

Ruggie, John Gerard. "What Makes the World Hang Together? Neo-utilitarianism and the Social Constructivist Challenge," in *Exploration and Contestation in the Study of World Politics*

Introduction

Traditionally, realism and idealism/liberalism have explained the world in terms of materials and ideas. Ruggie compares neoutilitarian theories to Newtonian mechanics: they do not explain where forces come from, but describe motion. Constructivism, by contrast, is about human consciousness and ideas.

The Classical Roots

Ruggie finds the roots of Constructivism in Weber and Durkheim. Durkheim discussed the role of ideational factors in social life and how ideas become socially causative, but stuck to a methodology of "revealed preferences," adhering to positivist epistemology. Weber did not stick to this methodology; for him, the task was to interpret the significance that social actors attribute to actions and shared meanings that make that attribution possible.

The Emergence of Social Constructivism

Neoutilitarianism is borrowed from microeconomics. Constructivism is much more homegrown. No label of "constructivist" was given prior to 1989, but Nicholas Onuf, Anthony Giddens, Ernst Haas, Hedley Bull (international society), John Meyer, etc. worked in the field.

Interests and Identities

Constructivism asks how constituent actors came to acquire current identities and interests. Also, constructivists stress how differences between states lead to international outcomes (*American hegemony* is different than *American hegemony*.) Also, empirical proof exists that norms have behavioral effects.

Ideational Causation

Constructivism holds that ideas can be causal; neorealists sometimes include them surreptitiously; neoliberals (Goldstein and Keohane) offer three causal pathways: "road maps," "focal points," and "insitutionalization," and three different types of ideas that use these pathways: "world views," "principled beliefs," and "causal beliefs." But they soon move back to neoutilitarianism. Constructivism holds "world views" to be of most interest, emphasizes the importance of "epistemic communities," and believes that their work is pre-rational.

Collective Intentionality

Ideas are not just held by individuals, but are held collectively (intersubjective understanding). Cf Searle. For example, sovereignty exists only by collective intentionality. Collective intentionality is also "deontic" in that it creates new rights and responsibilities. Finally, it creates meaning.

Constitutive Rules

Constitutive rules "define the set of practices that make up a particular class of consciously organized social activity – that is to say, they specify *what counts as* that activity." (p.231 emphasis original) Neoutilitarianism lacks a concept of constitutive rules.

Transformation

Neorealism is static; proponents argue that 1)the system has always been the same, or 2)the current system is pretty stable. Constructivists like to look at the historical evolution of structure at both macro and micro levels.

The Question of Agency

Actors interpret and construct reality; they don't just find the world around them, they actually make it, too. Preferences aren't fixed.

The Social Constructivist Project

"[Constructivism] addrconcerns itself with issues that neo-utilitarianism treats by assumption, discounts, ignores, or cannot apprehend..." (p.238)

Constructivism's Core Features

Human consciousness is key. Building blocks of reality are material and ideational. Ideas have normative and instrumental dimensions. They express individual and collective intentionality. Meaning and significance are not independent of time and place.

Variants of Constructivism

Ruggie divides Constructivism into three areas: neo-classical Constructivism (Katzenstein), postmodernism Constructivism (Ashley), and naturalistic Constructivism (Wendt). See Constructivism presentation. Naturalistic is differentiated from neo-classical due to its doctrine of scientific realism ("unobservables are real" – see Wendt, Ch.2)

Paradigmatic (Ir)Reconcilability

No paradigm is dominant. Neo-utilitarianism is useful in certain areas where its structure, ontology, etc. are applicable. Constructivism has a deep and broad ontology, but lacks rigor. But some constructivist studies work in "normal science"; e.g. Katzenstein volume. Ruggie thinks that working both within the frame of "science" and without it will be useful. Constructivism is a good counterpart for neoutilitarianism.