What is IR?

I. A Policy Question
II. Rationale for Theory in International Relations
III. Elements of Theory
IV. Types of Theory
V. Main Factors in Dominant Theories
I. A Policy Question

Q: Would the spread of democracy in the Middle East make that region stable and more favorable to American interests?

Q: What would be the key factor(s) needed to determine your answer?
II. Rationale for Perspectives/ Theory in IR

● Why Perspectives?
  – Need to simplify to understand
  – Generalizations and uniformity

● What are Perspectives?
  – Key factors causing a particular class of events
  – Start from important political questions
  – Then posit HYPOTHESES ....
Hypotheses

- Hypothesis: a potential but unproven answer to one of these questions
- LOGICAL CHAIN: Problem → Hypothesis → Testing of Facts → Theory

EX: What causes terrorism?

Hypothesis: Poverty causes terrorism.

THEORY: a set of concepts and hypotheses which posit consistent cause and effect relationships between various social and political factors (NOTE: Perspectives generally don’t rise to the level of theory)
III. Elements of Theory

● DESCRIPTION
  – What type of phenomena? What is ‘terrorism’? What constitutes ‘poverty’?

● EXPLANATION
  – Statements of causation (“Because of...” statements)
  – Proliferation of Poverty → Increased Terrorism

● PREDICTION
  – “If poverty persists in the Third World, we are likely to have increased terrorism (more 9-11’s) in next few decades”

● POLICY PRESCRIPTION
  – “Terrorism can be avoided through policies of economic development”
Q: What is ‘science’?

- Political Questions subject to:
  - Multicausality
  - Human unpredictability

- Methods in IR:
  - Rationalist
  - Constructivist
Two Simple Rules....

- **Correlation does not equal causation**
  - *Spurious correlation*
  - *EX: Many tropical countries are poor, therefore tropical climates cause poverty*

- **Necessary and sufficient causes**
  - Plastic explosives
  - Germany and the Holocaust
  - Global Financial Crisis (2008)
“Politics must be understood through reason, yet it is not in reason that it finds its model….Politics is an art, not a science, and what is required for its mastery is not the rationality of the engineer but the wisdom and moral strength of the statesman.” (p. 6)

• Q: Morgenthau critiques the application of rationalism to the study of politics. Why does he hold this position? Is his position valid?

• Q: Does Morgenthau think that the social world can be studied in the same manner as the physical world?

• Q: What is Morgenthau’s methodological approach?
IV. Types of Theory

- EMPIRICAL: theory which attempts to explain observed phenomena without value judgment ("WHAT IS....")

- NORMATIVE: theory that deals with values, norms, ethics, morals, etc. ("WHAT SHOULD BE...")
  - Line between the two not always clear!!!
  - Key concern is with EMPIRICAL value of theories.

- Ethics in IR -- Universalism, Relativism, and Pragmatism
Main Perspectives in IR

REALIST
Struggle for Power

IDENTITY
Ideas & Identity

Interactions & Institutions
LIBERAL