

Ph.D. Comprehensive Examination in International Relations
Spring 2015
Morning Exam Study Guide

1. IR scholars have traditionally justified separating international and domestic politics by asserting that international politics take place in an anarchic setting, while domestic politics take place in a hierarchical or ordered setting.

- Are there good reasons to doubt either part of this assertion? That is, is there reason to doubt that international politics are clearly anarchic, or that domestic politics are clearly not?
- Should the two fields be treated completely separate? Can insights from one inform the other? Why or why not?

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.”

- Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why or why not?
- If you agree, should we still teach our students about grand theory? Why or why not?
- 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?

3. What are the most significant theoretical and empirical contributions to the study of international relations over the past twenty years?

- Discuss at least one theoretical contribution and one empirical contribution, citing specific examples from the literature. Why have these contributions advanced the state of the field?
- What are some existing weaknesses in the field of international relations that offer particularly attractive opportunities for further research?

4. Many IR theories rely explicitly on the assumption of rationality, which some have criticized as unrealistic.

- Is there value in the rational actor assumption? Why or why not?
- If you believe there is value in assuming rationality, what are the limits of that assumption? When should the assumption of rationality be relaxed?
- If you do not believe there is value in the rational actor assumption, how would you alter existing theories that rely on it? How would you alter the approach to politics currently embraced by those that assume rationality?
- Please use specific examples throughout your answer.

5. Scholars have increasingly recognized that domestic politics play a key role in inter-state behavior. However, most scholars account for this by arguing that democratic countries behave differently than non-democratic countries (and perhaps including a "regime type" variable in their analysis), rather than building a domestic theory of international relations from the ground up.

- What theoretical reasons and empirical evidence do we have to suggest that democracies and non-democracies behave differently in their interactions with other states?
- Is theorizing about the differences between democracies/non-democracies the best way of constructing a domestic theory of international relations? Why or why not?
- Besides the democratic/non-democratic distinction, what other features of domestic politics might affect the way states interact with each other? Cite relevant research where appropriate.

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.