

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
CANDIDACY EXAM
2013

DAY ONE: CORE QUESTIONS

ANSWER ONE QUESTION EACH FROM THE THREE PARTS BELOW. YOU HAVE EIGHT HOURS TO COMPLETE THIS SECTION OF THE EXAM.

PART A: THEORY/PHILOSOPHY

1. One of the most prominent developments in IR theory in the past few years has been a turn toward “practices,” which its advocates argue will both facilitate cross-paradigmatic conversation and enable the field to overcome long-standing dualisms like agents vs. structure, material conditions vs. ideas, and the like. Evaluate the practice turn. First, briefly define practices and summarize the main claims of the literature. Second, how does the practice turn relate to older theoretical traditions that also talked about practices but did not thematize them directly? Is the practice turn genuinely new or just old wine in new bottles? Third, to what extent can the practice turn deliver on its promises, and why or why not? Finally, in light of your discussion, where do we go from here?

2. Some students of international relations believe that the theoretical logics that govern state behavior are immutable. Others believe that they change from one period to the next—that the early 1800s in Europe marked a transition from a pure balance-of-power system to one governed by informal international institutions, at least for a time. Which do you believe, and why? If the latter, what “meta-theoretical” explanations govern the transition of the international system from one logic to another?

PART B: METHODS

1. Much has been made in the past decade of the distinction between causal inference and descriptive inference. Especially in quantitative methods, new methods are driving an increased boldness in making causal claims about the world. What do you think of this? Is there a clear line between causal and descriptive inference based on observational data? Explain your understanding of how inference works in the social sciences and what it can and cannot tell us about the world.

2. In his 1999 article “Rigor or Rigor Mortis,” Stephen Walt argues that rational choice applications to IR have failed to produce many new hypotheses and that the models produced by rational choice theorists “have for the most part not been tested in a careful and systematic way.” Fourteen years later, do you think Walt is right? What have we learned, if anything, about the best ways to generate observable implications from rational choice models and to test them?

PART C: POLICY/PRACTICE

1. What does IR theory tell us about which countries should be most likely to accommodate a rising power and which countries should be most likely to balance against it? Are our IR theories correctly predicting state reactions to contemporary rising China?

2. There is a longstanding debate among IR scholars over whether IR theory “matters” – sometimes discussed in terms of “usefulness” or “relevance” – and if so, to whom and how. Scholars in this debate seem to mean different things in talking about what it means to matter. Characterize the various laments. To what extent does the theory-practice dialogue need improvement and if so how could it be improved?