PhD Comprehensive Exam in International Relations

Fall 2017

Morning Exam

Please answer *one* of the following questions.

1. From your perspective, what is the most "underrated" and what is the most "overrated" research in international relations in the last 25 years? In your answer, please define "underrated" and "overrated" and provide detailed arguments about why the specific research you chose meets these definitions. What should researchers do to expand upon the "underrated" research? What should researchers do in response to the "overrated" research?

2. Lake (2011) argues that the field of international relations should eschew a focus on grand theory (or the "isms") and "focus instead on developing contingent, mid-level theories of specific phenomena."
   a. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why or why not?
   b. If you agree, should we still teach our students about grand theory? Why or why not?
   c. If you disagree, explain what you see as the proper roles of grand and mid-level theories in international relations scholarship. Should all mid-level theories be derived from grand theory? Do grand and mid-level theories serve useful, but separate, purposes?

   References: Lake, David A. 2011. "Why "isms" Are Evil: Theory, Epistemology, and Academic Sects as Impediments to Understanding and Progress." International Studies Quarterly 55(2):465–480.

Afternoon Exam

Please answer *two* of the following questions.

1. Much recent research on human rights and human security concerns how international actors can or cannot influence human rights/human security outcomes in specific countries. In your opinion, what are the two most promising avenues for how international actors can influence human rights outcomes? Please evaluate the quality of the evidence in this area.

2. The bargaining model of war dominates the contemporary literature on international conflict. Discuss both the advantages and limitations of this analytical framework.
    a. Does the model uniquely contribute to our understanding of international conflict (i.e., does it provide insights that previous explanations for war could not)?
    b. Is the bargaining model able to provide a fully comprehensive account for international war? Are there aspects of conflict that it fails to explain? What, if anything, is the model missing? What are its limitations?
    c. Could the model be usefully modified to provide a more complete or realistic account of international conflict? If so, how? If not, why not?

3. Since the 1980s, much more focus in IR concerns non-state actors like firms, terrorist organizations, or NGOs. Focusing on any non-state actor, please explain what the incorporation of this actor-type into IR does to the discipline. Does the addition of non-state actors generally provide new knowledge, or are these actors epiphenomenal to IR outcomes of interest? Is there a specific theoretical or empirical approach that is best suited for the study of non-state actors?

4. What evidence is there to suggest that international institutions have an independent effect on state behavior? What are the difficulties in identifying the effects of international institutions on state behavior? Discuss how these difficulties can be addressed and cite relevant studies. On balance, does the evidence weigh in favor of or against claims that institutions are important determinants of behavior in IR? Cite relevant studies for at least two policy areas (e.g., security, trade, finance, environmental policy, human rights, humanitarian law, etc.).

5. Assume that explicit assumptions about human decision making are necessary to construct coherent explanations of state behavior. Evaluate rational and cognitive assumptions in terms of their capacity to provide a foundation for building international relations theory and/or for conducting foreign policy analysis.

6. Please provide a new puzzle in the area of international political economy. Why is this a puzzle? What do existing IPE theories say about this puzzle? Please provide a tentative hypothesis and test concerning this IPE puzzle.