

# PSC/IR 106: Week 3 Recitation

William Spaniel

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# Agenda

- Introduction/Ice Breaker (Friday only)
- Section expectations (Friday only)
- What is a theory?
- The Gnomes of *South Park*
- Crafting theory

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# Introduction/Icebreaker

- Name
- Where are you from?
- What makes you awesome
- One thing that you want to get out of this class/recitation

# Introduction/Icebreaker

- | • Name  | Example           |
|---|-------------------|
| • Where are you from?   | • William Spaniel |
| • What makes you awesome                                      |                   |
| • One thing that you want to get out of this class/recitation |                   |

# Introduction/Icebreaker

- | • Name  | Example           |
|---|-------------------|
| • Where are you from?   | • William Spaniel |
| • What makes you awesome                                      | • San Diego       |
| • One thing that you want to get out of this class/recitation |                   |

# Introduction/Icebreaker

- | • Name  | Example              |
|---|----------------------|
| • Where are you from?   | • William Spaniel    |
| • What makes you awesome                                      | • San Diego          |
| • One thing that you want to get out of this class/recitation | • I catch baseballs. |







# Introduction/Icebreaker

- | • Name  | Example                             |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| • Where are you from?   | • William Spaniel                   |
| • What makes you awesome                                      | • San Diego<br>• I catch baseballs. |
| • One thing that you want to get out of this class/recitation | • I want to give everybody an A.    |

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- The Gnomes of *South Park*
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# Section Expectations

- Section is worth 30% of your grade.
- Some of the section material will be available on YouTube/embedded videos on my website.
  - But attendance is *mandatory*, so don't get any ideas.
    - I will excuse one absence.
- Quizzes?
  - Please don't make me.

# Section Expectations

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- How many of you are taking political science classes to avoid math?
  - It's okay, I was in the same boat seven years ago.
- For good or bad, most current political science research is highly technical.
  - We will be going over the hard parts (math) in recitation.



# Scheduling Office Hours

- Tuesdays 2:15-4:15, Harkness 309.
  - Assuming there is not substantial discontent.
- Or by appointment.

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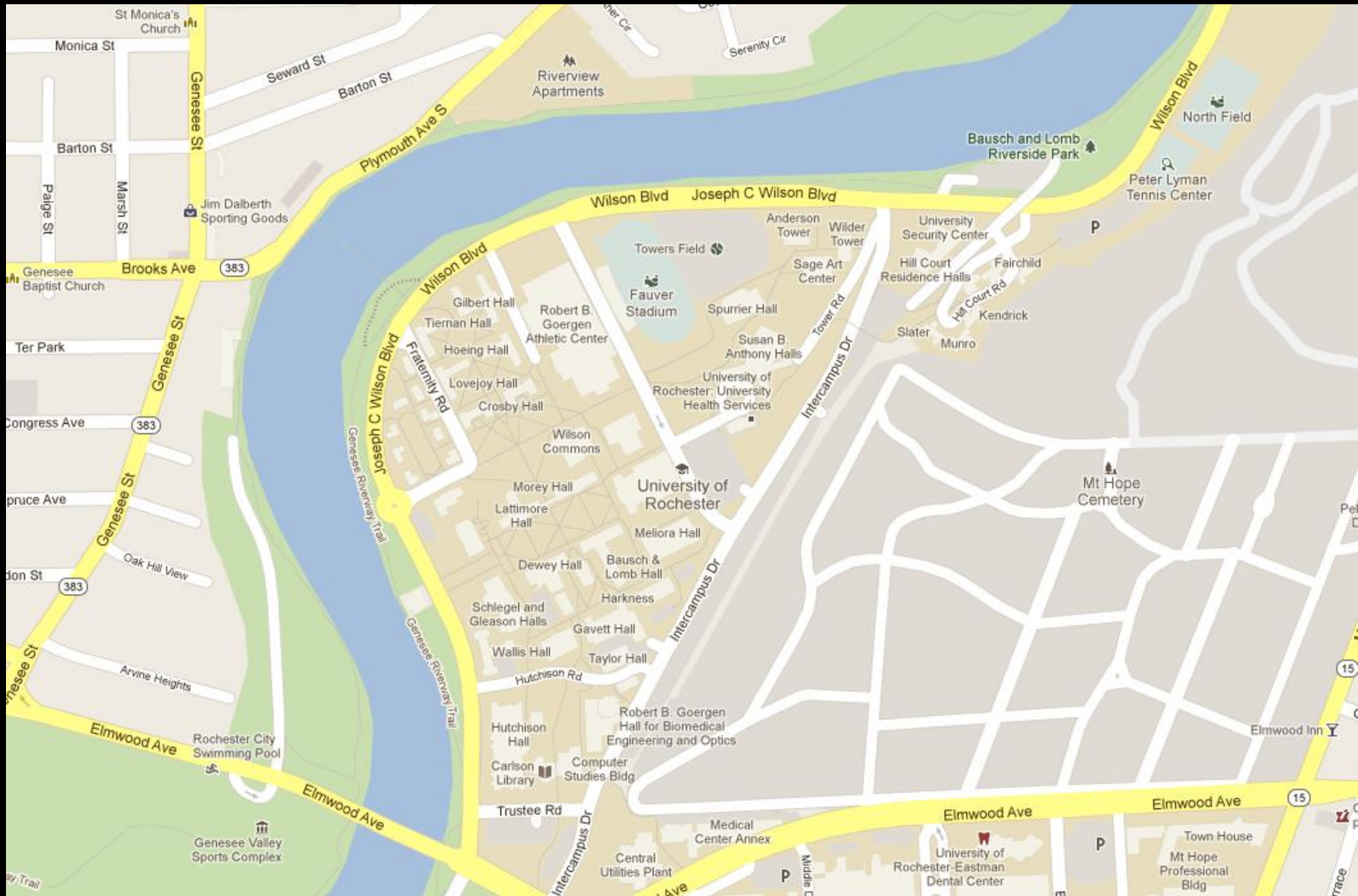
# Theory

- Theory is a tradeoff between details and generalization.
- Historians focus more on the former. Political scientists focus more on the latter.
- Simplifications are not only allowed but encouraged.

# Simplicity = Good

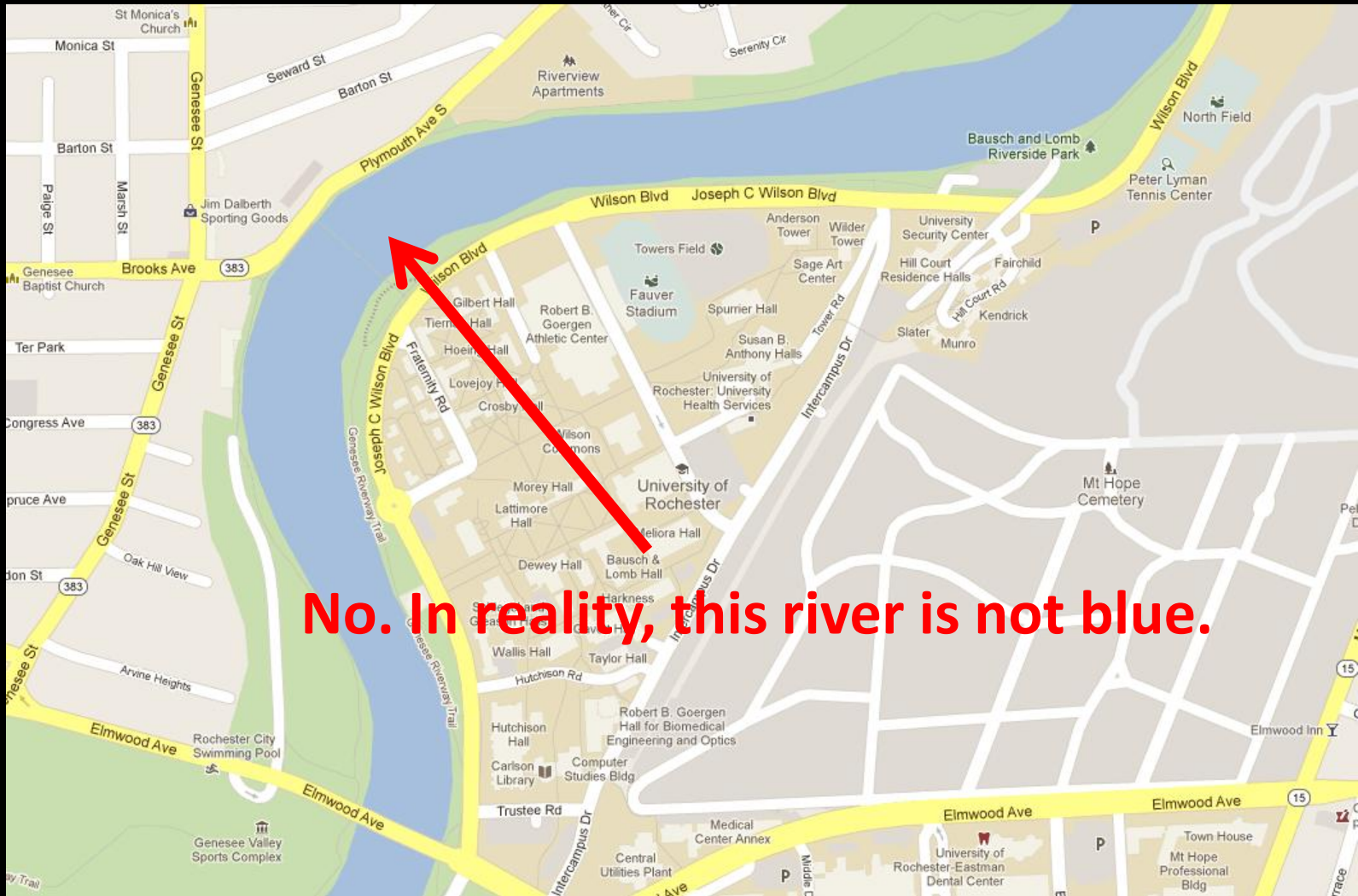
- We think of the world in simplified terms all the time.
  - The world is too complex for our puny brains to comprehend otherwise.

# Theory as a Map



*Is this reality?*

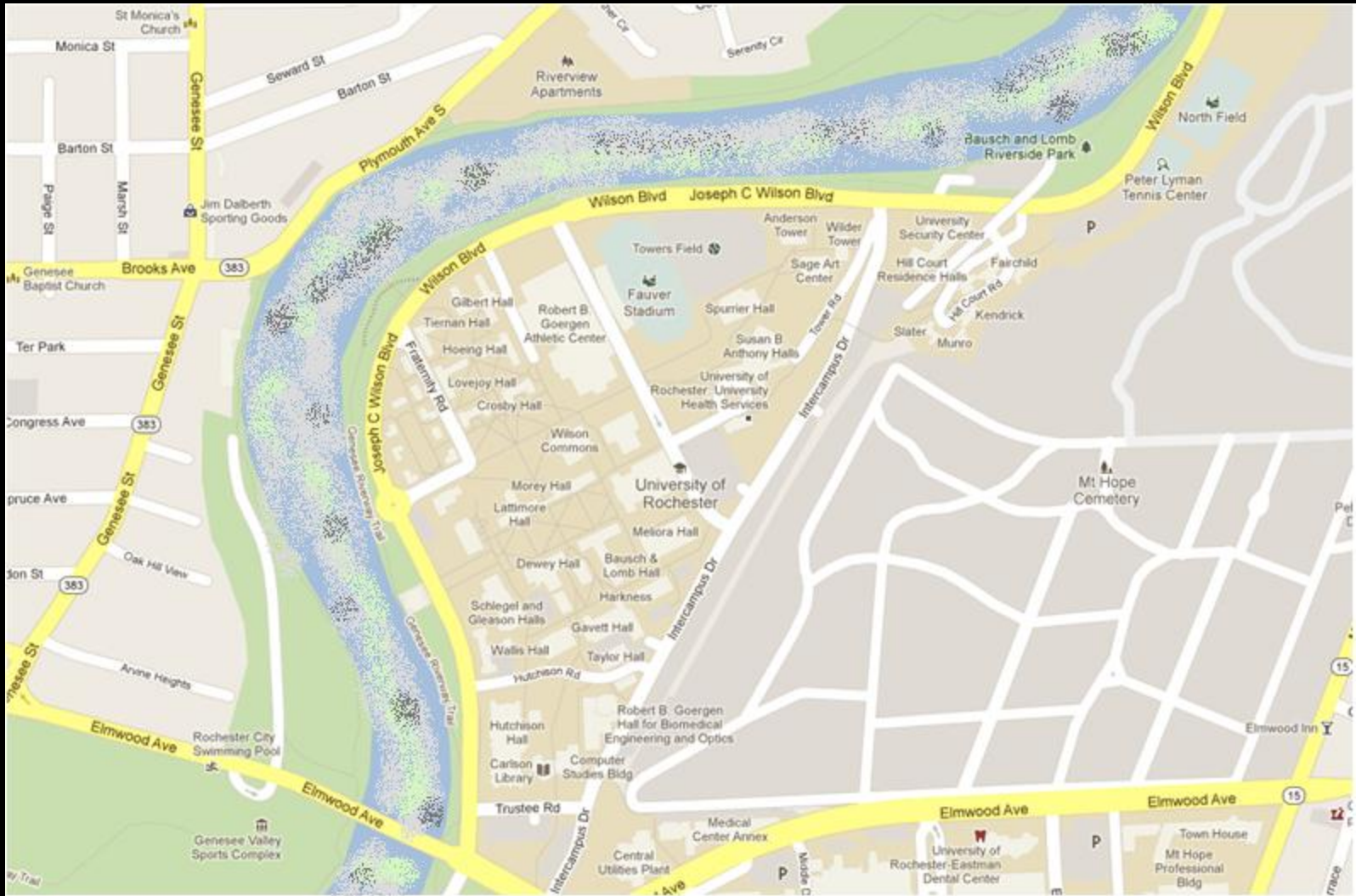
# Theory as a Map



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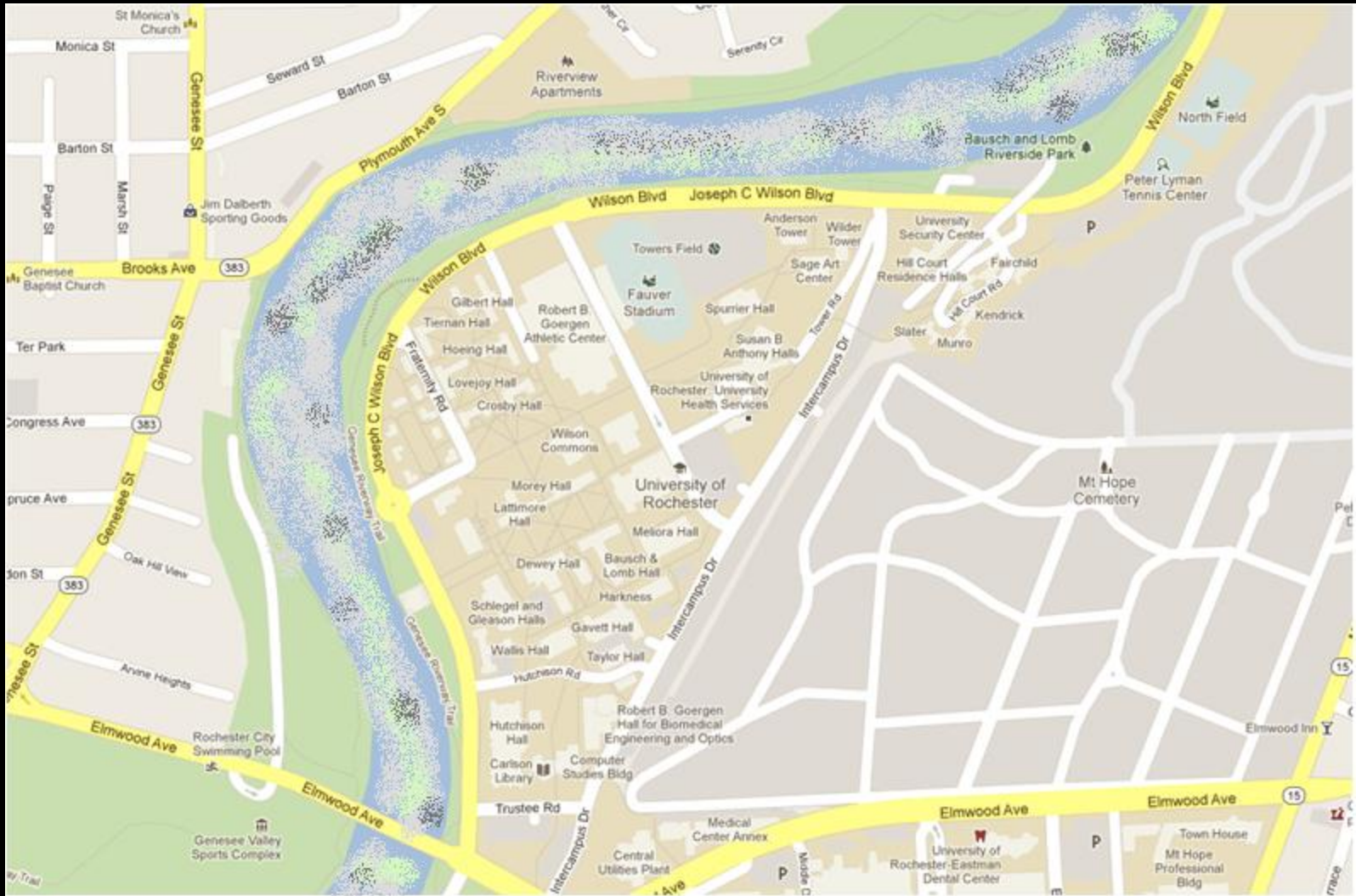


# Theory as a Map



*Is THIS reality?*

# Theory as a Map



No. But if you want to get around campus, it might as well be.

# Simplicity = Good

- We think of the world in simplified terms all the time.
  - The world is too complex for our puny brains to comprehend otherwise.
- Simplifications are only problematic when they interfere with results.



# Theory as a Map



This has become too abstract to be useful.

(But it will be very useful if your life ever turns into an 8-bit RPG.)

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- *The Gnomes of South Park*
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# Gnomes

- In *Gnomes*, a group of gnomes steals everyone's underwear.
- One child witnesses them, but no one believes him.
- The gang stays up one night to catch them.





PHASE 1

PHASE 2

PHASE 3

Collect  
underpants

?

Profit



# Gnomes

- The gnomes have a theory: underpants leads to profit.
- But how?
  - Perhaps they can resell them to the residents of South Park.
  - Perhaps they can recycle the cloth and sell it wholesale.
- For the gnomes to have a *good* theory, they need an explicit phase two.

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PHASE 1

PHASE 2

PHASE 3

Make  
Assumptions



Explain  
Outcomes

# Crafting Theory

1. Make assumptions.
2. ?
3. Explain outcomes.

# Crafting Theory

1. Make assumptions.
2. Logic/game theory.
3. Explain outcomes.



# Crafting Theory

1. Make assumptions.
2. Logic/game theory.
3. Explain outcomes.

These steps must be explicit!  
Otherwise, we will argue about  
what you are arguing about rather  
than your actual argument.

**Premise 1:** *There is no world government.*

**Premise 2:** *All states are capable of using force against other states.*

**Premise 3:** *No state can ever be certain that another state will not use force against it.*

**Premise 4:** *All states seek to maintain their territorial integrity and domestic autonomy.*

**Premise 5:** *States are rational actors.*

Wagner 2007, 13

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**Premise 5:** *States are rational actors.*

Wagner 2007, 13

**Conclusion 1 (Mearsheimer?)** *Two states may go to war with each other even though they both want only to survive.*

Wagner 2007, 14

**Premise 1 (Waltz) Definition:** *A bipolar world is one in which there are two great powers, and a multipolar world is one in which there are more than two great powers.*

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**Premise 2 (Waltz)** *Miscalculations of the relative strength or behavior of opposing states or coalitions of states can cause wars to occur.*

**Premise 3 (Waltz)** *States are less likely to miscalculate the strength or behavior of states than of opposing coalitions.*

**Conclusion 1 (Waltz)** *War is less likely in a bipolar world than in a multipolar world.*

Wagner 2007, 19

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**Conclusion 1 (Waltz)** *War is less likely in a bipolar world than in a multipolar world.*

Wagner 2007, 19

**Premise 4** *The only miscalculations that can lead to war are miscalculations about the relative strength or behavior of the great powers.*

**Premise 5** *There is no other possible cause of war that might be more likely to occur in a bipolar world than in a multipolar one.*

Wagner 2007, 20

# Crafting Theory

- Everything rests on our assumptions.
- Pitfalls
  1. Failure to specify important assumptions invalidates the theory.
  2. Ridiculous assumptions will lead to (logically valid) but ridiculous conclusions.
  3. Too few assumptions leads to an intractable model and therefore no proven logical validity.