

Sensur guidance

General guidance

The candidate should display good knowledge of the constructivist-naturalist and deductivist-inductivist dimensions. A good answer will discuss each article in depth with the respect to the dimension in question: The article by Moses places these articles in the Cartesian space (pictured below). The candidate must go beyond the brief explanation found in that article to earn at least a C. The Moses and Knutsen book (and the Moses article) remind us, however, that academic work may not fit in to categories in a neat and tidy fashion. The better answer will note evidence on both sides of a classification. The quality of the argument and the way the student draws upon the articles and relates their features to the ideal-typical formulations of constructivism and naturalism should be central to the grade. This time, I set a maximum length for the examination: 2100 words, or 1050 words per question. This should work out to about 3 pages per question. Because the page length is limited, students are expected to have time to pay attention to the composition of their answer. Finally, students were informed that proper academic style was expected in their two short essays.

The constructivist-naturalist positions are explained extensively in the Moses & Knutsen textbook. They are summarized as:

The naturalist position is:

- There exist regularities or patterns in nature that are independent of the observer (i.e., a Real World)
- These patterns can be experienced (observed), and these observations can be described objectively
- Observational or experimental statements (based on these regularities) can be tested empirically according to a falsification principle and a correspondence theory of truth
- It is possible to distinguish between value-laden and factual statements (and facts are, in principle, theoretically independent).
- The scientific project should be aimed at the general (nomothetic) at the expense of the particular (ideographic)
- Human knowledge is both singular and cumulative.

I summarized the naturalist position as:

- **Ontology** of independent particulars
- **Epistemology** which relies on an idea of accumulated *a posteriori* knowledge\* of associations or correlations  
(\*empirical, experience-based knowledge)
- A **methodology** which seeks to identify regularities in the real world

The inclusion of epistemology here as a part of naturalism and as relying “on an idea of accumulated a posteriori knowledge of associations or correlations” may be confusing. In the Moses article, the inductivist-deductivist divide is clearly labeled as the epistemology axis, with inductivism fitting best with naturalism. This does not violate the summary of naturalism above, but it is not quite the same. In addition, the Cartesian space from the Moses (given here but also displayed in the

examination) shows that there can be inductivist constructivists. None of this is a problem, but requires thought in handling the concepts.

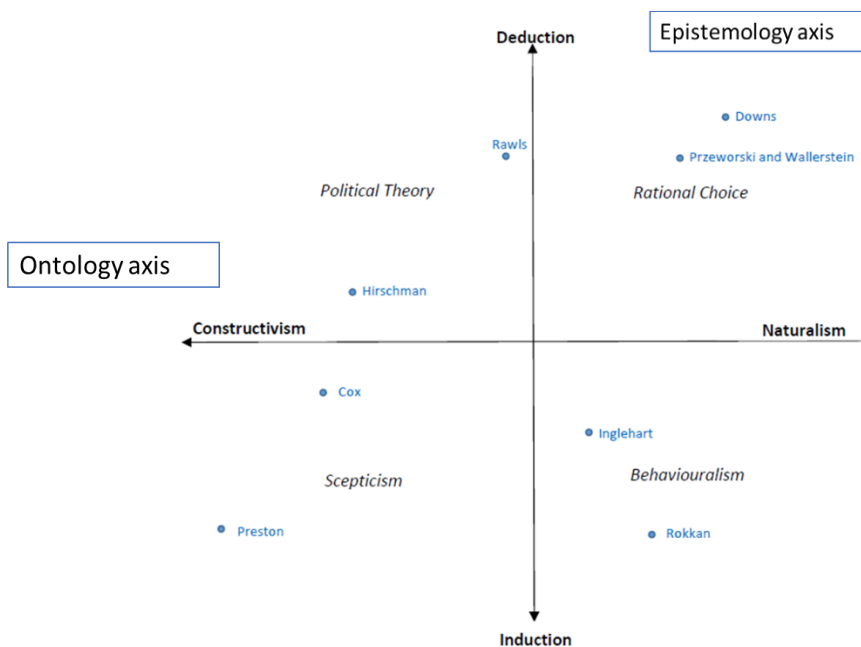
The constructivist position:

- The world we study is not singular and independent of the observer; the world includes social facts
- Observations and experience depend on the perspective of the investigator; they are not neutral and not necessarily consistent across investigators.
- Observational statements contain bias and can be understood in different ways
- Even factual statements are value-laden
- Knowledge gained by ideographic study is embraced in its own right (not as a necessary part in a larger nomothetic project)
- There is value in understanding, and there can be more than one way to understand

I summarized the constructivist position as:

- **Ontology** based on the precepts that women and men are malleable, and that each of us participates in the construction of our own world
- **Epistemology** which, in addition to sense perceptions and human reason, relies on a much broader repertoire of epistemological devices (such as empathy)
- **Methodology** which seeks to identify socially constructed patterns and regularities
  - Consider what “evidence” means from this perspective
  - Note: I asked: Are studies of mentalities, discourses, etc. *empirical*?

Figure 4: A Methodological Mapping



1. Do you agree that Rokkan is more naturalist and inductivist than is Inglehart? Explain.

The Rokkan article in question is "Geography, Religion and Social Class: Crosscutting Cleavage in Norwegian Politics, from 1967. The Inglehart article is "The Silent Revolution in Europe: Integrational Change in Post-Industrial Societies.

Inglehart starts his work with reference to a theory (related to the Maslow basic needs pyramid, and some other theory) and then collects evidence to see whether it supports his theory. In this sense, his work appears to fit very much into the box of "Science". More than any other article in the required readings, Inglehart is looking for confirmation of fairly universal rule of human behavior: that when basic needs are met, people look to satisfy other needs. In this early article, Inglehart uses a fairly unsophisticated theory, and writes about "post-bourgeois" vales. It is not until later that he uses the term "post-materialism", for which he is well-known. Students might consider whether Inglehart, in supposedly starting with a theory, edges towards the deductive position – but they might ask where that theory came from (I suggested in class that it was inspired by the Paris demonstrations of 1968). Students might consider whether in focusing on "needs" he is less "behavioralist" than he might be (since behaviorists wanted to focus more on observable behavior) but he operationalizes these needs by looking at voting patterns. In any case, Inglehart is looking to the Real World for his evidence, and this is central to the naturalist position. (note: it is true that Inglehart does not have the historical data that Rokkan does. But 1) he has a substitute (he looks for the same pattern to hold over different contexts, here 6 case studies) and 2) he is at the start of a project that will be creating a database so that later studies will have time series data.)

Rokkan has a good deal of evidence, of course. In the first half of his article he provides an explanation for the development of Norwegian politics that rather resembles a technique mentioned by M & K in connection with constructivist work: process tracing – or so I said in class. Later parts of the article look more "scientific" (naturalist) in that he uses data and basic tools such as crosstabs to look at voting patterns to check his theories but to develop additional explanations. Rokkan's work is tied loosely to big theory construction about the emergence of the Norwegian Political system and that in turn is connected to the larger "crises and sequences" school of comparative politics. On the other hand, Rokkan constantly adjusted his work on the basis of new information. Considered from the perspective of the crisis and sequences school which focused on Europe, and the fact that Rokkan's work relates specifically to Norway, a case might be made that he is not uncovering universal laws. Even so, his work remains very much grounded in empirical evidence. There is no right answer to the question – a good display of understanding of the concepts and the articles is the key. Note: It is not enough to repeat that Rokkan relies on "official statistics" and that Inglehart is relying on a questionnaire without explaining what the significance of this is. Question to consider: Are cleavages fact or social constructions?

1. Do you agree that Rawls is more Constructivist than Downs and Przeworski & Wallerstein? Explain.

The three articles in question.

Downs, Anthony (1957) "An Economic Theory of Political Action in a Democracy." *Journal of Political Economy* 65 (2):135-150;

Przeworski, Adam and Michael Wallerstein (1988) "Structural Dependence of the State on Capital." *American Political Science Review (APSR)* 82 (1): 11-29;

Rawls, John (1985) "Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical." *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 14 (3): 223-251;

None of three articles is a work is a typical example of articles that fit neatly into the constructivist-naturalist divide. The Przeworski & Wallerstein restates a Marxist theory that the state cannot act independently of the dominant capitalist class, and then uses formal theory in a rational choice framework to put this theory to the "test". Downs takes uses what he calls an economic model (also in a rational choice framework) to deduce the way voters will act in a situation of uncertainty (lack of information on the part of government and voters). In both cases, these theorists begin with a precisely defined first position of assumptions and axioms and deduce the logical outcome of individual decision makers (capitalist, workers and the government on the one hand and voters, lobbyists and parties on the other). Rawls is proposing a solution to a problem that he sees as central to liberalism: the emergence of competing and incompatible versions of the good that cannot be reconciled through political action. He seeks a practical, workable solution to this problem and argues that what are needed are institutions that create an acceptable balance between the principles of liberty and equality. These institutions can be agreed upon through a kind of game theoretical exercise in which people would deliberate on good institutions assuming that they are in the "original position" of not knowing their position in the society they create (the veil of ignorance". Rawls too posits assumptions about the capacities of his decision makers. All three score high on the "deductive" scale in the Moses, for reasons that this description should make obvious. The question, of course is why Rawls should be placed in the constructivist side of the vertical axis. This sets up a comparison of the three articles Moses argues that Downs seeks universalist solutions and that P & W are more willing to engage in empirical examples and studies. If the student agrees, s/he will have to argue for this. One could also argue that Downs introduces a real problem of a lack of information, leading to an explanation of much behavior we see today: potential voters who do not get engaged and do not vote, the rise of lobbyists, etc. P & W argue that governments that want to impose fx taxes on corporations should act decisively and quickly – and that the Social Democratic idea can work. Still – is JM correct when he says P&W engage with more empirical data? Where in the article do they do that?

But the question requires special attention to what makes Rawls different. Moses argues that Rawls seeks to avoid "claims to universal truth or claims about the essential nature and identity of persons". If the student agrees with this assessment, he or she will have to support this. On the one hand, Rawls' approach applies only to liberal democracy; on the other, one could argue that anyone placed in that situation would act the same way. Note that Rawls is using a deductive approach – it is not meant to be simply his opinion. There is room to argue this both ways.