WHAT CONSTRUCTIVISM?

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In the troubled world of the twenty-first century, with a need for a change on an unprecedented – indeed, epochal – scale, globally and regionally, everywhere, also in areas such as the Middle East, who would not want to be a constructivist?

Throughout its history, constructivist thought was always radical, in its many versions indeed revolutionary, with a long, distinguished but variegated lineage. Referred to in different fields of inquiry also as “constructionism”, constructivism was noted in the discipline of IR only since the late 1980s, introduced there by Nicholas Onuf’s in his 1989 book *World of Our Making: Rules and Rule in Social Theory and International Relations*. However, and quite amazingly, by 1998 constructivism has become the newest, formally recognized mainstream approach in the discipline of IR in the US, as the third of the three US IR mainstream approaches alongside neorealism and neoliberalism. And the meteoritic rise has not stopped there: according to a survey by US-based research group TRIP, more than 50% of scholars and students of IR from countries other than the US said they are constructivists or use a constructivist approach.

In the US this newly minted mainstream constructivist approach has become popular very quickly, but here too there is a major change: what happens in the US IR discipline has much broader consequences; the discipline of IR does not exist only as it did some hundred years ago only in two countries, the US and the UK: IR is now a globalized discipline. According to the TRIP, in 2014 IR as a field of study existed in 32 countries and nine languages, and a mere three years later, in 2017, the TRIP World Faculty Survey found IR in 40 countries on six continents.

It seems to be amazing since it was after all only in 1977 that Stanley Hoffmann had called IR “an American Social Science” serving primarily as a legitimizing tool for American foreign policy, dominated by scholars from the US, much of its content devoted to understanding the world from the “American point of view”. The ontology and the epistemology of the discipline, according to Hoffmann, were all American, demonstrably Eurocentric, America-centered.

Or, is it despite globalization the same? IR is taught in a large number of some estimated 5,000 tertiary outfits existing in the US, dwarfing studies of IR anywhere on the planet. In the globalized IR, the US contingent continues to dominate the worldwide study of IR with its largest and best-funded academic community and the dominant journals. There is a worldwide market for textbooks in English, and the production of texts has become a major export industry, advancing the globalization of IR. In the US, IR is in many regards institutionally
unique: IR is a subfield of Political Science alongside many other subfields: Comparative Politics, American Government, Local Government, and Area/Regional Studies, including Middle East Studies (MES). These are all co-joined by philosophical postulates embedded within a single way of understanding their topics, i.e., positivism. Thus, the official version of mainstream constructivism is by definition positivist, although the first versions of constructivism in IR were decidedly not.

Critical IR scholars (and they, too, are regarded as constructivists) watch the globalization of IR and a spread of US IR approaches as an important part of the ‘global knowledge governance’, ‘knowledge production and diffusion across borders, inextricably linked to universities’, building inter-elite consensus on global standards. The critical constructivist argument is that how knowledge is constructed plays a major role in the construction of the world. As a response to such concerns, there is a growing body of literature advocating the search for and recognition of “non-Western” approaches in which post-colonial studies now play an important role. So far, many authors report, it has been difficult to shed the Western categories no matter how hard they are being rearticulated: they are a lens through which the world has learned to view itself, through models and concepts presented as objective, universally valid, but in fact, so it is argued, developed in and for the “West”.

Constructivism, obviously drawing primarily on its US IR version, is now popping up everywhere, including in the Middle East Studies: it has been referred to in analyses of terrorism or the Arab Spring by authors hailing not only from the US. Constructivism figures in a subtitle of a well-received 2017 book by Louis Gordon and Ian Oxnevad, *Middle East Politics for the New Millennium: A Constructivist Approach* (which cites out of many constructivist works only Alexander Wendt, the main US IR mainstream constructivist).

What does this “turn to constructivism” mean? Is it some metamorphosis of how we study IR? Is it a pretext simply to ignore IR? Or, has the word constructivism acquired some new meaning, or rather, has it lost any meaning to become no more than a quasi Zeitgeist, a cry for help, an expression of the helplessness of the troubled world?

**About this chapter**

The task assigned by the editor of this volume to this chapter is to address ‘the relevance to the Middle East region of the constructivist international relations theory and its potential ability to offer a useful set of tools to make sense of regional dynamics. . . . The Middle East region has attracted significant scholarly interest, but International Relations theory was rarely used as a tool to understand events, or not with much success’.

This chapter is not an attempt at a constructivist analysis of the Middle East. It is not an overview of all constructivisms. Since Nicholas Onuf first introduced constructivism into the IR discipline in 1989, many important constructivist works of different forms followed: the overview of all of them is beyond the scope of this chapter, but a good selection of them is listed in the bibliography. Left out from our concerns here, for instance, are the “norm constructivists”, with their emphasis on norms, the norms’ lifecycles, their diffusion as well as “norm entrepreneurs”, belonging more to comparative politics than to IR. So are other forms and variations of constructivism, such as realist constructivism, pragmatic constructivism, etc.

The chapter focuses on the two very different forms of constructivism, one positivist and the other nonpositivist, and how one won and the other lost. To understand what was involved, we go to the questions of ontology, epistemology, and methodology of IR. We go over the IR various divisions, its vicissitudes, but most importantly the IR philosophical underpinning, which prevent it from addressing many issues central to the Middle East. In conferences, symposia,
panel discussions on the pages of professional scholarly journals, it is acknowledged that the IR discipline is going through a crisis of relevance. The *American Review of Political Science*, for example, published an article asking whether the IR, which in the US is a subfield of Political Science, should be “dropped” as a subfield.\(^{14}\) Many contributors to the special issue of the *European Journal of International Relations*, for example, seem to agree that the IR discipline should change, should become pluralist.\(^{15}\) None of these debates, however, show any concern for the relevance of such an important region as the Middle East, much less whether religion, so important as it is, matters or not.

The chapter proceeds under several headings:

1. The international politics and foreign policy analysis split – leaving out regional studies
2. The tale of two constructivisms: Onuf and Wendt
3. An excursion to the “IR philosophy101”: how Wendt’s constructivism became the mainstream approach and what was lost
4. Towards post-secular constructivism?

For brevity’s sake, there are several illustrations allowing us to simplify an otherwise complicated argument – particularly in part 3 of this chapter (Table 3.1, 3.2, Figure 3.1 and Table 3.3) and in part 4 (Figure 3.2). At the end of the chapter, there is an Appendix showing at a glance differences between positivist and nonpositivist/constructivist positions in regard to some selected topics. All of this is presented in order not to have to reiterate arguments made many times on previous occasions.\(^{16}\)

**International politics and foreign policy analysis split – leaving out regional studies**

For a variety of reasons,\(^{17}\) the US IR discipline split since the 1950s into two parts, international politics and foreign policy analysis – a distinction which Andrea Teti refers to as a binary separation of “theoretical/universal as against empirical, particular” with a relation between them historically strained and limiting the relevance of IR theories to MES.\(^{18}\) This is a distinction between general IR theories as against regional studies, that is to say, the *systemic study of International Politics (IP)* and *Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA)*. The IR theorists draw with broad brushstrokes on their large theoretical canvas with no attention to the detail such as regional studies need to handle. With the introduction of structural realism/neorealism by Kenneth Waltz in 1979, which dominated US IR for a quarter of a century, this division has been particularly obvious. International Politics has explained the dynamics of IR from the material structure, the uneven distribution of capabilities across functionally same units, states, with the assumption that states, regions are interchangeable, and will respond in the same way to the material structure, which was the main, indeed sufficient, independent explanatory variable. FPA would handle the details.\(^{19}\)

The way the IR discipline has been set up, whomever would want to be a constructivist would want to do no more than break out of the determinism that says that states have to behave in a certain way depending on their position in the “structure”. From this perspective, the structure acts as a set of constraints on the actions of any state. That’s in a nutshell how constructivism found its way to IR.

The two most prominent constructivists whom we discuss here still think along the lines of the distinction of the International Politics vs Foreign Policy Analysis, although there are major differences between them. Both Alexander Wendt, the most popular mainstream constructivist,
and Nicholas Onuf, who introduced the term constructivism to IR, make it no secret that they are not interested in the “events”, or “data”, only in “the big picture”. Neither of them addresses in their theories any particular region or issue, no matter how important, emphasizing that their task is to “provide a big picture”.

The best-known positivist mainstream constructivist Alexander Wendt says:

My work is entirely theoretical. I treat what I know about real-world politics as a source of interesting problems for both me and my students, although I am relatively skeptical about using the “real world” as data against which to test theory. Sometimes it can be useful to test theories if it answers a specific question to which we don’t already at least implicitly know the answer, but I’m not sure we’ve learned as much about the world by testing our theories all the time, as some people seem to think. 20

And Nicholas Onuf confirms the same attitude. ‘Events’, he says, ‘have never inspired me’. And he continues,

I am not very much interested in events – either as theoretical fodder or as a matter of what’s happening in the world at any given moment. Most of my friends and colleagues are fascinated by current events – how often I find them glued to one news source or another. Students are too, and it seems pretty obvious they should be. Most people in the field engage in the skillful assembly of events, whether in ‘cases’ or as statistically manipulated patterns. Learning the appropriate skills takes a great deal of time and training. At the same time, students also need exposure to theory – big picture thinking – and, in my view, the philosophical issues that lurk behind any big picture.21

However, Onuf’s form of post-positivist constructivism did not preclude others following Onuf from trying out constructivism to any specific region or circumstances, as we will show in the following sections.

Of interest to mention here too is that the most famous US IR constructivist, Alexander Wendt, has essentially abandoned his constructivism to move on beyond it to possibly its exact opposite, quantum mechanics, so fashionable nowadays, and use it as the explanatory framework for international relations. 22 Wendt proposes that consciousness and social life – so important to constructivism – are, in fact, a macroscopic quantum mechanical phenomenon sharing with natural sciences the quantum foundations. Visionary or revolutionary as it has been referred to and may well be, a major concern will be how to do quantum social science empirically, how useful for the Middle East, for example, will be concepts such as “wave-function collapse” that initiates “temporal symmetry breaking” as experienced in “entanglement” with others?

The tale of two constructivisms: of Nicholas Onuf and Alexander Wendt

Constructivism was first introduced into the IR discipline by Nicholas Onuf in his 1989 book *World of Our Making: Rules and Rule in Social Theory and International Relations*. (Wendt’s first constructivist sortie came later, his 1992 article “Anarchy Is What States Make of It” and his main book, now regarded by his colleagues as a canonical book published in 1999, *Social Theory of International Politics.*) Around Onuf’s version of constructivism, there formed at the two neighboring universities in Miami where Onuf lived between 1994 and 2005 a “Miami Theory Group”. In an effort to simplify and make accessible Onuf’s oeuvre the Miami Theory Group
produced a number of volumes in a series called after its first volume, “International Relations in a Constructed World”. The series was praised as ‘an outstanding and comprehensive series on constructivism’. Onuf’s *World of Our Making* was not an easy read. In fact, the Miami Theory Group asked him to write a simpler piece, which he called “Constructivism: User’s Manual”, his most cited piece. *World of Our Making* is for scholars. The “User’s Manual” is for anybody – or so we thought.

Onuf’s constructivism was new, radical, and as far as IR, revolutionary: it was post-positivist, and unlike positivism it did not ignore the language and put the language in the forefront; it was non-state-centric, it focused on people, real people, not artificially created entities. It drew on hitherto-unexplored tradition in IR: philosophy of language. Philosophy of language explores the relationship between language and reality and the nature of meaning. Thus, constructivist theories of language are connected to the revolutionary idea claiming that speech is not only passively describing a given reality, but it can change the (social) reality it is describing through “speech acts”, as revolutionary a discovery as for physics was the discovery that measurement itself could change measured reality. Speech act theory was developed by J. L. Austin, although other previous thinkers have had similar ideas.

Onuf called his constructivism Rule Oriented, but some of us preferred to call it more simply linguistic constructivism, or simply taking a linguistic turn. When constructivism became of interest in IR, Onuf’s constructivism was called radical or thick – as against Wendt’s conventional or thin.

Onuf’s ideas are very infectious once one grasps them. They open a different view of the social world: not just IR but social relations since they all are part of Onuf’s grand project of social theory, of which IR is just a (very important) slice. It is completely different from the standard positivist view of the world. To begin with, in positivism language is only a passive tool “reporting”, a one-way street, not affecting that which is reported, language is not “constructing”. Teaching it and using in research was very different from the IR political science routine: there we taught the search for variables, both dependent and independent, looking for the patterns of their relations to explain, predict, and verify hypotheses. Only that counted as a theory; only that was a legitimate academic pursuit in IR.

The Miami Theory Group tried to develop Onuf’s ideas on many topics, though not on the Middle East, except for a chapter on Islam by a University of Miami PhD graduate, Nizar Messari, now the dean of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane, Morocco. Other than that, and of particular interest here, there is an unpublished doctoral dissertation of the late Xiao Feng on constructivism and the Chinese language, exploring the differences in and comparison of meaning of Chinese as a non-Indo-European language with Indo-European languages, something begging to be explored for other non-Indo-European languages also in the Middle East. There was also my own effort to explain Gorbachev’s new thinking, and the lessons from the post-communist Eastern Europe for Cuba as a case of a change of ideas, change of rules in any “regime change”. Departing well beyond what secular Onuf would undertake, I tried to explain religion in a piece called “Towards International Political Theology”.

On reflection, Onuf went too far by repeatedly arguing that IR discipline was a discipline without a subject, about nothing, and proposed to comprehend IR inside a much broader field, social theory, which could not be popular since it represented an existential threat to IR as an autonomous discipline.

In an academic popularity quest, and particularly due to the disciplinary politics, a very different form of constructivism popularized by Alexander Wendt overshadowed Onuf’s constructivism. Wendt’s constructivism became very quickly elevated to the mainstream status and
Onuf’s constructivism “vanished”. In terms of its non-state-centric cast (it is a social theory), its attention to language (it is based on the linguistic turn) and even to religion, there might be found some insights of use to the students of MES, to which we will return.

The mainstream form of constructivism is associated with the work of Alexander Wendt, most importantly his famous 1992 article, “Anarchy Is What States Make of It”, and his 1999 book, Social Theory of International Politics. The latter is a response to the reigning structural realism’s “canonical” text of Kenneth Waltz in 1979, Theory of International Politics. That it was intended as a response was made clear even in Wendt’s choice of a title for his book. He used Waltz’s title but prefixed it with the adjective “Social”, thus Social Theory of International Politics. Wendt’s book also soon became a canonical text.

Wendt’s work came with several strikingly memorable lines/catchphrases, which no PR agency could improve on. They are now on the lips of all IR graduate students, certainly in the US: ‘Anarchy is what states make of it’, ‘States are people, too’, ‘ideas, identities matter’. (Onuf’s only catchphrase might be “world of our making” and “speaking is doing” and “co-construction”).

Wendt’s lines alone would seem to convey a radical break from the standard IR approaches, in fact, their repudiation: a possibility to change anarchy? “Anarchy” (i.e., an absence of any authority above sovereign states) as an organizational principle of the system of states, which is axiomatically postulated to exist both in “the real world” and in all IR theories. “Anarchy” as a defining feature of the IR discipline separates IR from other fields of political science, thus justifying the existence of IR as a separate field; the reference to “states” as “making anarchy” would seem to upgrade states downgraded in structural realism, where they were capable of no more than uniform responses due to their position in the material structure. As noted above the study of states, their foreign policy was relegated to another field – Foreign Policy Analysis to be studied there albeit within the parameters of structural realism. There states’ “identity” was a redundant term being exogenously given from their material capability in the structure. Wendt’s lines would seem to convey a new era, a new understanding of the world, and a sharp departure from the tradition of IR discipline. The verb “make”, as in states “making”, conveys a possibility of a change lost in insistence of realist approaches on the essentially unchanging nature of international relations. No longer sounding deterministic, these soundbites convey that international relations are socially “constructed”.

The implied ability to construct conjures up a promise of a new discipline of IR. Different identities of states, presumably would ipso facto lead to different theories of IR? The constructivist approach would make up for the discipline’s neglect of ideas, and fill that void, giving a new lease on life to the IR discipline. However, Wendt’s constructivism, which now dominates the mainstream US IR to the exclusion of other forms of constructivism, has become a theory compatible with the other reigning approaches, neorealism and neoliberalism, no more than an adjunct to a neoliberal approach, the “bird of the feather”. It was no more than a much-needed makeover after neorealism and neoliberalism failed to explain the end of the Cold War.

As the leading British IR scholar Steve Smith put it,

the radical possibilities promised by social constructivism have been ‘hijacked by a mainstream’ and the dominant, now increasingly popular form of constructivism of Alexander Wendt, Peter Katzenstein, etc. have been assigned an unthreatening role of an adjunct explanation for those things that the positivist mainstream finds difficult to explain.

In order to explain Smith’s indictment, we have to make an excursion into a sort of an “introductory IR philosophy 101” to overview some ontological and epistemological issues.
What constructivism?

Only then can the process be appreciated of how constructivism became canonized. Only then a search for a different form of constructivism, which would be useful for the MES, can begin.

An excursion to the IR philosophy of 101: how Wendt’s constructivism became the mainstream approach and what was lost

To summarize what is a complicated argument involving questions of ontology and epistemology, and for brevity’s sake, we illustrate the main issues surrounding the adoption and adaptation of constructivism to the US IR graphically in several figures. The range of key omissions should become clear.

The explosive atmosphere of what is referred to as the IR Third Debate facilitated the arrival of constructivism into the discipline.31 Drawing on the work of continental philosophers such as postmodernist/poststructuralist Michel Foucault and critical sociologist Jürgen Habermas a number of IR, postmodernist, poststructuralist, and critical theorists (including Richard Ashley, James Der Derian, David Campbell, and R.O. Walker) led the “debate”. They were collectively referred to as “posties”, and the early constructivists were indiscriminately added to them since many were anti- or post-positivists too. Until the Third Debate, nobody in US IR would discuss words such as ontology and epistemology, only methodology. Ontology and epistemology were unnecessary to mention since they were assumed as given, positivist, neopositivist. To this day, emphasis on courses in IR curricula only on methodology, teaching students methods, quantitative and qualitative and exclusion of all else, is a telltale of a positivist orientation of an IR graduate program.

However, the Third Debate forced a deeper examination, not just of methodology. Until the Third Debate, there was in place a tacit injunction to “leave philosophy to philosophers”, but during the Third Debate, the can of worms of philosophical issues was burst open and not so much a debate, but a battle began. The targets, the reigning neorealists, responded with an utter shock worth quoting even today.32 On the face of it, there were many things to attack: positivism, or neopositivism, its naturalism, its conception of science, its conception of rationality. More specifically, the way Kenneth Waltz’s structural realism, aka neorealism,33 focusing only on “material” structure ignoring things “ideational”. Assailed was the rationalist assumption that the interests and identities of actors – primarily – or exclusively of states, were given, and states regarded as “interchangeable”. Thus, the role of ideas, discourse, and identities in explaining political behavior was reduced to material power. International politics was seen as essentially timeless and unchangeable – given the “nature of things”, such as human nature and the consequences of a lack of a common authority between states known as “anarchy” a result of the Peace of Westphalia in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the latter also attacked as a myth, a figment of imagination. IR was all about material structure, and the human agency was lost. Structure would determine but there were no people to do “constructing”. Last but not least, it was argued that IR as a field of studies was misconceived, other forms of studying the world should be found, critical theory, historical materialism34 or social theory.35

The Third Debate, including the early constructivists, forced a deeper examination – going into the theory/philosophy of knowledge. In order to discern differences between different positions, philosophical questions were asked. To abbreviate, we contrast what was involved in Table 3.1 and Table 3.2. Table 3.1 is nearly empty, with only methodology filled in (3A), and the rest is crossed out, empty; since these remained tacit, those questions are redundant. That’s how it always was.

Table 3.1 then becomes filled in. Table 3.2 read line-by-line from the top-down shows the change.36
Follow from the top of Table 3.2 with its now filled-in spaces. According to answers about the social world ontologically speaking, there emerged a distinction between anti-foundationalists and foundationalists, depending on whether or not those asked thought the social world was or was not dependent on our knowledge: see 1A and 1B for the answers. Epistemological issues followed from the ontological split led to the division between the rationalists on one side and the reflectivists on the other: see 2A and 2B. This distinction was institutionalized as a binary by the then ISA president R.O. Keohane in his ISA Presidential Address.37

The binary Keohane created was between rationalists and reflectivists. Rationalists (2A in Table 3.2) included realists, neorealists, liberals, neoliberals, and others, as long as they adopted the broad theoretical and ontological commitments of rational-choice theory. Reflectivism (2B in Table 3.2) referred to a range of theoretical approaches that oppose rational-choice accounts of social phenomena and, generally, positivism.

Being a reflectivist in this binary was not flattering; it consigned reflectivists to a non-mainstream status: all reflectivist approaches were, according to Keohane, lacking a “clear program that could be employed by students of world politics”, i.e., unable to formulate and verify hypotheses, via identifying dependent and independent variables etc. A reflectivist–rationalist binary became one of the central fault-lines within the IR discipline.

However, efforts were made to bring the two sides, or parts thereof, the rationalists and reflectivists, together. In “Seizing the Middle Ground”, and we draw in Table 3.2 a bridge,38 argued how constructivism can be understood in a way that builds bridges between reflectivists and rationalists, bringing one form of constructivism into the mainstream. “Scientific realism” was used to bring on par things that were not observable and those that were observable, as it is explained in Table 3.2, 2AB. Hence, 2A and 2AB became compatible.

This is, however, not the entire story. The US IR discipline became besieged on yet another front: the Soviet Union collapsed, and with it, the bipolar structure of the world mapped out in a great deal in the US IR discipline. The US IR discipline did not see it coming; when it happened, it was left grappling with the change, discovering that most of the cold war theories would not fit no matter how hard they might be stretched. In the 1980s, IR in the US was dominated by neorealism and neoliberalism, neither of which was well equipped to explain major

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**Table 3.1** Questions asked before the Third Debate and the arrival of constructivism

Before the Third Debate and the arrival of constructivism, issues of ontology, theory of being, epistemology, and a theory of knowledge were in the US IR implied, assumed, “bracketed out” as given, not discussed, not taught, in Figure 3.1 crossed out. Only methodology was taught, sharing empirical-analytical methods with natural sciences, verified with unilinear causal models and methods. Scientific knowledge was connected to direct evidence by testing against direct observations. Objectivism was assumed, and quantitative analysis was emphasized.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Ontology:</th>
<th>“a theory of being—what is”: “is there a ‘real’ social world out there that is independent of our knowledge of it?”</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Epistemology:</td>
<td>“a theory of knowledge”: what is knowable about the social world and how we know what we know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Methodology:</td>
<td>“where is my evidence”?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A Empirical-analytical methods as in natural sciences, verified with unilinear causal models and methods; scientific knowledge connected to direct evidence by testing against direct observations.

(Assumes objectivism). Emphasis on quantitative analysis.
Table 3.2 Questions asked in the Third Debate: ontology, epistemology and methodology of US IR and the answers by constructivism(s)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Ontology: “a theory of being – what is”</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social world</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The key question: “is there a ‘real’ social world out there that is independent of our knowledge of it?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1A If “yes” – foundationalists argue:</strong> There is a “real social world” – “out there” existing independently of me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1B If “no” – anti-foundationalists argue:</strong> Social world is constructed; social and natural worlds are not analogous</td>
</tr>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>2. Epistemology: “a theory of knowledge”: what is knowable about the social world and how we know what we know.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The key questions: “What we can know about the social world and how?” “Can an observer identify ‘real’ or ‘objective’ relations between social phenomena?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2A If “yes”:</strong> Rationalist-Positivists argue: through direct observation seeking causal relationships between social phenomena for explanation and prediction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2B If “no”:</strong> Reflectivists (aka Interpretivists) as against Rationalists – social phenomena are socially constructed, Rejecting the notion of a “real” world beyond our own subjectivity, for how could one observe such a world if it does not in fact exist? e.g., normative approaches, classical idealism, some list here postmodernism, post positivist constructivism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2AB If “yes, but . . .”:</strong> Scientific realists (building a “bridge” between positivists, interpretivists, or a via media – Wendt) There are some social phenomena which can be directly observed, but other relations are not directly observable – some deep social structures and social phenomena exist but can’t be directly observed; e.g., in Wendt’s constructivism, also in critical theory, in the English School, Gramsci, Marxism</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>3. Methodology: “where is my evidence”?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>3A Empirical-analytical methods as in natural sciences, verified with unilinear causal models and methods; scientific knowledge connected to direct evidence by testing against direct observations. (Assumes objectivism). Emphasis on quantitative analysis</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3AB Seeks explanation of observable phenomena, and understanding of non-observable phenomena, puts more emphasis on qualitative analysis (assumes subjectivism) uses both (assumes objectivism for observables, subjectivism for non-observables)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3B Methodology is not to devise “methods” but reconstruct the world understood as human world Seeks understanding of social phenomena, the meanings actions have for actors</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ideational world-transforming shifts that were occurring in the underlying foundations of world politics. The end of the Cold War, unpredicted and unexplained, the resurgence of religion, the end of the bipolar arrangement, and uncertainty as to what will happen next, instabilities across the planet – were something the IR discipline in its existence never before experienced. The title of an article by Professor Mearsheimer in the 1990 *Atlantic Monthly* summarized the prevailing sentiment: “Why We Will Soon Miss the Cold War”. A solution had to be found.

In Greek tragedy, *deus ex machina*, a mechanical device – a crane or a riser – would bring gods onto the stage to resolve the plot and conclude the play, a tragedy or a comedy. Constructivism became the solution. Not a crane but a Pantheon, a building, ironically originally meaning a temple “dedicated to all the gods” or to a “group of illustrious or notable persons or things”. The Pantheon complete with three pillars arrived on the scene, with its picture drawn in a 1998 article in *Foreign Policy* called “International Relations: One World, Many Theories”. In it, Princeton Professor Steve Walt declared constructivism to have ‘largely replaced Marxism as the pre-eminent radical perspective on international affairs’[sic] (Marxism deemed irrelevant, he claimed, now that the Soviet Union ceased to exist); or a “new form of idealism” or “idealism’s new clothes”. Both assessments are off the mark.

Constructivism has become the third US IR pillar, next to neorealism and neoliberalism. It is a carefully vetted form of constructivism, a sort of a compromise, a bridge, and a via media, which gave a new lease on life to the US IR, without compromising its foundation. After much theoretical haggling, building bridges, and looking for “via media” and compromises, one type of constructivism meeting the criteria in the rationalist/reflectivist binary became “canonized”, “mainstreamed”, and others “delegitimized” as a part of the “non-mainstream”.

![Figure 3.1 The three-pillar US IR pantheon](image-url)
What constructivism?

It is important to note that the Third Debate did not alter the views of the positivists, who continue to dominate many leading departments and journals, particularly in the US.

With Wendt, the kind of constructivism emphasizing norms and identity has entered the mainstream in the US. Indeed, it is very close to the neoliberal approach, as could be seen on Table 3.3 with a comparison between neoliberal and mainstream constructivist approaches to highlight the similarities and the differences as Wendt characterized them.43

What then can we make of Wendt’s famous lines ‘anarchy is what states make of it’, ‘ideas, ideologies, identities matter’, ‘ideas not all the way down’, and ‘states are people, too?’ Alexander Wendt’s constructivism is strictly state-centric. It might not stretch to the multilayered reality of the Middle East with states in the context of intertwining tribal, cultural, religious loyalties, and entities. Where in all of its cultures, civilizations, religions, nongovernment organizations, many not territorially organized, fit in a strictly state-centric scheme?

The existence of anarchy too as a territorial states-based organizing principle of humanity dating from the Christian reformation of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is challenged from many quarters – postmodernist, rule-oriented constructivist, not to mention Chinese and Muslim scholars – but Wendt strictly adheres to it, except allowing some modifications based on an intersubjective agreement basis among states: but how?

And to unpack another of Wendt’s vignettes, ‘States are people, too’, we discover that states are not real human beings, real kings, religious leaders, presidents, or prime ministers. The leap from the identity of an individual to corporal identity such as that of a state is at best difficult. To Wendt, states are abstractions of mysterious provenance, which Mika Luoma-Aho has linked to the lineage of the Christian Corpus Mysticum,44 something Wendt may not be aware of.

Perhaps most importantly, as the leading IR scholar Jack Snyder confirmed, in Wendt’s constructivism there is no place for religion.45 In an authoritative study, Jack Snyder agrees that the most likely IR approach to deal with religion, i.e., constructivism, ignores it:

Wendt does not have anything much to say about religion. Constructivist international relations theory would seem to provide friendly terrain for the role of religion in international politics because of its emphasis on ideas, norms, identity and culture. Although no single work captures constructivism’s full intellectual diversity, Alexander Wendt’s Social Theory of International Politics comes closest to being the canonical text. Neither the term religion nor any specific religions appear in the book’s index. This is not accidental. While Wendt notes that the domestic-level cultures that units bring to the international situation matter for the development of international-level culture, his main interest lies in the way units create international-level “cultures of anarchy” through their interactions. His prominent version of constructivist theory is therefore not the most religion friendly statement of this approach.46

There are other issues: in a region, which for centuries has been a theater of fierce contestations of religions and cultures and ethnicities, with languages playing an important role, Wendt’s actors “do not speak” any particular language(s), they simply do not speak at all, as Zehfuss pointed out.47

They “interact” or “signal”, in the process learning from each other’s reactions and altering their identity – to wit, the concrete example Wendt uses in his most famous article “Anarchy Is What States Make of It”. In the article, Wendt likens Reagan and Gorbachev to two hostile aliens, Alter and Ego. The aliens meet for the first time. Through a series of gestures, they determine whether the other is hostile or friendly. Each exercises an element of choice, and thus agency, in how this relationship develops. Choice is not unlimited. Alter and Ego coexist in a social relationship, and their
**Table 3.3** A summary of a comparison between mainstream constructivism and neoliberal institutionalism

Mainstream constructivism is positivist; that is, it shares the main features and requirements of a commitment to knowledge as science. It adds to this approach its own vocabulary, however. It talks, that is, of “agency”, “process”, “social structure” and most importantly “inter-subjectivity” used routinely in sociology. States – which are personified and regarded as people – agree inter-subjectively that they can override objective reality. What is agreed inter-subjectively becomes a “social fact”. The domestic politics of states are eliminated. States are depicted as quasi-persons. Thus, anything going on in the minds of real people becomes hors de combat. Language is not studied. “Agents” interact, but they do not talk. One day, therefore, they may decide that “anarchy” – the foundation stone of IR – need not exist any more. This is the implication of Wendt’s famous quote that “anarchy is what states make of it”. Since real people are not part of this form of constructivism, as one of his mainstream colleagues freely admits, it cannot handle anything to do with faith or religion in any innovative way; indeed, it cannot handle it at all.49

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Framework</th>
<th>New topics and key words</th>
<th>Ideas are</th>
<th>States' identity and interests</th>
<th>States’ rationality</th>
<th>Explanation of social change</th>
<th>Domestic politics</th>
<th>Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neoliberal institutionalism</td>
<td>Both positivist: insisting on empirical testing of propositions/hypotheses against facts</td>
<td>Independent variables but limited role, placed within rationalist framework as road maps and preferences in cost-benefit calculations</td>
<td>Rationalist-behavioral, exogenously given by the anarchical (bipolar cold war) material structure which has causal power: USSR as a superpower restricted by the cold war and has to rationally follow these external dictates in its fp, BUT some institutional modifications are possible (by &quot;new thinking&quot;)</td>
<td>Yes, maximizing interests or utility</td>
<td>Both approaches the same mechanism of functional/institutional efficiency and causal logic</td>
<td>Not studied</td>
<td>Not studied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream constructivism</td>
<td></td>
<td>Impact of ideas on objective reality not studied</td>
<td>Identity and interests are endogenous to interaction, i.e., dependent variable, i.e., not given, and therefore can be transformed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Constructivism adds: agency, process, social structure, inter-subjectivity</td>
<td>Not pure rationalist (cost-benefit calculations but reflectivist, taking ideas and understandings into account in relation to interests that influence decision-making and choice of action) Ideas regarded as capable of changing reality</td>
<td>Anarchy, cold war, structure are socially constructed by collective meanings. Thus states can transform competition into cooperation: “new thinking” could change the superpower game</td>
<td>Yes, once interests are established (through acceptance of ideas and changed identity) Consider also psychological insights</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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49 The quote is attributed to Kenneth Waltz.
choices are partially dependent on the responses of the other. The space for choice is thus regarded as “mutually constituted”. They do not speak; they signal to each other, dropping their weapons and advancing gingerly towards each other and, in the learning process, slowly changing their identities and interactively agreeing to end the Cold War. It is worth repeating that this scenario comes from Wendt’s most celebrated article “Anarchy Is What States Make of It”. In retrospect and in hindsight, it is difficult to accept that the Cold War was ended by Gorbachev and Reagan in the roles of Alter and Ego. It is even more difficult to imagine a scenario of the key figures of today’s multilayered complex Middle East acting along the lines of multiple “aliens” that Wendt imagined.

Towards post-secular constructivism?

Why go to this length only to conclude that the mainstream constructivism of the US IR does not provide any better tools than any other earlier IR theoretical approaches and that the binary, as Tetti calls it, between the particularistic/regional studies and universalist/IR theory has not closed, and IR theories continue to be of limited use?

A lengthy explanation of this simple conclusion has been nonetheless in order. IR is now a globalized discipline, and its approaches, particularly with fancy attractive soundbites spread far and wide and might mislead, may be taken at face value, ignoring what baggage they carry. Or, that they mean nothing.

Figure 3.2, which is obviously very schematic and simplistic, should be read as a culmination and a development of the two previous figures, Table 3.1 and Table 3.2, cumulatively peeling
off bit-by-bit layers to get deeper into the roots of our understanding of the world. Figure 3.2 shows the sharp contrast of the modern and the “pre-modern”, which was assumed to secularize but did not: it shows separately religions and secular theories.

The Middle East, one of the most crucial and volatile parts of the world, the complexity of which defies amateurs, presents a profound challenge to IR theory. Only the scholars of MES who can straddle the complexity of secular and post-secular can develop their form of constructivism, which would make sense of the mosaic of specific features embedded in the Middle East but nonexistent in the West, from which the US IR hails. The existing IR theories are simply not equipped to handle the region’s specific characteristics, the importance of religion, tradition, ethnicity, languages, and the complex web of power struggles embroiling the region. IR discipline has reinforced its neglect of religion and, more importantly, its inability to incorporate religion into its theories. To positivists, religion stands in sharp contrast to reason and is not to be taken seriously. Unsurprisingly, religious and secular thought starts from different ontologies – all religions share a distinction between ordinary and transcendental reality. Religious thinkers see human experience as only one (small) dimension of a multidimensional reality that is ordered by design but is not knowable to sensory perception. Creating gods is a necessary feature of the human search for identity and transcendence. A believer must follow the dictates of conscience that are beyond the realm of “rational choice”.

This chapter’s hope has been to encourage the Middle East experts to develop constructivism that is more fitting for the region. For that purpose, the chapter has “exhumed” bits and pieces of the original post-positivist linguistic constructivism (see the Appendix) – now long ago overshadowed by the US IR mainstream and buried under its rubble. Linguistic constructivism is not a theory; it is a framework and a re-reading of the world, and parts of it might be useful. It does not formulate testable hypotheses, theories which explain and predict; it offers insights. It is not state-centric; it focuses on people, their agency, the source of which can be not just material or social (Onuf) but also transcendental or immanent. Linguistic constructivism analyzes languages, speech acts, rules, co-constitution of institutions, and agents, and it can handle religion. And these might be some of the features of what could develop into post-secular constructivism.

The post-secular constructivism would not/could not be exclusively state-centric: not just because of large numbers of non-state entities, but because of the radical revival of Islam challenging the Westphalian system of states. To secular IR theory, religion eludes the territorial boundaries that are characteristic of state-centric IR. The ultimate goal of radical revivalists is the Islamization of the international political order, replacing the secular state with an Islamic system under God’s rule. Non-state groups claim authority for a people who are often not self-contained within a state, but they also look to state institutions to promote Islam. Support for Islamic movements is statist and transnational at the same time. Incorporating religion into IR theories, particularly in the US, argues Ann Tickner, has been built on ontological foundations of a system of states rather than on social relations among people, an ontology that complicates the incorporation of religion into its theories. There too, linguistic constructivism may be useful since it is primarily dealing with people.

The constructivism for the Middle East would have to be post-secular; in the Middle East, one must understand the faith to understand the region’s politics, unlike in the West where religion is greatly marginalized as a result of the Enlightenment period and the experience of the Renaissance. The mainstream constructivists are prepared to consider ideas, including religious ideas, and changing identities and state interests but – and that is crucial – subordinate them to the rational-choice theory. Religion is of concern only if it can be treated as
a “dependent variable”, “soft power”, nongovernment organization to assist in the peace process or development or can be connected to an explicitly faith-based state (as in Iran and Saudi Arabia).

In Figure 3.2, anti-foundational postmodernists/poststructuralists are marked in a box: there is nothing very religious about them. They, too, like the “modern” secular IR scholars, equally reject/ignore religion. However, the “post” critics of the mainstream have succeeded in unsettling their mainstream colleagues, challenging the IR mainstream’s insistence on the strict ‘use of evidence to adjudicate between claims’, and assigning theories which are not ‘testable’ to the ‘margin of the field’ because it is ‘impossible to evaluate their research program’.54

Tickner quotes approvingly Kubálková’s claim that it is not possible to study religion adequately in a positivist framework. Tickner, also arguing for a linguistic constructivist approach, agrees that there is a profound difference between positivist and religious understandings of the world. Indeed, positivists’ reliance on logic and the positive evidence of the senses are seeking non-religious foundations for secure knowledge. Kubálková, whom Tickner quotes, advocates the shift to an insider’s perspective in the search for knowledge. Such a perspective, characteristic of hermeneutic and post-positivist thought more generally, has religious antecedents in romanticism which originated in the late eighteenth century as a revolt against modern rationalism. Kubálková states56 that, up until 200 years ago, religions provided the dominant mode of thought, and many schools of thought, such as phenomenology and hermeneutics, have their roots in religion. The stress on identity, the inside/outside distinction, phenomenology, and hermeneutics, all characteristic of post-positivist thought, has always been central to religious thought and practice. Thus, post-positivist approaches to knowledge cumulation are likely to be better at understanding religious worldviews.

Tickner points out that theories built upon the epistemological foundations of secular rationalism are not particularly useful for understanding religious motivations or worldviews. The social sciences, which have emerged out of Enlightenment thinking, are themselves part of the secular rationalist thinking. Religious worldviews may be better understood using methodologies that are reflexive and dialogical, not those based on instrumental rationality. While linguistic constructivism has also been secular, Kubálková claims that approaching human action through linguistic constructivism – as a world created through human action and the meaning that humans give to their actions – is the methodological path by which we can incorporate religion into international relations.

The post-secular constructivism would have to be based on a linguistic turn, taking seriously religions, spoken and written, as well as secular discourses of the power politics, all of these complex layers permeating the Middle East. Apart from the insights, the constructivist ideas are to this day not without important supporters.

In her “Taking Religion Seriously”, Ann Tickner quoted earlier, for example, supports linguistic constructivism and the effort to build an “International Political Theology” of Kubálková, agreeing that the linguistic constructivism makes sense regarding understanding religion. Fabio Petito also supports a linguistic turn: if treated seriously, language opens the door of the discipline of IR to the dialogue among cultures, religions, and civilizations, which is otherwise essentially ignored in the IR discipline, blocked by the positivist treatment of language as a mere passive tool, with which the mainstream constructivist Wendt agrees. Only with language or a linguistic turn, claims Petito, is it possible for an academic reflection on the dialogue of civilizations to replace Western unilateralism, universalism, and monologue, a dialogue so important for the future of the world order.57
Tickner is paying the greatest possible compliment:

Kubáleková and Morgenthau both claim that fundamental questions about human existence cannot be answered in modern secular “scientific” terms. Both are searching for a way to understand human motivations, which, as they suggest, are not adequately explainable in instrumental rationalist terms. Both are helpfully suggestive of some ways in which we need to rethink contemporary knowledge production to better understand religious worldviews.58

The title of this chapter raises the question of what type of constructivism might help us to understand the complexity of the Middle East today. I have proposed a new form, “post-secular constructivism” to embrace a range of dimensions not common in the constructivism’s versions we have seen so far. There continues to be a worldwide “constructivist turn,” and any constructivist has to accept that – historically – constructivism meets with a great deal of resistance. Not necessarily because of inconsistencies or gaps in the argument, but because of the “justifiable suspicion that constructivism intends to undermine too large a part of the traditional view of the world.”59

The gravity of the problems of the Middle East requires that we accept the challenge and try.
Appendix 3.1
Positivism and linguistic constructivism compared: part 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The ontological status of the “world” including IR</th>
<th>Mainstream IR approaches</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The world is “out there” to be found – we “mirror” the world either as detached, objective observers,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or as people who are observed and whose behavior (devoid of meaning or intentionality) can be reified into objects. Their ideas and values are excluded or it is traced back to material factors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The ontological status of language</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language is a neutral medium, representing reality. It is studied only for its propositional content</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The objective of research</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seeking regularities in the world by establishing laws (connecting events) so that through their application the world’s events, for example, can be explained, predicted, controlled</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Linguistic Constructivism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>By the use of the verb “to construct” is conveyed that (real) people are “constructing” reality.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Constructivism maintains that construction is inseparable from the effects of that which is being constructed, i.e., social relations “construct” or co-constitute people as social beings.

The world is not “out there” to be found and stepping out of it to study the world is only provisional. The social world is made up of people (agents, which means competent participants) who in turn are themselves made. Not all of the world is social; only that part that is constructed by people.

– people as agents observing structures refers to agents acting in institutions and the consequences (intended and unintended) of their actions
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is studied</th>
<th>Mainstream IR approaches</th>
<th>Linguistic Constructivism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>What is studied</strong></td>
<td>Events, their description and explanation</td>
<td>people as agents acting in institutions (institutions refers to agents, rules and the consequences of acts) making rules, i.e., as influencing others and as making other people do something</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The status of realist assumptions</strong></td>
<td>Regarded as facts: note, these can be overridden by Wendt’s version of constructivism, which regards “social facts” as being based on inter-subjective interaction and as such as equal to facts</td>
<td>Language has its own ontological status. It is one of the universals of the human species (together with reasoning). Speech acts and deeds and the patterns they make equal rules; rules in turn make agents, that is, competent participants who wield influence and make the world. Rules are assertive, directive and commissive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(state-centrism anarchy, states’ objectives and behavior)</td>
<td>1 finding rules and to identify them as one of the three generic categories of rule, 2 identifying agents, institutions and structures 3 explaining their content, e.g., “realism”, “liberalism”, which is then studied and analyzed as the content of the three categories of rules</td>
<td>1 finding rules and to identify them as one of the three generic categories of rule, 2 identifying agents, institutions and structures 3 explaining their content, e.g., “realism”, “liberalism”, which is then studied and analyzed as the content of the three categories of rule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rules-based relations and institutions • The identification of agents/structures/rules</td>
<td>Rules-based relations and institutions • The identification of agents/structures/rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• (IR consists mainly of commissive rules, studying their interface with the rules of other states) • rules, their main categories, mixes, support for them by other rules, in consciousness and culture • the study of rules’ content</td>
<td>• (IR consists mainly of commissive rules, studying their interface with the rules of other states) • rules, their main categories, mixes, support for them by other rules, in consciousness and culture • the study of rules’ content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Regarded as the content of rules as issued by agents in order to make the world a certain way</td>
<td>Regarded as the content of rules as issued by agents in order to make the world a certain way</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 3.2
Positivism and linguistic constructivism compared: part 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>International Relations as a Discipline</th>
<th>Linguistic Constructivism (C)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>International Relations as a discipline claims that the topic of international relations is its sole focus. IR is one of the disciplines in the Western academy now fragmented into multiple disciplines each characterized by its insistence on a particular disciplinary focus. US IR has not one but there are three mainstream approaches. The singularity of the focus on IR of mainstream approaches, and on neorealism in particular, means that they can devise elegant, simple (truncated) theories of world affairs, uncomplicated by the need to add other types of relations</td>
<td>C. is a social theory that claims to deal with the most general principles on which societies, indeed humanity and not only IR, are based. C. is part of a tradition that includes Max Weber, Karl Marx, Talcott Parsons, Anthony Giddens, and scholars who predated (and/or rejected) the specialization of Western academe into more narrow academic disciplines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IR is not ignored: it is regarded as a particularly important category of social relations. So much so that it is seen as deserving a separate inquiry. International relations are at the apex of multiple social relations of great complexity. IR constitutes only one set of these relations. It is impossible to tear them out of their broader context, however. C. addresses all the issues that the IR discipline does although it always places them within a broader context</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Axioms</td>
<td>The mainstream approaches are structuralist, i.e., they emphasize the importance of structure as defined by uneven distribution of capabilities across functionally like units The state is the main actor. It is a &quot;territorially based political unit characterized by decision-making and enforcement machinery, that is legally sovereign (i.e., it does not</td>
<td>Constructivism is not structuralist. It regards agents (and rules) as being of equal importance: structure to C. is any stable pattern of rules, institutions and unintended consequences as observed by other agents (the preferred label for a structure is social arrangement) Constructivism unwraps the reified package of positivism and presents states consistently as social relations It sees sovereignty as a fiction and agents as always limited by rules that give other agents the opportunity to act. It sees states in IR a society of relatively self-contained societies constituted by different rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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41
### Notes

1 According to the eighteenth-century Italian philosopher Vico, who was regarded as the forefather of constructivism, the natural world is made by God, but the historical world is made by Man. Men make their history. Karl Marx agreed. Immanuel Kant argued that we can obtain knowledge about the world, but it will always be subjective knowledge in the sense that it is filtered through human consciousness. Max Weber emphasized that the social world (i.e., the world of human interaction) is fundamentally different from the natural world of physical phenomena. Human beings rely on “understanding” of each other’s actions and assigning “meaning” to them. To comprehend human interaction, we cannot merely describe it in the way we describe physical phenomena; we need a different kind of interpretive understanding, or *verstehen*. Max Weber concluded that ‘subjective understanding is the specific characteristic of sociological knowledge’. Emile Durkheim used a distinction between the brute and social – i.e., man-made, socially agreed upon, facts. These are just several relevant glimpses back. The term constructivism was around for a long time throughout the twentieth century, education, psychology, and sociology, before it was imported to the US IR discipline. In education, constructivism was developed into an extensive enterprise based on experiential learning. The key analyst here was Jean Piaget (1896–1980). Peter Berger’s 1966 *The Social Construction of Reality*, co-authored with Thomas Luckmann, was in 1998 declared by the International Sociological Association as the fifth-most important sociological book of the twentieth century. As the main source of his inspiration, Berger refers to Alfred Schutz using “construction” (in German *Aufbau*) in his 1932 *Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt*, literally in English “meaningful construction of the social world,” published in English as *Phenomenology of the Social World*. John Searle, as well as Ludwig Wittgenstein used construction and constructivism, albeit in a very different way. Anthony Giddens’ concept of structuration is referred to by most today’s IR, constructivists.

2 The standard usage is that International Relations (IR) is capitalized when it refers to the IR discipline (also International Studies) and in lowercase when it refers to the world events. Stanley Hoffmann referred to this distinction as the “state of the world” in contrast to the “state of the discipline”, i.e., the “world” and the “discipline”. Stanley Hoffmann, “An American Social Science: International Relations”, *Daedalus* 106, no. 3, Volume I (Summer 1977): 41–60.
What constructivism?


5 The author of this chapter bears witness to the fact that IR was not studied, recognized as anything to be studied across the then vast Soviet bloc and China: she was the first-ever student who went from the then Czechoslovak Socialist Republic to study IR in the UK. IR were comprehended in historical materialism, an epiphenomenon of more important forces, there called class, later by R.W. Cox and historical materialists in the West styled as “social forces”.

6 Australians used to regard themselves as a part of the UK contingent, eventually to become the English School (in many views a precursor of constructivism).

7 Hoffmann, “An American Social Science,”

8 Approximate figures of US, UK, Australian, and Canadian universities establishments convey the sense of the enormity of the number of the US universities and their IR faculty: 4,400 in the US, 319 in the UK, 228 in Canada, and 106 in Australia.

9 “Books at Amazon” department offers over 80 texts, and that is just those with the words “International Relations” or the “world” or “globalization” in their title. They are all in English by British, Australian, and American authors. Many IR textbooks appear in many editions. Interestingly, the preface of the second edition of one of the texts published by a leading publishing house proclaims that only after its first edition that particular textbook was adopted in courses in 35 countries. Many texts come out in many editions and with many IT enhancements and dedicated websites. Some textbooks are available online to download free of charge.


Vendulka Kubálková


19 Kubálková, “Foreign Policy.”


22 Alexander Wendt, Quantum Mind and Social Science Unifying Physical and Social Ontology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).


27 Onuf, World of Our Making; Onuf, Theory Talk #70.


[we – the neorealists] “are all card-carrying members of insidious and rather dangerous conspiracy that, like Socrates, is indoctrinating the youth (read graduate students) in false and dangerous ways of thinking . . . the Kafkaesque prosecutor . . . exposed us for the evil that it is. The heinous and common crime of these perverts of the next generation of graduate students in international relations is “neorealism”, the felony . . . one does not know whether to be bemused or downright scandalized. . . . I am not sure precisely what it is that I and my fellow defendants have actually committed . . . Unfortunately [the publisher] failed to send an English translation with the original text . . . I have no idea what it means. It is this needless jargon, this assault on the language, that gives us social scientists a bad name . . . the opacity of the prose, crimes and serious misdemeanor.

( Ibid.)

33 Kenneth Waltz, Theory of International Politics (Boston: Addison-Wesley, 1979).

What constructivism?

35 Onuf, *World of Our Making*.


39 Mearsheimer’s article opens with the following summary: “The conditions that have made for decades of peace in the West are fast disappearing, as Europe prepares to return to the multi-polar system that, between 1648 and 1945, bred one destructive conflict after another”.

40 Walt, “International Relations,” 38.


42 Wendt’s “compromise” was that neither agent nor system are preferable, but rather what he (or Anthony Giddens originally) called “structuration” is what really occurs between agent and structure. But structures shape (or even determine) agents, and these same agents shape (or even determine) structures, and so on and so on. In a moment in time, one might argue that one or the other (agent or structure) is acting as an independent variable, and the other way around, but in the end, agents and structures are not independent of each other as it regards IR, but mutually constitute each other over time. However, the line of reasoning is consistent with positivism/rationalism.

43 Sterling-Folker, “Competing Paradigms.”


45 Snyder, *Religion and International Relations Theory*.


48 Wendt, “Anarchy.”

49 Wendt, “Anarchy.”


56 Ibid., 22.

