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The study of international affairs is best understood as a continuing competition between the realist, liberal, and radical traditions. Walt explains each of these paradigms as well as some constructivist theories. Why should policymakers and practitioners care about the scholarly study of international affairs? Theories of International Relations allow us to understand and try to make sense of the world around us through various lenses, each of which represents a different theoretical perspective. In order to consider the field as a whole for beginners it is necessary to simplify IR theory. This chapter does so by situating IR theory on a three-part spectrum of traditional theories, middle-ground theories and critical theories. Examples are used throughout to help bring meaning and perspective to these positions.