Constructivism
GRADER TYPES

OPTIMIST

These answers are half right!

PESSIMIST

These answers are half wrong!

REALIST

Statistically speaking, my teaching has had no impact.

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Russia and Crimea

- 2014 Crimean ‘separatists’ and Russian soldiers in unmarked uniforms capture Crimea

- Very costly for Russia (sanctions, international isolation…why do it?)

- Lots of reasons (probably) but one: shared imagination within Russia that Crimea is a primordial element of Russian territory and birthplace of the Russian people. Thus Crimea is an element of Russian identity.
Peer Discussion

How would you characterize constructivism?
Constructivism

- Not opposed to neorealism and neoliberalism per say
  - Contrasts against rational foundations of the Neos

- Constructivism ≠ substantive theory

- Constructivism = social theory

- Ruggie: “Constructivism is about human consciousness and its role in international life.”
Constructivism

What do we mean by agents and structures?

- Agents: actors with agency
  - States, people, IGOs, NGOs

- Structures: overarching cultural and normative forces
  - Sovereignty
Constructivism

- Core of Constructivism: Idealism and Holism
  - Idealism: Take seriously the role of ideas.
    - Material forces not irrelevant, but significance and meaning of material factors are conditioned by ideational forces.
  - Holism
    - What happens in the world is more than just the product of combined individual elements. Social structures play a role independent of agency.
Structuration

- Agents and social structures create and recreate each other
  - Agents, though their action, generate social structures.
  - Social structures, in turn, shape actors behavior though norms, ideas, identity, roles.
- Social structures are not permanent
- However, changing structure is not necessarily as easy; ideas, identities, norms, and roles become sedimented over time, constraining actors.
Social construction of Reality

What do we mean by the social construction of reality?

- Socially constructed nature of actors and their identities and interests
- Actors are produced and created by their cultural environment
- Knowledge (symbols, rules, concepts, and categories) shapes how actors construct and interpret the world
Logics of Action

❖ Two ‘logics’ for understanding the calculations of actors:

❖ Logic of consequences

❖ Logic of appropriateness
What are norms? What are regulative versus constitutive norms?
Regulative vs. Constitutive

What is the difference between regulative and constitutive norms/rules

- Regulative norms: guide the behavior of actors by indicating what is appropriate or not for a given identity.
- Constitutive norms: the observation of these norms defines membership in a particular identity.
Anarchy

- What does Wendt mean when he says “Anarchy is what states make of it”?

- Three cultures of anarchy defined by dyadic identity dynamics (or amity and enmity roles)
  - Hobbesian - Enemy
  - Lockean – Rival
  - Kantian – Friend
Meaning

- Constructivists attempt to recover social systems of meaning and in turn the meaning actors give to their practices and the objects they construct.
- Adds ideational power to material power
  - Legitimacy, reputation
  - Power also includes how knowledge, the fixings of meanings, and the construction of identities allocate differential regards and capacities.
Nature of Scientific Inquiry

- Constructivists reject the unity of science thesis
- Social world different from the physical world
- Model of the natural sciences not appropriate for the social sciences
- Structures have causality by producing or enabling certain kinds of behavior (i.e. sovereignty)
- Discovering timeless laws is virtually impossible.
Rationalism vs. Constructivism

What is the difference?
Norms

- Diffusion drives institutional isomorphism
- Forces of diffusion
  - Coercion (colonialism)
  - Strategic competition
  - Resources acquisition (state part of the modern ‘club’ and therefore worthy of investment)
- Periods of uncertainty
- Symbolic importance or standing
- Professional associations and expert communities
Norms

- Norms Lifecycle
- Emergence
- Cascade
- Internalization

- Is norms diffusion unidirectional?

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Social structures

- Norms operate within social contexts and structures, e.g. identity

- In some ways, we can think of norms as the operating instructions of identities, and different sets of norms adhere to different identities
Identity

➤ What then is identity?

➤ To put it simply, identity is who ‘we’ as a collective are in contrast to some ‘other’

➤ Everyone has multiple social identities, so activation of identity is key for understanding international relations outcomes.
Constructivism

In sum, constructivism is about keeping open a space in IR for the social rather than the material.