# K Answers

## Imperialism K

### 2AC---AT: Quantum Holography K

#### Predictions are good and true

Michael D. Ward 16, Michael was a Professor of Political Science @ Duke University, “Can We Predict Politics? Toward What End?”, Journal of Global Security Studies, Volume 1, Issue 1, 02/10/2016, <https://academic.oup.com/jogss/article/1/1/80/1834930> [\\pairie](file:///\\pairie)

What Are the Pros and Cons of a Predictive Approach to Social Science?

The main pro is that the predictive enterprise helps us evaluate how well we are doing so that we can improve our understanding of the world. It is the gold standard of a scientific approach. We do not yet have an experimental framework for many important subjects. As a result, it is important to make sure we can get the same kind of results with new information that we got with the data we began investigating. That means we have to either save some data back (a great idea), use the future to see how well our modeled understandings perform, or preferably both. There are only nascent traditions of this in the social sciences at present. Keeping track of your success is not collecting significant coefficients. Keeping track matters. One consequence is that we cannot just keep using the same data over and over. And over. One reason that many hate predictions is that talking heads make many predictions in the media, but few of them ever keep track of how well they are doing. Their goal is somewhat akin to a venture capitalist’s make enough bets that eventually one of them is correct enough that you get to make a lot more bets. Ascher (1979) long ago showed that the talking heads were most often wrong. This is still true. You would think that they would get better over time, but there is little evidence that this is the case.

We also will be driven into making more precise investigations once we start to predict. We will not be satisfied with annual data for most things. Nor will we necessarily be satisfied with national-level information because it becomes even more apparent in the predictive domain that the world is neither flat nor homogeneous. As a result, we should get more precise understandings of how things play out in our social world. At the same time, we have to recognize that our predictions are probabilistic and contain a large amount of uncertainty, more so than in other endeavors.

As a result of these two aspects, better and more precise understandings of our social world, it is possible to be more relevant to decision makers at all levels. This does not mean just inside the beltway. It also means decision makers at CDC (Centers for Disease Control) as well as those in non-governmental organizations around the world.

What are the cons? Several arguments are usually brought to the fore.

1. The world is inherently unpredictable. But we are studying it anyway. Go figure. The refrain to this litany is often “but I know what is going to happen in this instance.” Maybe, but let us keep track and find out if you are right. This is the talking heads premise, and it is demonstrably false. Making cause and effect statements about politics does imply that politics is in part, at least, predictable.

2. This will empower the establishment and impoverish those without power. Actually, it might. But at the same time, it provides ways in which those outside the capitals can also affect the future. Why will prediction be more valuable to the establishment than it is to the rest of society? Is the same thing true of explanation and substantive knowledge? Western society is based in part on the idea that knowledge is a valuable thing for all. It is true that some take more advantage of it than others. But having open and available knowledge can be important for many diverse groups. As an example, we might think that clandestine organizations can benefit from open knowledge, even precise actionable knowledge, but as we think these thoughts, most of us might not be thinking about transnational activist networks but rather large governmental organizations. However, it is clear that non-governmental actors are also consumers of knowledge.

3. It is possible to predict things without true understanding or knowledge. Sure, but rarely is this true for any but the simplest of systems. I am reminded of the wonderful essay by Calvin Trillin describing the chicken on Mott Street in New York’s Chinatown that played and always won Tic-Tac-Toe. The chicken did not understand the game. But the chicken always won.6 It is ridiculous to suggest that we have models that predict as accurately as the (now gone) Mott Street chicken but have the same understanding of the “chicken” game. Even if it were the case (and I repeat it is not), could the opposite really be true? If you have deep understanding of the world, should you not be able to generate accurate predictions of how it will work in situations you have not seen before? Will proximate effects lead us toward distant causes much like proximate causes can lead us to distant effects?

4. We will disrupt the space-time continuum. If we can predict conflict, for example, we will be able to prevent it. Or start it where we want. And then we will no longer be able to predict conflict. One of my models attempts to predict where there will be coups de e´tat and other types of irregular regime changes on a monthly level. Maybe if Muhammadu Buhari, who assumed the presidency of Nigeria at the end of May 2015, sees our manuscript, he might be able to prevent any irregular leadership change from occurring in the next six months. And maybe that would be bad. Or good. But in any case, I am pretty sure that the Nigerian president is already aware of the fragility of the Nigerian political landscape. This is a frequent type of criticism of forecasting. I think we can wait for this to become a real problem before we stop trying to develop better understandings of the world.

5. Real social effects occur glacially. Predictions will be focused on epiphenomenal changes that won’t matter in the long run. How do you know?

In summary, we need less theory because most theory is an attempt to rescue or adapt extant theory. We need more predictions in order to keep track of how well we understand the world around us. They will tell us how good our theories are and where we need better explanations. Predictions are like cell phones. First, they seem arcane and bizarre. Then, in a few short years, there is no one around who remembers life without cell phones and your kids use them in ways you don’t understand. The 2012 US presidential election was the first that was famously and accurately predicted. But it will be the first of many. All future voters will vote in an era in which accurately predicting the election will be the norm, not the exception, though as in the UK in 2015, there will be exceptions. This will have consequences for democracy. In the same way that having a product recommended to us on the web is now normal, this will become the new normal. Data science (and more data) will guide us to a better understanding of our future than we have now. Whether you are involved with commercial organizations, local government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the federal government, or international organizations, prediction will be part of the daily ebb and flow of information, and we shall become used to seeing accurate predictions about a wide variety of political phenomena.