records and provides students with certain rights. [See <http://registrar.gmu.edu/privacy>].