

International Relations Comprehensive Exam Fall 2015

Morning Exam Study Guide

1. Design the outline for an international relations pre-seminar syllabus (a graduate course). What topics would you cover? Which works are essential readings for the course? Which readings would you omit? Be sure to justify the topics and the works included/excluded.
2. Many IR theories rely explicitly on the assumption of rationality, which some have criticized as unrealistic.
 - a. Is there value in the rational actor assumption? Why or why not?
 - b. If you believe there is value in assuming rationality, what are the limits of that assumption? When should the assumption of rationality be relaxed?
 - c. 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?
 - d. Please use specific examples throughout your answer.
3. States are commonly considered the most important actors in international relations (Waltz 1979; Mearsheimer 2014). Do you agree with this position? Why or why not?
4. 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.
 - a. 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?
 - b. Should the two fields be treated completely separate? Can insights from one inform the other? Why or why not?
5. Most theoretical approaches to international relations incorporate incomplete information into their explanations in some way. Explain the various ways that major grand- and mid-range theoretical approaches in international relations address and account for incomplete information? For each, is the treatment of incomplete information a strength or weakness of the theoretical approach?