

Torsti Sirén:

National Defence University, Finland

“VERUM EST IPSUM FACTUM” – TRUE IS WHAT HAS BEEN MADE AS SUCH

Abstract

In traditional International Relations theory (IR), states have been approached from empiricist perspective by using methods and terminologies that consider states as homogeneous ‘speaking billiard balls’, which compete for power, prestige and so forth with each other. This article does not argue that traditional paradigms of IR (such as Classical Realism or Neorealism) would not count any more, vice versa, but what this article argues is that for being able to understand more deeply such topical social phenomena as terrorism, strategic communities, spread of nuclear weapons, nuclear policies, world order, NATO-enlargement, EU-integration, threat scenarios, enemy images and so forth, one has to adopt a more holistic, Constructivist social theoretical, approach than traditional IR offers. In this context Constructivism necessitates at least three things. Firstly, one has to explicitly clear out his/her ontological and epistemological points of departure for being able to operate with Constructivist social theory. In some occasions it may e.g. be necessary to deal with God’s and religions’ ontological and epistemological statuses as signifiers of interests, or as ‘root causes’ of behaviour of many social groups, communities and nations. Secondly, the state should be considered as a ‘decentred subject’ consisting of individuals, many sub-groups, organizational structure, institutions and especially identity structure, which has been purposefully constructed throughout the history (the endogenous perspective), and which is under constant reconstruction through domestic and international discursive interactions (the interactionist perspective). Thirdly, one should take into account that human communities and societies tend to habituate themselves into certain beliefs, values and modes of action that change very slowly over the course of history (the cultural perspective), despite increasing interactions

Keywords

Philosophy of science · Rationalism · Empiricism · Pragmatism · Constructivism · Realist ontology · Epistemological relativism · Habituation · Identity · International Relations theory

From beliefs to realist ontology and epistemological relativism

At first hand, saying that ‘I know’ seems simple and makes sense in a common-sense world, but actually one is dealing with a difficult issue. One may state that s/he knows that the world is 6,000 years old, since the Bible says so; another may state this is nonsense, since science has proven that the world has existed already for millions of years; and the third one may state that magicians created the world and life is only based on magic. Are these three perspectives all wrong, all correct, or does only one of them possess truth with a capital “T”? According to the classical Western philosophies, knowledge can be based on experience (empiricism), thinking (rationalism) or a shared belief that something may just be considered as true on some basis (pragmatism).

Ontology and epistemology probably can not be totally separated, since one always has some tacit interpretation or pre-/pseudo-knowledge about the world or one’s reality. It is always possible to claim that the life-experience one has unconsciously or consciously defines the way one experiences, or wants to experience the world out there. So, we may occupy e.g. religion-based (Creationism), rationalist-positivist (Darwinism) or magic-based ontological understanding of reality, which influences our epistemic ways of getting information and knowledge of the world. We may consider the world in more holistic ways, meaning that there exist many partial truths, illusions or beliefs of the reality simultaneously.

According to common-sense realism the world may be considered as a tough and bad place to live in. It follows that we can do nothing but adapt ourselves to this situation. But ideally we should change

the prevailing circumstances, if these do not meet our needs.¹ Scientifically thought (*scientific realism; seeing is believing – not knowledge*) reality may be considered as a totality that does not depend on sense perceptions of the single observer.² Thus, according to scientific realism (*realist ontology*)³, everything that we consider as a reality is based only on subjective perceptions, which are built on our cultural background, physical qualities and on our subjective sense-worlds. However, many external matters of our sensible world appears to us as impacts and then as objectively considered experiences (*intersubjective experiences*); You can not see, e.g. a state, but we all agree upon that there exist such things as states with all kinds of rules, norms and structures that do cause many kinds of impacts on our lives (e.g. you will

¹ See e.g. Hollis and Smith 2003: 11. There are some terms in social sciences that cause troubles, because they have different meanings in IR and in philosophy. The first is *Realism*, which in IR refers to school of thinking opposed to 'Idealism'. In philosophy, realism (with small *r*) means the view that "*there are truths about the past, which are distinct from all present evidence and may remain unknown to us*". Correspondingly Idealism in IR refers to normative approach that is concerned with the human will and institutional progress. This approach aroused in the aftermath of WWI and took the view that disasters, like WWI, are partly due to failures of understanding and partly due to the lack of suitable institutions to courage cooperation. Its liberal hopes of progress are based on the beliefs that human beings are good in their nature and have intersubjective ideas of peace, health and prosperity and that institutions are human constructs, and once created those even may have effects of their own on people's thoughts and actions. In philosophy idealism (with small *i*) refers to theories that, which work in terms of experience, conceived as 'ideas' in the mind. Sometimes idealism is called as ideationalism as well. There is an affinity between Idealism, idealism (ideationalism) and an interpretive approach, like there is affinity between Realism, realism and explaining (scientific approach).

² Wittgenstein 1972 [1949-51]: 25e, 37e. In "Wittgensteinian" form this can be stated as knowing is believing: "what I know, I believe", or "What we believe depends on what we learn."

³ See e.g. Geertz 2000: 111. According to Geertz, Simple acceptance of the world, its [empirical] objects and its processes as being just what they seem to be is sometimes called as naïve realism. In scientific perspective this givenness disappears through the realist ontology.

probably be punished by a fine, if you park your car on the wrong side of the street).⁴

Realist ontology means that the world is real, but relative since the real world is independent of our knowledge and perceptions (Morgan 2005, Patomäki 2005 and Bhaskar 2005). Furthermore, we may understand “the realities” of the world in many ways, but the failure to distinguish between reality and our conception of it is epistemic fallacy. Reality is structured and *layered*, which means that there are *many levels of reality* (such as emergence of life, natural life etc.) and structures are *themselves manifested differently in different times*. Reality consists of three different layers: empirical (observable by human beings), actual (existing in time and space), and real (transfactual and more enduring than our perceptions of it). Thus, social phenomena e.g. emerge from the deep underlying structures, become actual and then empirical. However, our understanding of these social phenomena happens exactly the opposite way (from empirical to actual and then to real), which makes understanding them a very difficult task (Kaboub, December 2001).

Epistemological relativism means that all beliefs and knowledge are socially constructed, contextual and fallible. Since social science cannot involve experiments in laboratories like natural sciences, information and knowledge gathered from empirical evidence is subject to more open criticism than information gained from laboratory experiments. CR tries to understand layered meanings of knowledge. We have been capable of researching new phenomena during the times when our knowledge has increased. Earlier science has lacked that capability we possess now and so forth. (Bhaskar 2005)

Creationism and magic – ‘What is, is’

Creationism can be understood as the “belief that the universe and living organisms originate from specific acts of divine creation, as

⁴ Searle 1995: 25 and Adler 1997: 327. Intersubjectivity does not assume a collective mind. Individuals have purposes and intentions, but even though each of us thinks his/her own thoughts, we may share our concepts with our “fellow-men”. It is the same phenomenon, when we are doing something together, “the individual intentionality that each person has is derived from the collective intentionality that they share.”

in the biblical account, rather than by natural processes such as evolution” (Pearsall (ed.) 2001: 430). Creationism and magic are basically about *a priori knowledge*, meaning that something is believed to be known or postulated before it has been proven. Creationism has long philosophical roots, but it was the Enlightenment era (18th century), when philosophers, sometimes very critical of the monotheistic religions began to be safe from “witch hunts” when expressing their doubts about divine existence.⁵ For example John Locke’s *An Essay concerning Human Understanding* and David Hume’s *Dialogues and Natural History of Religion* offer a very illuminating philosophical discussion of the significance of religions to mankind and of how the world can be perceived, perhaps not without God but at least agnostically.⁶

The core of Hume’s *Dialogues and Natural History of Religion* consists of discussion about the differences between *polytheism*, *theism* and *deism*. *Polytheism* as the most ancient form of divinity means the idea of total divinity of nature and human existence; e.g. sun, moon and stars are all gods according to polytheism, whereas *Theism* is the belief that only one all-mighty God exists and this God created the universe, as well as that God remains active and is present everywhere. *Deism* is more or less a philosophical view of religious belief which accepts that only one God exists and created universe, but rejects that God remains active and would be present everywhere.⁷ Hume may be considered as

⁵ Compare the Enlightenment era and our current era. Is it possible now to doubt the existence of God, or say e.g. that all the religions are pure magic? Maybe, maybe not, but in any case it depends on tolerance of the societies. Probably we have not gone so far mentally from the Enlightenment era’s religion vs. magic debate as we think in our current technology- and rationality-driven euphoria?

⁶ Locke 1979 [1689] and Hume 1993 [1779/1757]. See also Hume 1985 [1739-40] and Hume 1995 [1758]. See also Pompa (ed.) 1982: 22, 81. According to Giambattista Vico, beliefs and religions do have account in human affairs: “... nor has the world ever contained a nation of atheists, since all nations originated in some religion”. *Vico considers* religion as a necessary social bond, from which follows that only societies with religious beliefs can endure and that any society which had endured must have had religious beliefs, according to Vico.

⁷ Paden 2003: 16-17. According to Paden, in 17th and 18th-century France and England Deism was in fashion. It can be considered as a philosophy of “*half-way house between religion and science*”. Deists challenged the narrow-minded beliefs in miracles and supernatural ex-

a deist, even though in his lifetime he was kept presumably regarded as an atheist (at least an agnostic). Basically Hume did not suspect the God's existence, since "the whole frame of nature bespeaks an intelligent author...", but what makes him suspicious of religion(s) is the human mind: "The belief of invisible, intelligent power has been very generally diffused over the human race ... and two nations, and scarce any two men, have ever agreed precisely in the same sentiments".⁸

Polytheism, as a primitive origin of current religions, offered Hume a case for analyzing the human mind as "uninstructed mankind". Trying to follow Hume's thoughts, he presumably thought that in all those nations that embraced polytheism, the ideas of religion did not come up from possible divine contemplation of the works of nature, but from then unexplained events of life, such as earthquakes, sunrise, death etc. To be more explicit, the ignorant human being is afraid and confused, when facing unexplained phenomena.⁹ Fear and unexplained phenomena (*unknown causes*) had effects on the human mind, like worshipping 'God of the skies', 'God of the afterlife' etc.¹⁰ These effects were socially constructed, meaning that families, tribes and clans worshipped the same gods, gnomes and ferries; it was more or less a question of survival, based on material basic needs and intersubjective ideas about how to understand "the world around us" and how to deal with the unexplainable.

Ignorance is closely related to fear when faced with unexplained phenomena. Whenever men are ignorant of the natural causes of things and are unable to explain them even by means of similar things, they

planations, while still maintaining confidence in a higher principle of order in universe, namely God.

⁸ Hume 1993 [1779/1757]: 134. See also Kant 2007 [1781]: 584, 608.

⁹ In a way we are operating here with the problem of intuitive mind versus analytical mind. Intuitive mind is in connection with primitive thinking, religion, as well as self-preservation, and they are activated in dangerous situations. Analytical mind is in connection with constructive, learned and cultural ways of thinking.

¹⁰ Hume 1993 [1779/1757]: 138-140. According to Hume: "Each nation has its tutelary deity...The province of each god is separate from that of another and ...Today he protects: Tomorrow he abandons us". See also Hobbes 1985 [1651]: 170. According to Hobbes: "*Gods were at first created by humane Feare*" (sic).

ascribe their own nature to them, as, for example, when the ignorant human being says that the magnet loves iron. (Pompa (ed.) 1982: 171)

According to Giambattista Vico, man starts religion with some idea of materiel divinity. But this idea is false, following Vico's thinking, since it is a product of the imagination working in accordance with non-rational principles. This idea then fragments into that of plurality of gods. Finally, as the individual comes to identify her/his self-identity with mankind and thus becomes rational, he comes to believe in one god who is wholly spiritual. Vico believed that this one god is the Christian God.¹¹

Most current monotheistic religions contain two main elements (*a priori*): 1) an element of general and public information, which would be evident to anyone who looked at the world or the relevant arguments (e.g. God created the world); and 2) an element of special information in the form of revelations of the person(s) whose teaching is to be followed. But when analyzing "instructed mankind" by current monotheistic religions we easily notice that these previously mentioned two elements have something that people do not understand and have not understood properly, since: "In effect monotheism as it has commonly been found in the world has resulted in more actual human sacrifices to God – religious wars and disorders, and the killing of heretics – than ever was demanded by such few and very ancient cults as explicitly required human sacrifice". (Hume 1993 [1779/1757]: x-xxvi)

What is the difference between religion and magic then? Superficially interpreting we may say that they represent the "opposite sides of the coin". Both of them are more or less based on an ontological belief on something, but epistemologically you cannot get proof of God's existence or non-existence: "Tis an established maxim in metaphysics, That whatever the mind clearly conceives includes the idea of possible existence, or in other words, that nothing we imagine is absolutely impossible". (Hume 1985 [1739-40]: 81)

Magic beliefs are never without a certainty, but they do not bind men who believe in them like religions do. Neither do the magic beliefs unite people into the same group in the way religions do (in this context e.g. the Caribbean Voodoo cult has been considered as a religion). Ma-

¹¹ Pompa (ed.) 1982: 21, 50. According to Giambattista Vico, "Consequently our Christian religious ceremonies are the purest of all, for our beliefs about God are the holiest of all".

gicians may form a community among themselves, whereas “[A] Church is not simply a priestly brotherhood; it is a moral community made up of all the faithful, both laity and priests “. (Durkheim 1995: 42)

Religion is inseparable from the idea of a Church, even though we may have our personal relationship with something transcendental, like God. Thus, we may define our personal God by ourselves, but even then we are affected by the dogmatic attitudes of the Church and religion, under which we culturally live with. (Durkheim, 1995: 42) Religion is also an integral part of identities and cultures; without religion it is “arguable that nations and nationalism, as we know them, could never have existed”. (Hastings 2006 [1997]: 4)

My 10 year old daughter (now 13 years) stated me in 2006 that she does not believe in one God only, nor in everlasting triumph of science either. What she said she believes in, was magic. My daughter’s belief in magic represents here basically the same idea as polytheism was among the ancient tribes and clans. For being ignorant of the scientific efforts and models for understanding and/or explaining the world my daughter, as probably all children of her age, handles the unknown on the belief side. I am not saying that these beliefs are exogenously granted, on the contrary, some beliefs of our children mirror the narratives and perceptions of their parents, adopted in a primary socialization process; some of our children’s beliefs are adopted during the secondary socialization process from the external environment, meaning their comrades, media etc. The crucial point is the tolerant and holistic understanding that we may have many ‘right’ Gods in this world.

When trying to defend God’s existence as a *priori* truth, John Locke, e.g., offers very convincing defence of His/Her, or the almighty’s existence when saying:

“There is no truth more evident, than that something must be from eternity. I never yet heard of any one so unreasonable, or that could suppose so manifest a contradiction, as a time, wherein there was perfectly nothing. This being of all absurdities the greatest, to imagine that pure nothing, the perfect negation and absence of all beings, should ever produce any real existence.” (Locke 1979 [1689]: 622)

From that follows that there might be something cognitive that has existed for eternity, since scientifically it may be impossible to prove that nothing produces anything (*ex nihilo nihil fit/nothing may come from nothing*). That cognitive being we are used to calling God, Allah etc. that was capable for creating the universe, planets, human being etc. out of nothing (*ex nihilo/out of nothing*). So far so good, I can accept Locke's reasoning, even though there are natural sciences and the 'Big Bang theory' as well, which might be more convincing as an explanation for our being here on this planet and this time.

The idea of a divine creator and an almighty sovereign may be the same, or possess the same powers, even though people and nations do not call their gods in the same names. All the children are curious by their nature and wonder about the unknown or unexplainable due to the lack of education and experience. When encountering the unknown for the first time they base their conceptions of it on their senses (sensation) and fix this sensation into primitive idea(s). Thus, when seeing e.g. a rainbow for the first time children can not explain the phenomena. Church (-es) may teach, in scholastic ways, that this rainbow is a holy link between God and a human being (as understood by ancient Israelites), without mentioning that this phenomena can also be explained in scientific ways, with experiments and proof.

John Locke and David Hume explicitly expressed believing in a divine and eternal creator (God) and at the same time they expressed their agnostic suspicions towards religions. What comes to Locke's suspicions he writes in his Essay as follows:

"For, to this crying up of faith, in opposition to Reason, we may, I think, in good measure, ascribe those Absurdities, that fill almost all the Religions which possess and divide Mankind. For Men having been principled with an Opinion, that they must not consult Reason in the Things of Religion, however apparently contradictory to common Sense,..., led into so strange Opinions, and extravagant Practices in Religion, that a considerate Man cannot but stand amazed at their Follies, and judge them so far from being acceptable to the great and wise GOD, that he cannot avoid thinking them ridiculous, and offensive to a sober, good Man. So that, in effect Religion...is that wherein Men often ap-

pear most irrational, and more senseless than Beasts themselves". (Locke 1979 [1689]: 696)

In the same way as Locke, Hume strongly expressed his agnostic suspicions towards religious ontology as follows:

"If we take in our hand any volume – of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance – let us ask, Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence? No. Commit it then to the flames, for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion" (Hume 1995 [1758]: 173)¹²

A priori knowledge relates to the concept of innate ideas that we may have or may not have immediately after our birth. Children, e.g., know certainly before they can speak, the difference between the ideas of sweet and bitter, but they do not know, e.g., the difference between the numbers three and four, nor do they possess the innate idea of God, divinity, or that God is to be worshipped unless they haven't been taught to know these ideas and principles. What about concept of God itself? According to David Hume, it cannot be an innate idea or a principle, since you have to teach the content of the concept to the children.¹³ If it were an innate idea you would not have to teach it. And furthermore, why would the concept of God be an innate idea, if so many interpretations exist. Thus the 'truths' the world religions teach us must be afterwards learned and deduced from previous sensations and ideas and thus these truths are constructed realities that vary from religion to religion and nation to nation.

If human beings have some universal principle or innate a priori idea it may be a drive for happiness and security, but even these are relative principles since one's happiness and security may have been reached by reducing the security of the other (man or nation). Almost

¹²: 173. See also Nietzsche 1992 [1888]. Nietzsche's motives for "waging war" on religion, or being more precise on Christianity, was because he just wanted to shake up the habituated traditions: "If I wage war on Christianity I have a right to do so, because I have never experienced anything disagreeable or frustrating from that direction – the most serious Christians have always been well disposed towards me."

¹³ See e.g. Hume (1995 [1758]), p. 193.

all the principles like morality, law and justice, are actually more or less relative in their nature, even though we might expect them to be universal in their nature. They are socially constructed and intersubjective perceptions, and do vary like the content of religion or concept of God.¹⁴ There are no two countries that share the same codex of law, and even justice and morality are experienced in varying ways. The difficult question then is whether we should experience and define them universally and unanimously approvable? Probably so, but who or what might be the authority to do it, if we do not agree upon the existence of God, his/her goodness or badness, or even the way our existence was initiated?¹⁵

Empiricism and Rationalism – ‘What is, may not be’

The difference between rationalism and empiricism lies within epistemology, the sources and limits of our knowledge. This difference can be prescribed by three main questions: 1) What is the nature of a propositional knowledge about the world being true? 2) How can we gain knowledge?, and 3) What are the limits of our knowledge? The disagreement between rationalists and empiricists primarily concerns the second question. When seeking knowledge (*How can we gain knowledge?*), empiricism operates perhaps more on the *a posteriori* (knowledge is dependent upon sense experience) side, whereas rationalism operates on the *a priori* side (knowledge can be gained independently by sense experience through intuition and deduction).

A posteriori knowledge is based on observation (i.e. empirical knowledge), meaning that something can be said to be known after proof has been presented. Empiricism seeks to acquire knowledge

¹⁴ Or as Locke put it: “... *that doctrines, that have been derived from no better original, than the superstition of a nurse, or the authority of an old woman; may, by length of time, and consent of neighbours, grow up to the dignity of principles in religion or morality*” (Locke 1979 [1689]: 81).

¹⁵ See e.g. Paden 2003: 25. According to Paden there are always those to whom religion is simply not religious at all. Instead of promoting peace and love, it acts out divisiveness, intolerance and fanaticism. Thus, the term religion can be connected to the catastrophic crusades and holy wars past and present, conflicts that put “the will of God on one’s own side, Satan on the other”.

through senses and experience¹⁶, whereas rationalism holds a position that our senses are deficient for offering any proof of the world surrounding us. Within Western philosophical tradition empiricism and rationalism have their roots in the thoughts of Greek philosophers, like Plato and Aristotle¹⁷. Since the Enlightenment era (from the end of 17th century to the mid 18th century) representatives of empiricism (English philosophers like John Locke and David Hume) and rationalism (continental philosophers, like French René Descartes and Dutchman Benedict de Spinoza) have had ontological and epistemological debates upon e.g. the existence of God and the ways we can receive knowledge overall.

Empiricism – knowledge through experience

Empiricism may be understood as “a theory that all knowledge is derived from sense-experience”. (Pearsall, 2001: 604) Empiricism developed in the 17th and 18th centuries particularly through the works of John Locke and David Hume. According to Locke, all our knowledge and reason are based on sensation, ideas, reflection, comparison and experiences starting from childhood. You only have to “Follow a Child from its Birth, and observe the alterations that time makes, and you shall find, as the Mind by the Senses comes more and more to be furnished with Ideas, it comes to be more and more awake; thinks more, the more it has matter to think on”. (Locke 1979 [1689]: 117)

Both, Locke and Hume, focused on the human senses, ideas and habits of the mind when seeking understanding of our existence. Both of them were empiricists, but it was Thomas Hobbes who dealt with a philosophy of the mind, cognition and empiricist principles even earlier than Locke and Hume. Basically Hobbes is known for his conception of anarchy: “For they that are discontented under Monarchy, call it Tyranny; and they that are displeased with Aristocracy, called it Oligarchy: So also, they which find themselves grieved under Democracy,

¹⁶ Kant 2007 [1781]: 127. According to Kant: “Nevertheless it [experience] is far from the only field to which our understanding can be restricted. It tells us, to be sure, what is, but never that it must necessarily be thus and not otherwise.”

¹⁷ Pompa 1982: 81. According to Aristotle there is nothing in the intellect, which was not previously in the senses.

call it Anarchy...". (Hobbes 1985 [1651]: 240) Hobbes's empiricism rests on senses and doubt as a basic origin of our knowledge: "No Discourse whatsoever, can End in absolute knowledge of Fact, it is originally, Sense; and ever after, Memory. And ... No man can know by Discourse, that this, or that, is, has been, or will be; which is to know absolutely". (Hobbes 1985 [1651]: 131)

What separates Hobbes from Locke and Hume is that Hobbes did not focus on the philosophy of the mind as Locke and Hume did, and it was Locke that initiated the systematic tracing of our ideas to their empirical origins (from external experience (*sensation*) to internal experience (*reflection*)). Hume continued "on tracking the mysteries of mind" in the way Locke did more than half a century earlier. Both, Locke and Hume, were agnostics, but probably not atheists. Both of them stressed the need for tolerance (i.e. religious freedom) and possessed a tone of liberal values in their texts. That was possible only (perhaps) because all of them, Hobbes as well, were Englishmen and England was converted to protestant faith by the year 1603.

According to Locke, sensations are the first stage on the road towards knowledge. All the simple ideas e.g. light is white, sky is blue, ice is cold and hard etc. are based on sounds, tastes, smells as well as all kinds of visible and tangible sensations (Locke 1979 [1689]: 525-538). Hume shared Locke's view, but added that sensations, passions and emotions belong to the same category, namely to the category of impressions operating on the feeling side, whereas ideas operate on the thinking side and can be defined as "faint images of impressions in thinking and reasoning" (Hume 1985 [1739-40]: 49). When we combine several simple ideas into one, we compound complex ideas in our mind. All our simple ideas in their first appearance are derived from simple impressions, which are the causes of our ideas, meaning e.g. that "we cannot form to ourselves a just idea of the taste of a pineapple, without having actually tasted it" (Hume 1985 [1739-40]: 52-53). Complex ideas like beauty, gratitude, an army, the universe or e.g. national identity are complex ideas, named as such by history and consisting of many simple ideas; e.g. an army consists of weapons, men, transportation vehicles, command and control devices etc. The more complex ideas we have constructed, the more relative is the real essence, or meaning of that complex idea. For example the ideas like statehood, national identity, defence identity, world order etc. do have

many meanings varying from man to man and nation to nation. We are culturally habituated to act and think according to only certain meaning of the above mentioned ideas. (Locke 1979 [1689]: 525-538)

However, knowledge is not the same thing as truth. Whereas we may agree upon knowing something by sharing the same views on a certain subject, after mutual agreement, e.g. the sun will rise tomorrow, which seems to be true, based on our experience of previous sunrises, but there is still a hypothetical possibility that the sun will not rise tomorrow. In this case the daily sunrise is only habitual knowledge, based on our memory of earlier sunrises. (Locke 1979 [1689]: 525-538) There can be no absolute certainty at least in social sciences, perhaps not even in natural sciences; “*What is, may not be*” (Hume 1985 [1739-40]: 281-282). Proofs are those arguments, which are totally free from doubt and uncertainty. Probability is still attended with uncertainty. The above mentioned example of the sun rising is a good test case for these statements. Even though we do not know that the sun will rise tomorrow, it will be ridiculous to say that it is possible only. (Hume 1985 [1739-40]: 20)

Rationalism – knowledge through reason and doubt

That in order to examine into the truth, it is necessary once in one's life to doubt of all things, so far as this is possible”. (Descartes 1997b [1644]: 277)

In its broadest sense, “rationalism means the commitment to reason, the willingness to follow the use of the reasoning mind wherever it might lead”. (Pettman 2000: 4-9) In its common sense meaning, rationalism may be understood also as “a theory or practice of guiding one's actions and opinions solely by what seems reasonable” (Webster's New Encyclopedic Dictionary 1994: 841) and in philosophy as “a theory that reason rather than experience is the foundation of certainty in knowledge”. (Pearsall (ed.) 2001: 1539)

Rationalism, as a continental counterpart to British-origin empiricism, seems to hold that reason has precedence over the other sources of knowledge, meaning senses and experience. Rationalism holds also that reason is capable of describing and explaining social realities as natural ones, meaning then that scientific methods (positivism) can be

applied to human beings and nature alike.¹⁸ The intuition/deduction thesis of rationalism claims that we can know some propositions by intuition and deduction, because we have thinking substance of mind or rational soul especially created by God: “The fact that mind is in truth nothing other than a substance, or an entity really distinct from the body, in actuality separable from it, and capable of existing apart and independently, is revealed to us in Holy Scripture, in many places”. (Descartes 1997b [1644]: 339) Empiricists, like Locke and Hume, seemed to approve this thesis, at least what comes to our intuition of God’s or some eternal’s existence.

Rationalists, like Descartes, shared the view that there is nothing in the world that is certain, and that all the things a human being sees are false, but arithmetic and mathematics were considered more or less as ‘truths’ (Descartes 1997a [1641]: 139):

“[A]ll the sciences known as yet, arithmetic and geometry alone are free from any taint or falsity or uncertainty. We must further observe that while our inferences from experience are frequently fallacious, deduction, or the pure illation of one thing from another... cannot be erroneous when performed by an understanding that is in the least degree rational”. (Descartes 1997c [1684]: 6-7)

In Cartesian mechanic rationalism the main issue is doubt. Everything is and should be doubted, even the existence of God, if one wishes to increase the general level of knowledge: “I have no reason to believe that there is a God who is a deceiver, and as I have not yet satisfied myself that there is a God at all, the reason for doubt which depends on this opinion alone is very slight, and so to speak metaphysical”. (Descartes 1997a [1641]: 149)

The Cartesian method of doubt may be prescribed as the use of reason that has the power of forming a good judgement and distinguishing the true from the false. This reason, or good sense, or doubt is by

¹⁸ Adler 1997: 348. Positivism is about 1) “commitment to a unified view of science, and the adoption of natural scientific methodologies to explain the social world”, 2) “the view that there is a distinction between facts and values”, and 3) “a powerful belief in the existence of regularities in the social as well as the natural world.”

nature equal in all men. Descartes explicitly emphasized that he is not going to teach this method of doubt, but only showing how he has used his reason. He questions systemically all preconceived views open to the smallest doubt, until he encounters an absolute certainty: “*Cogito ergo sum*” – “I am thinking, therefore I exist”, which is the first principle of the Cartesian philosophy. However, this does not mean that thinking would prove our existence, but only that we are conscious¹⁹ of our possible existence by being able to doubt it: “That we cannot doubt our existence without existing while we doubt; and this is the first knowledge that we obtain when we philosophise in an orderly way”. (Descartes 1997b [1644]: 279)

The problem with the rationalism is that it makes us extracted from the empirical world and thus from our societies. It does not matter, if one pulls him-/herself or is pushed away too far from one’s society; only his/her connections to his/her society will break. One is then not part of his/her society anymore, but floating free in some asocial realm. (Pettman 2000: 4-9, 89) What if everyone is thought to be rational in Cartesian way, and rational only? There might be no societies at all anymore.

Later philosophers, like Giambattista Vico rejected Cartesian *Cogito* on the ground that, although there can be no better evidence for one’s own existence than one’s consciousness of thinking, simple consciousness is not knowledge. Thought is a sign, but not a cause, of existence; therefore certainty about our thoughts does not provide knowledge. Man can doubt whether s/he feels or is alive or even whether s/he exists, but it is impossible from this consciousness to deduce with certainty that s/he exists. The least certain area of knowledge is human affairs, and the most certain area of human affairs is the history. Vico discovered that, at a certain level, changes in human affairs are governed by causes within human nature, which are so conditioned by their historical and social context that there can, however, be a science in them. (Pompa (ed.) 1982: 8-9)

¹⁹ Gadamer 2004: 61. According to Gadamer “Cartesian characterization of consciousness as self-consciousness continued to provide the background for all of modern thought...the most certain of all facts, that I know myself, became the standard for everything that could meet the requirements of scientific knowledge in the thought of the modern period”.

The Cartesian method of doubt includes several levels. The first level of doubt, casts doubt on the senses, because they sometimes deceive us. The next level is the dreaming argument, meaning that sometimes you do see the ‘truth’ in your dreams. Thus, can we even be sure that we are awake, when we feel so? But this kind of doubt does not cover geometrical or mathematical knowledge, since two plus three equals five whether you are asleep or awake²⁰. The final stage of the Cartesian method of doubt considers the existence or non-existence of the physical world. According to Descartes there is the possibility that some omnipotent deceiver (not God, since God is not a deceiver, but a *a priori* creator) is employing all his energies in order to deceive a man; the sky, the earth, shapes and colours might as well be delusions or dreams this omnipotent has devised to confuse a human being’s judgements. (Chávez-Arviso 1997: xvi)

How can we then know (epistemology), if everything is to be doubted, or claim that everything that might be false is to be assumed to be false? According to Descartes, we should hope to find at least one truthful claim, however slight, that is certain and unshakeable, in order to build on it a comprehensive system of knowledge. This relates to the famous “Cogito-thesis”. Even if there was a deceiving supreme power that might deliberately and constantly deceive us, our capability to doubt (think) is a truth claim that was enough for Descartes to build a comprehensive system of knowledge. (Chávez-Arviso 1997: xviii) However, at the practical level Descartes accepted that, until such times as the truth had been fully revealed by the application of his method, we had no alternative but to act in accordance with judgements of probability. (Descartes 2006 [1637]: 23)

It seems that in accordance with empiricists, even rationalists, like Descartes, had implicit mission to doubt the existence of God as *a priori* truth, but due to their Catholic environment they explicitly tried to prove all the truth to be from God. But Spinoza was the philosopher who even rejected any idea of humanity’s special election and of its privileged dominance in the universe. (Spinoza 1996 [1677]: xvi)

Spinoza identified God with nature and he denied the possibility of an Act of Creation. Spinoza attempted to portray God and nature, body and soul, as one. In a way he was on the same lines as Descartes,

²⁰ This is why arithmetic and mathematics were experienced as “truths” among the rationalists.

who considered body and soul as separate substances, but at the same time closely joined together.²¹ But Spinoza differs from Descartes when saying that human beings do not have supernatural souls and their processes of thought are inseparably linked to bodily processes. (Spinoza 1996 [1677]: xii) This is actually a form of materialism and thus we may postulate that even our mind is a material thing.²²

According to Spinoza, a two-sided human being (thought and bodily extension) is comparatively free, so far as we are dealing with the freedom of thought, but at the same time not free, as far as we are conceiving ourselves as organisms responding to physical forces in the environment. Relating to human beings' freedom of thought, Spinoza postulated that belief could not be enforced on us, and the state's major and only function is to be responsible for the protection/maintaining of public order. The majority of citizens, ignorant of philosophy, will always be restrained by the imagination of divine rewards and punishments rather than by a perception of rational self-interest. It is a principle of statecraft, then, not to weaken the superstitious beliefs of established religions when religious scepticism is likely to lead to disorder and violence. A rational morality is likely at all times to be the possession of a minority, of those who have the habit of reflection and of self-consciousness from their thoughtless passions. However, Spinoza did not follow the Stoics in arguing that the wise person is free of emotions. The path to wisdom and happiness is the enjoyment of intellectual activity and resides in the pleasure taken in the deployment of physical and mental powers.²³

²¹ Descartes 1997a [1641]: 133: "... the mind of man is really distinct from the body, and at the same time that the two are so closely joined together that they form, so to speak, a single thing."

²² Chávez-Arviso (1997) p. xviii. According to Descartes human beings are made of the union of two incommensurable substances: thinking substance (*res cogitans*) and corporeal substance or body (*res extensa*). He postulates that rational soul must be specially created by God. This immaterial thinking part of us is not something, which is derivable from our body (brain).

²³ Spinoza 1996 [1677]: xiv-xv, 108. According to Spinoza (p. 108): "... *sadness follows absolutely all those acts which from custom are called wrong, and joy, those which are called right. For from what has been said above we easily understand that this depends chiefly on education*".

According to Spinoza there are three levels or “kinds of knowledge”. The first “kind of knowledge” is opinion or imagination: “*from signs, for example, from the fact that, having heard or read certain words, we recollect things, and form certain ideas of them...*”. The second “kind of knowledge” consists of reason: “*... from the fact that we have common notions and adequate ideas of the properties of things*”. The third “kind of knowledge” is intuitive knowledge: “*... this kind of knowledge proceeds from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to the adequate knowledge of the essence of things*”. (Spinoza 1996 [1677]: 57)

All in all, there might not be so wide differences between empiricism and rationalism. It could be argued that all the possible knowledge can be deductively derived by reason. But it means that even the rationalists have to have that initial or innate knowledge on which they base all the other efforts in reasoning the rest of all other possible knowledge. How to get this initial knowledge is thus the crucial question. René Descartes solved this problem by noting that if one can think (doubt) he definitely has to exist (*cogito ergo sum*). In this perspective Descartes is dealing with ontology, but epistemology also, since if a human being can think (and doubt) and thus judge his/her very existence by mere reason, s/he could possibly reason all the other possible knowledge also. It seems at the first glimpse that Lockean and Humean empiricism would offer a more mature solution, but actually it may be vice versa, since our senses can provide only images, not certain knowledge. In this respect Descartes criticized scholastic philosophers (not only scholastic empiricists, but all scholastic philosophers) by stating that “[E]ven scholastic philosophers hold as a maxim that there is nothing in the intellect which has not previously been in the senses, in which, however, it is certain that the ideas of God and the soul have never been”, and continues: “For after all, whether we are awake or asleep, we ought never to let ourselves be convinced except on the evidence of our reason ... For although we see the sun very clearly, we should not on that account judge that it is only as large as we see it...”.²⁴

²⁴ Descartes 2006 [1637]: 32. Discourse was originally published in 1637 as “A Discourse on the Method of Correctly Conducting One’s Reason and Seeking Truth in the Sciences”.

Empiricists hold the same epistemological suspicions vis-à-vis our sense-perceptions as rationalists do, even though the senses were considered as a primary source of our knowledge. When we examine from farther distance e.g. a drawn straight line, it appears to our sight as a straight line, but the closer our eyes are to it the clearer it seems that this line is anything but straight:

“We clearly perceive, that we are not possessed of any instrument or art of measuring, which can secure us from all error and uncertainty. We may apply the same reasoning to curve and right lines. Nothing is more apparent to the senses, than the distinction between a curve and a right line”. (Hume 1985 [1739-40]: 96-99)

Pragmatism and social ontology – ‘What is, may only be because we have agreed upon so’

“Be a philosopher, but amidst all your philosophy, be still a man”.
(Hume 1995 [1758]: 18)

Pragmatism as a term is derived from the Greek word *pragma*, meaning action, from which our words ‘practice’ and ‘practical’ come from. According to empiricists, like David Hume, we should remember as human beings that there exists at least two realities in human life: academic and practical one. This leads us to the common sense pragmatism, which may basically be understood as “[A] practical approach to problems and affairs” (Webster’s New Encyclopedic Dictionary 1994: 791), or as “a pragmatic attitude or policy”. (Pearsall (ed.) 2001: 1456) In philosophy the content of pragmatism may be understood as “[A] doctrine holding that the meaning of an idea is to be sought in its practical bearings, that the function of thought is to guide action, and that truth is to be tested by the practical consequences of belief” (Webster’s New Encyclopedic Dictionary 1994: 791), or as “[A]n approach that assesses the truth of meaning of theories or beliefs in terms of success of their practical application” (Pearsall (ed.), 2001: 1456).

Pragmatism could also be understood as a method only, by “settling metaphysical disputes that otherwise might be interminable”. Thus it may be understood as ‘a civilized common-sense thinking’ as well. Pragmatism is not interested (mainly) in the origin of knowledge, but it is interested in constructing and developing our “knowledge” further. Pragmatism does not consider the origin of the “facts” so important as their logic or consistency.²⁵ The underlying ontology of pragmatism is scientific realism (realist ontology), meaning that the real, truth and knowledge are independent of what anybody may think them to be. (Buchler (ed.) 1955: ix-xii) According to Charles Sanders Peirce this is a “fundamental hypothesis” of science: “[I]t is stated that we understand precisely the effect of force, but what force itself is we do not understand!” (Peirce 1955: 35).

Empiricism, rationalism and pragmatism are probably epistemologically closer to each others than we usually think. Even rationalists, like Descartes, as well as Spinoza, admitted that it is not possible to gain all the knowledge through the use of reason alone in the practices of human being. And furthermore, the habits and customs of human beings and societies may be much more important in social sciences than ontological and epistemological debates over knowledge: “We are much more swayed by custom and example than any certain knowledge”.²⁶

According to Giambattista Vico this world of ours has been made by men (*verum – factum* –theory). There are no ultimate truths available for us, only partial or relative ones, and even those are more or less culturally and historically constructed: “*Verum est ipsum factum*” (True is what has been made as such). And because there is no ultimate truths to be found (except God, according to most pre-19th century phi-

²⁵ Peirce 1955: p. 35. Pragmatism was first introduced into philosophy by Charles Sanders Peirce in 1878, by the article: “*How to make Our Ideas Clear*” pointing out that our beliefs are really rules for action.

²⁶ Descartes 2006 [1637]: 16. See also Hume, 1985 [1739-40]: 231. We do not know an ultimate truths, but only probable truths; our knowledge increases all the time anyhow. According to Hume: “*There is no Algebraist nor Mathematician so expert in his science, as to place entire confidence in any truth immediately upon his discovery of it, or regard it as any thing, but a mere probability. Every time he runs over his proofs, his confidence encreases*” (sic).

losophers) science's mode must be rediscovered within the modification of our own mind ("New Science").²⁷

Those who seek knowledge try, at least implicitly, to trace a single cause to explain many effects (positivism), but those who seek practical wisdom try to trace as many causes as possible for a single effect, in order to reach the truth by induction. And according to Vico, knowledge is directed towards the highest truths, practical wisdom towards the lowest. This represents actually the paradox of the whole Western (political) philosophy: we try to seek truth(s), but the truth should be universal and eternal. When we notice that nature contains nothing, which is stable, we have to admit that only the particular truths are accessible to us and even these become false with the passing of time (relativism). (Pompa (ed.) 1982: 42)

That is not to say that there is something new in the pragmatic philosophical attitude, but it harmonizes previous philosophic traditions, like empiricism and rationalism. Pragmatism may be considered also as common-sense thinking that tries to settle down the metaphysical disputes that otherwise might be interminable:

"Is the world one or many? – fated or free? – material or spiritual? – here are the notions either of which may or may not hold good of the world; and disputes over such notions are unending. The pragmatic method in such cases is to try to interpret each notion by tracing its respective practical consequences. What difference would it practically make to any one if this notion rather than that notion were true? If no practical difference whatever can be traced, then the alternatives mean practically the same thing, and all dispute is idle. Whenever a dispute is serious, we ought to be able to show some practical difference that must follow from one side or the other's being right". (James 2007 [1904])

The first step of Cartesian rationalism was to permit scepticism (theoretically) and to discard the common practice of looking to some authority (like churches) as the ultimate source of truth. More natural

²⁷ Pompa (ed.) 1982: 206. *Scienza Nuova* (New Science) was Vico's main publication, published originally in 1730 and in 1744 (revised edition).

source of true principles was to be founded in the human mind. Self-consciousness was to furnish us with our fundamental truths, and to decide what was agreeable to reason. But since all the ideas are not true, Cartesian introspection could not pass over the distinction between a seemingly clear truth and an idea that really is true. The mind can only transform knowledge, but never originate it, unless it is fed with “facts” of empirical observation. (Peirce 1955: 24)

According to pragmatists, like Peirce, the sole motive, idea, and function of our thoughts are to produce beliefs. But these beliefs have to be consistent or logical, since beliefs establish a rule for our actions. The essence of beliefs is the establishment of a habit, meaning that we think and act according to our habituated beliefs. If these beliefs do not satisfy us, e.g. in the situations that we do not consider them as logical anymore, we are irritated by doubt, which is then the motive for further thinking. Thought relaxes and comes to rest when a new, amalgamated, belief is reached. In short, Peirce seemed to say that we should consider our reality ontologically in more holistic ways than we mostly do, since our reality is based on many colliding beliefs that are cultural constructions and experiences of “truths” and “true knowledge”. Truth and true knowledge is probably never to be reached, but we may close to them slowly during the future. (Peirce 1955: 28-29)

Our beliefs have to be logical for initiating any action. Peircean pragmatism tries to offer a logical technique for the clarification of our ideas. According to Peirce, as far as thought is cognitive it must be linguistic or symbolical in character, meaning that thought must presuppose communication. Communication takes place by means of signs and thought is a web of continuously related signs. Thus, Peirce dealt and understood the concept of logic as semiotic, which may penetrate e.g. to the standards, presuppositions and ideas of ours that do not necessarily refer to any real, but are more or less habitual thinking only. This habit-acquiring tendency of ideas or feelings do then spread among us and become increasingly general (shared or intersubjective ideas).²⁸

Critics of pragmatism can be found, of course. For positivists, like Emile Durkheim, pragmatism offered a normative and idealistic

²⁸ Buchler (ed.) 1955: ix-xiv. These ideas belongs to the social constructivism as well, regardless whether we understand it as a philosophy or social scientific paradigm.

tool to change the world. But it is difficult to consider pragmatism as a normative tool to change the world. Rather, pragmatism may be considered as a 'via media' between traditional Western philosophies (empiricism and rationalism) and social theories like Constructivism and Critical Realism (CR) by introducing social ontology into philosophy of science and IR. Even constructivism, if understood as philosophy (i.e. the reason why it is not written here with capital 'C'), does not include normative elements, but interpretive only. Critical realism, if understood as a philosophy, includes normative element by proclaiming emancipation. This means that, as the social world is a human construct, and if we agree that the world is a bad place to live in, we should change it by human efforts. But as the focus of this article is not normativity, but deeper understanding and interpretation, I will not continue this philosophical journey along with critical realist philosophy of science.

Durkheim continued his criticism of pragmatism by arguing it for being too utilitarian in its nature. This means that there can be no moral constraints in pragmatism if everything that has been evaluated as valuable and useful would be accepted. Thus, if everything would be useful in relation to certain ends, then even the worst things would be useful from a certain point of view. According to Durkheim, pragmatists also believe that we make truths in conformity with our needs, but at the same time they approve that there is nevertheless a prime matter (truth), which we have not created. This prime matter is only an ideal limit, which we never reach, although we always tend towards it. For pragmatists it is wiser then, Durkheim criticized, to ignore the absolute truth, since it is rather an obstacle to a more adequate knowledge of realities which are accessible and more useful to us. But since everything can not be true and useful, choice has to be made, but on what basis? Only on personal experience? If something causes us more satisfaction than discomfort, we can say that it is useful, but the experience of other people can be different. (Durkheim 1983)

Durkheim's critic on pragmatism is valid, but since we probably have to admit that impersonal truth is not accessible we have to live on some ontological and epistemological basis anyhow. Everyone, in fact, has an interest in acting in concert with his fellows, if s/he does not feels her-/himself to be stronger and more useful. This usefulness of

joint action implies shared intersubjective views, judgements and ideas that comprise the core basis for every social group, even for nations.

Philosophical synthesis

Most of the time we are ‘common sense animals’, religious, agnostics or secular in our nature and habituated to think and act in a certain ways that is defined by the culture and social environment we live in. We do not have to be philosophers at all, or all the time, but it may be useful for all of us to notice at least that the very essences of our ‘truths’ and ‘knowledge’, are actually based on socially constructed ideas, or beliefs of the world around us. A secular world view is not the only way to ‘truth’, but neither is a religious one. No proofs of God’s existence have been accepted, but God is still the main signifier of social reality in many cultures. From this perspective pragmatism is more of a mature philosophy than a bit of anti-theological empiricism and a bit of religious rationalism.

During the research processes, we make subjective choices all the time; some phenomena are always more significant for us than others based on our metaphysical beliefs. We also create our own reality by our words, narratives and actions, but eventually they may start to rule our world, behaviour and actions. Political and social constructions as well as the concept of world order are subjective experiences. Thus, we are habituated towards certain kind of actions, opinions, ways for thinking, doing etc.

Some elements have to be objective experiences anyhow, like in the physical world, where things can be measured and where quantifications are possible. John Searle has tried to find avenues for our possibilities to construct an objective social reality in a real world that is independent of our thoughts and talk. (Searle 1995: xii-xiii) Searle refers to the correspondence conception of ‘truth’, meaning that in some extent we make the world that exist independently of our thoughts and speech, but which we make true by our language; we speak it ‘out from there’ as being then socially constructed and culturally shared understandings. That is what pragmatism is trying to express as well. Not saying anyhow, that anything would go in pragmatism’s ultimate utilitarian form, but saying that social ontology is culturally constructed and shared understanding about ‘real world’.

Thus, there are things that exist only because we believe them to exist (e.g. money, governments, property, marriage, identity etc.); we have agreed them to exist. These conventions may be kept as ‘objective’ facts, since it is not in our hands as individuals to decide whether about these ‘institutional facts’ do exist or not, they do exist, but their content and meaning is culture dependent. Institutional facts require human institutions for their existence, whereas brute facts do not need human institutions for their existence (e.g. a rock is a rock, no matter if we claim it does not exist). However, brute facts require an institution of language so that we can state the facts, but brute facts themselves exist independently of the language.²⁹

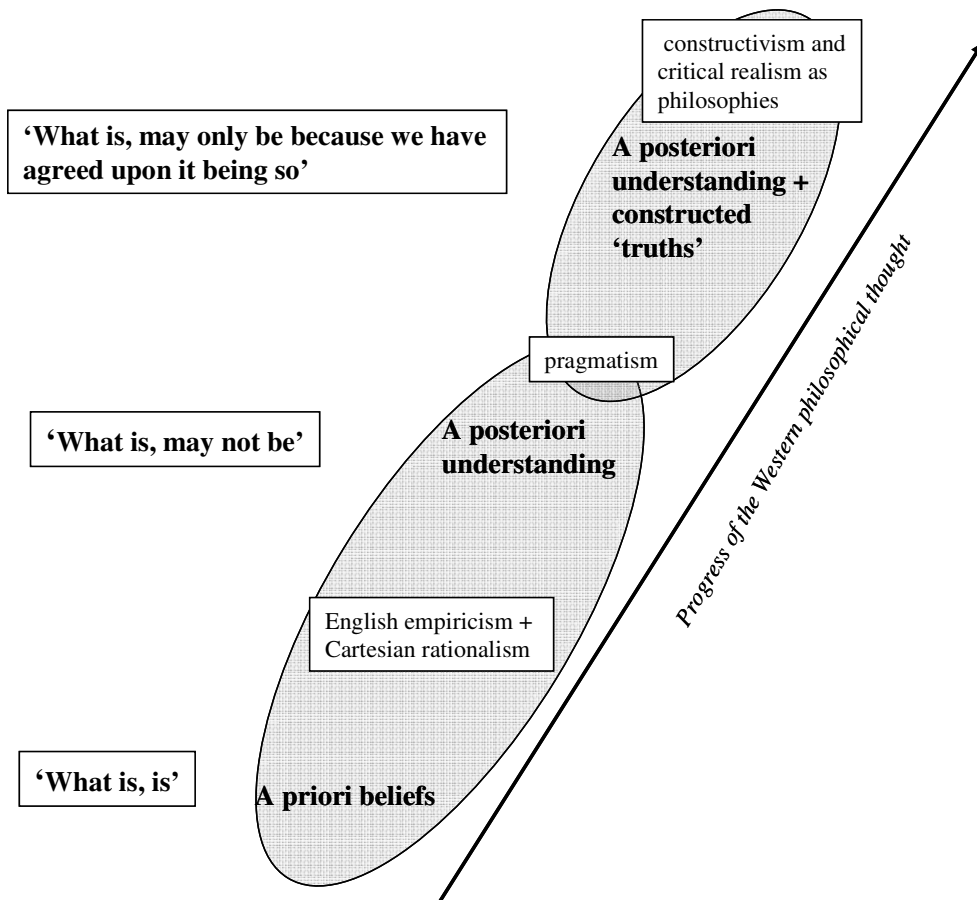


Figure 1: Progress of the Western philosophical thought

²⁹ Searle 1995: 1-2, 27. See also Ruggie 1998: 856.

Thus, if it is not possible to find objective elements in political and social constructions, like a world order, some elements may be considered as objective conventions anyhow, as shared and objective factors for everybody. Identity, states, societies and world order can be considered as such conventions; they are there, even if we did not see them. They can be considered as variables also, upon which some other variables do effect constantly. Those variables may be internal variables of the states (pressure groups, religion, political parties, influential individuals etc.) as well as external variables of the states, such as international organizations, global enterprises and overall global trends (e.g. ‘unipolar moment’ of American hegemony).

As a philosophical conclusion it may be said that there is no absolute truths (*what is, is*) out there; we, human beings, do perceive, judge and reason what we sense around us, but our perceptions may often be false, judgements rushed and reasoning defective (*what is, may not be*). We may believe in anything as our ontological basis, e.g. God, Voodoo, magic, science etc, but all in all none of those alone could offer us route to the ultimate knowledge and truth. We are desperately seeking for the truth and facts in social sciences e.g. through empirical testing or reasoning, but social facts are always cultural and theory-dependent and only the partial understanding is what is open to us. That applies even to natural sciences, since its methods and tools, e.g. mathematics are human constructions and conventions (*what ever is, may be because we have agreed upon so*).³⁰

What is left then after this philosophical journey, is *scientific realism* (the world is real, but relative since the real world is independent of our knowledge and perceptions), *social ontology* (even though there are worlds independent of our knowledge and perceptions we may consider some elements socially and culturally real) and *relativist epistemology* with pragmatic flavour, meaning that there are many ways to get partial knowledge (e.g. inductive and deductive ways), but since the ultimate knowledge is unattainable, the best possible and useful knowledge basis is enough for us. For avoiding ultimate post-modern ‘what-everism’, it is the empirical community (e.g. political and military stra-

³⁰ Modified from Giambattista Vico’s “Verum est ipsum factum” (true is what has been made) statement.

tegic communities) or society (e.g. Finns as a nation) then which has the power to define the conditions under which one may say of a proposition that something is true, whereas researcher's task is try to understand and give meaning to the elements, processes and conditions on what the mentioned 'truths' have been socially constructed: "*Verum est ipsum factum*"

Decentred subjectivity and Constructivist perspectives on world politics

The Constructivist approach in IR, which leans philosophically on pragmatism, argues that international reality is socially constructed by ideational structures that give meaning to the material world.³¹ The aim of Constructivism is to advance a sociological perspective on world politics by emphasizing the importance of the role of ideas and identity in the constitution of interests and action, but also, the importance of material and normative structures, as well as the mutual constitution of agents and structures. (Price and Reus-Smit 1998: 260).

Traditional paradigms of the IR (such as Classical Realism and Neorealism), which lean philosophically on empiricism, consider the state as a single actor (e.g. 'according to Finland this should be done this way, but Brussels has a different opinion'). This kind of simplified understanding of the state as a unified actor has been called *anthropomorphization*, meaning that states are understood as though they were human beings ("*states are people too*").³² However, states as actors are not as comprehensive or integrated as human beings, since states have many functional levels and they can commit themselves to many situations simultaneously.

Constructivist IR-theory considers state as a 'decentred subject' consisting of individuals, many sub-groups, organizational structure, institutions and especially identity structure, which has been purpose-

³¹ This is just the opposite on Marxist perspective, which argues that social consciousness is based on material conditions merely.

³² Wendt 1999: 193–224; Neumann 1998: 2. According to Iver Neumann, "almost the entire social theory literature on collective identity formation depends on an anthropomorphization of human collectives." See also Bloom 1999 [1990]: 1–2.

fully constructed throughout the history (*endogeneous perspective*), and on which individuals and collectives tend to get habituated (*cultural perspective*). Identity structures tend also get reified from generation to generation, but they may change, albeit slowly, by constant reconstruction through domestic and international discursive interactions (*interactionist perspective*). Normally, there are several domestic communities

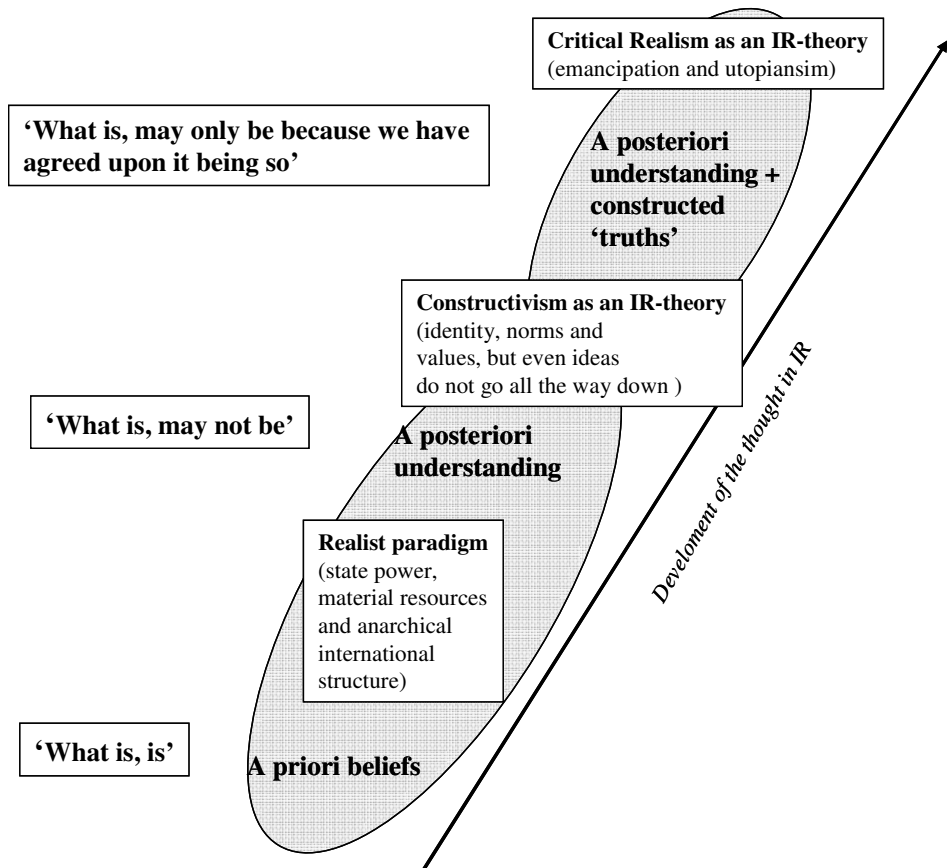


Figure 2: Development of the thought in IR

(such as state itself (political community), church (spiritual community), armed forces (military community) and so forth), which may discursively compete with each other by trying to “impose cultural forms on other groups, manipulate them, or convince other sub-cultures that

these dominant cultural forms are in fact their own forms.” (Johnston 1995: 44) We may conduct Constructivist research on our research subjects by focusing only one of the above mentioned perspectives (e.g. when analyzing cultural differences between political and military strategic communities), or by using them all simultaneously (e.g. in case studies, which analyze particular national identity constructions and reconstructions).

Endogeneous perspective

The endogenous perspective is about the one-way mediation of narratives told by conscious elites to create collective cognition on an otherwise empty collective identity field. The endogenous perspective may be called a narrative theory of identity, with the content that action becomes meaningful in the process of narrating a constitutive story of the ‘Self’. (Browning 2002: 49) Emanuel Adler sees the endogenous perspective as a theory of “*cognitive evolution*”. Cognitive evolution can be seen as the purposeful construction of national identity, meaning that it may not be the “best-fitted ideas” that become “naturalized” or reified, but those ideas that prove to be the “most successful at imposing collective meaning and function on physical reality.” (Adler 1997: 340)

From this basis, national identity enters into contextual interactions with the international structure consisting of various other national identities as endogenously constructed prior to such interactions. Even though the national narratives are usually based on previous historical experiences, and at the same time on previous interactionist cycles, these experiences may not have been felt collectively as national ones. For example, when Sweden and Russia waged war in 1808–1809 the operations were mainly conducted on what is now Finnish soil. The war was not a Finnish effort as a nation. There was no Finnish nation at that time; Finns were subjugated to the Swedish crown. But later the War was endogenously narrated by Johan Ludvig Runeberg as being part of the Finnish nation’s shared experience.³³

³³ Runeberg 1928: 5–6. The very first poem, “Maamme” (“Our Land”) in Johan Ludvig Runeberg’s book “*Vänrikki Stoolin tarinat*” (“Tales of Ensign Stål”; 1848–1860) became the Finnish national anthem. It was the patriotic heroism of this book (among other novels, poems and

The narratives of a society's past condition what that society thinks of itself now, but also point to directions for future development, by shaping what relations and actions with Others are acceptable to the 'Self'. Thus, identity reconstruction is highly politically loaded. (Browning 2002: 48.) In this respect, researcher's task is then to expose the legacy of the past by explaining what the past really was for the research object (community/society/nation) narrated by the research object itself.

As social groups (such as nations) are complex, it is difficult to accept that nations have a single perception of their own identity. However, it is assumed here that the people of every nation collectively share some crucial identity elements, like the perception of a common history, which makes it possible that nations can commit unitary actions as state agents. A nation does have shared understanding of its identity, which individuals belonging to that particular nation have internalized (habituated) through socialization (family and school education, politics, media, sports and other everyday practices). Thus, it is assumed here that the common conceptions shared by, for example, Finns include the idea of Finnishness (*Suomalaisuus*), meaning a shared understanding of our collective past, present and future, a common culture, a distinct national territory, attitudes towards national communities (e.g. political parties, church/religion and the armed forces of the state) as well as shared attitudes towards other nations. (Wodak, de Cillia, Reisigl & Liebhart 2005: 3–5)

Cultural perspective

The cultural perspective is about sustaining past narratives of the nation (or community, such as officer elite of a nation). These are presented in official identity expressions (e.g. the constitution and security political doctrines), in literature, in the media, and these can be noticed in everyday culture (material symbols like national flags, coats-of-arms, memorial statues and social symbols as ideas), all of which represent the shared experiences and concerns, triumphs and destructive de-

books of various other poets and artists) that coloured and still colours Finnish attitudes towards Russia.

feats of the nation. National identity is represented in these expressions as original, unchanging and unbroken, and as a uniform identity.³⁴

Once the basis for national or larger collective identity formation has been created this basis tends to become culturally habituated and reified forms of thinking and believing about something, like “*boundary markers*” between the ‘Self’ and the Other(s).³⁵ But even these boundary markers may be under constant domestic modification; it may be a cultural phenomenon to redefine continuously the collective boundary markers vis-à-vis the Others. By adopting cultural perspective on our research objects we may, for example ask then: How cultural habituation affects on enemy images of a nation, or how is it possible that Poles, for example, still believe themselves for being as Christian rampart (“*Antemurale Christianitatis*”) against the East (Russia and Turks)? (Sirén 2009) David Campbell, for example, has argued that it is more or less cultural habituation of the USA to find new enemies and threats through narrative interpretations of danger, which have been used to secure the boundaries of the identity in whose name it operates. (Campbell 1998: 5–6)

We all are part of our cultural structure, its symbols (ideas) and practices, but there is an international/external social structure and material world as well, which affects not only domestic ideas and practices, but also the national identity structure. In this context we may, for example, ask: How Finland’s geographical location reflects the attitudes toward Russia and Russians? Political elites are as constrained by the symbolic myths of the nation as the rest of the citizens of the state; myths that their predecessors have created. Political elites cannot escape the symbolic discourses³⁶ that they may manipulate in their domestic sub-cultures (e.g. foreign policy elites and defence policy elites), but they cannot escape the national symbolic myths, if they wish to hold on to their political positions as, for example, members of parliament; it may be political suicide to challenge national myths (‘Finland

³⁴ Checkel 2001: 553; Wodak, de Cillia, Reisigl & Liebhart 2005: 24.

³⁵ Barth 1969: 14 and p. 26; Neumann 1998: 4–5.

³⁶ Johnston 1995: 57. According to Alastair Iain Johnston, the “use of symbols by elites is directed at other members in the group”, meaning that “elites create an “official language” of discourse which excludes alternative strategies, undermines challenges to their authority, mobilizes support and otherwise upholds their hegemony in the decision process.”

has always been defended by Finns; therefore it is not necessary to align with NATO'). A problem of global significance then is that if political elites are 'victims' of national myths, largely stressing 'us-them' type differences, one can only expect cross-national differences to prevail in the future as well. But non-political elites can escape the symbolic discourses and can modify them freely. (Johnston 1995: 39–41)

Cultural perspective relates also to the concept of *strategic culture*, which may be understood as *political and military elite-centric beliefs, attitudes and practices that have developed and evolved over time*. Strategic culture does not concern merely the issue of how to use military force, but also how cultural habituation prohibits the use of chance. It also refers here to practices concerning how identity expressions such as security policy doctrines have been produced by small political and military elites.³⁷ Thus, we may, for example, ask: how is it possible that Poles managed to use their "five minutes time-frame" in 1999 when joining NATO, but Finns did not?

Interactionist perspective

The interactionist perspective is the core perspective of the Constructivist IR-theory. Recognition (*Need for recognition*) is the word that substitutes traditional IR-theory's (Realist paradigm) thesis of states' need to continuously increase their power. The recognition thesis makes a lot of sense, since it assumes that states tend to adopt international institutions, construct their domestic structures (identities, interests and social systems) in the hope of earning "universal recognition" in the eyes of the other states. The purpose of recognition may be understood negatively as well. Then recognition may be understood as seeking prestige through increasing military spending, or by leaning on terror as a tool

³⁷ Weldes 1996: 277, 282. *Political culture*, on the other hand, may be considered as *overall political codes, rules and assumptions, which impose a rough order (or disorder) on conceptions of the political environment*. Political culture is a wider concept than the strategic one, since political culture refers to the general behavioural side of national political decision-making practices and to the 'political atmosphere', whereas strategic culture is a more focused concept referring specifically to national foreign and defence policy practices and interests that have their basis in national identity construction.

for seeking recognition (e.g. Islamist terrorist organizations), which do not fit to the original idea of recognition. As an example of negative recognition one may mention Dana Eyre's and Mark Suchman's research concerning national purchases of high technology weapons simply to increase prestige. Thus, being a recognized nation is about, among other things, "having a flag" and "having a high-tech military", even though a high-tech military would not have true value in waging war, due to the small amount of high-tech weapons systems. High-tech military capability is then to be seen only as a status symbol so that a state can fulfil its need to be recognized by others.³⁸

Generally, the interactionist perspective focuses on how inter-subjective practices between actors result in identities and interests formed in the processes of interaction, and stresses that all identities, including national one, develop mainly through social interaction and learning. Learning is understood here as the reinterpretation of one's interests which occurs when actors adopt new norms and rules of behaviour based on previous experiences and/or new information and knowledge. Learning refers to new internalized beliefs signifying 'appropriate' behaviour, whereas mere adaptation to contextual norms does not necessitate fundamental learning.³⁹

It is precisely increased international interactions that have eroded the 'hard shell' of nation-states, according to the Constructivist IR-theory, by increasing their sensitivity and vulnerability to events and actions taking place beyond their borders. The fear of conflict may stimulate forms of cooperation, such as "banding together in the face of a common enemy." This may foster "a sense of community and collective identity among the cooperative parties." (Kratochwil and Mansfield 2005: x, 1)

Interactions are basically processes of signalling, interpreting and responding. Interaction rewards participant actors for "holding certain ideas about each other and discourages them from holding others"; it is to a large extent about learning what ideas are agreeable and produc-

³⁸ Eyre and Suchman (1996), pp. 79–98.

³⁹ Haas 2005: 89, 99. See also Hasenclever, Mayer and Rittberger 2001: 146; Rieker 2006: 509–514. Pernille Rieker has conducted research on French foreign and defence policy by asking how and to what extent has the EU's foreign and security policy lead to adaptation and change in national foreign and security policy and to what extent we can speak about learning through interaction.

tive. (Wendt 1992: 405) *Discursive interaction* affects national identity and interests through negotiative cooperation (the foreign policy statements and meetings of states' political elites on various external social contexts,⁴⁰ like globalization, NATO-enlargement and EU-integration), but also through international norms (i.e. institutions like state sovereignty, diplomacy and international law), and bargaining, enforcement and soft persuasion by other states or organizations.⁴¹ *Non-discursive interaction* (i.e. war) has been understood here as a possible foreign policy tool between interactionist states. War itself is understood here as a social event, even though the main methods of war are bullets and rockets, not discourse.⁴² Furthermore, external material factors, like global warming, geographic location (geopolitics and geostrategy) and material dependencies, such as dependency on oil and natural gas, have been considered as being capable of having an influence, not only on the interests and behaviour of the state, but also on national identity.

Constructivist analysis on EU-integration and NATO-cooperation suggests that five decades of European and transatlantic cooperation may have transformed a positive interdependence, not only into a collective "European identity", but also to some extent into a "transatlantic identity", in terms of which cooperative states define their self-interests. The process of evolving cooperation redefines the originally egoistic (e.g. 'to keep Germany constrained') reasons for that cooperation by reconstructing identities and interests "in terms of new intersubjective understandings and commitments." (Adler 1997: 347) This is largely about the "spill-over-effect" then at least when it comes to the EU, in that European integration, based on the 1957 Treaties of Rome,⁴³ has had two fundamental characteristics: the EU's enlargement

⁴⁰ Krasner 2005: 77. According to Stephen Krasner, "Elites act within a communications net, embodying rules, norms and principles, which transcends national boundaries." See also Nye 2005: 372.

⁴¹ Adler 1997: 341. Persuasion is "a struggle to define mutual understandings", and an attempt "to control behavior through a wide range of social sanctions, only one of which is the use of force." See also Schoppa 1999: 316–317.

⁴² Adler 1997: 347. War is a social event, since people wage wars, not machines. Discourse, in the form of diplomacy, is present in war, even during the bullets and rockets-phase.

⁴³ European Commission 1997: 9–10. On 25 March 1957 the six founder States of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) signed

has been a continuous process and European integration has continuously deepened and spread functionally into new areas (the “spill-over-effect”), such as Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP).⁴⁴

From the Constructivist perspective, joining and belonging, for example, to a security community,⁴⁵ like NATO, has long term effects on national identity, but membership sometimes necessitates persuasion, not necessarily enforcement, of a member state. Persuasion succeeds, because the more institutionalized a collective defence arrangement, such as NATO, the less likely the member states are to abandon each others.⁴⁶ Persuasion as a discursive interactionist practice is probably best understood through an example from Maja Zehfuss’s research on the change in Germany’s security policy behaviour as a result of “persuasion” by the United States. According to Zehfuss, Germany was softly forced to change her ‘never again war’-principle in 1999, when the Bundeswehr was authorized to participate in operation ‘Allied Force’ in Kosovo. It was the context that allowed, or forced Germany to rearticulate the ‘never again war-principle’, but the previous request of the USA to Germany to participate in the Gulf operation

the so-called *Treaties of Rome*, which established the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom).

⁴⁴ The original *Treaties of Rome* have been revised four times: in 1987 by the *Single European Act* (SEA), in 1992 by the *Treaty on European Union* (Maastricht Treaty), in 1997 by the *Amsterdam Treaty* and in 2001 by the *Nice Treaty*. By the SEA the member states decided to increase the cases in internal markets in which the Council could take decisions by qualified majority instead of unanimous agreement among the twelve Member States. The SEA also established the European Council, which formalises the conferences or summits of the Heads of States and Governments (see the European Union 1987).

⁴⁵ Deutsch (et al.) 1969: 5–7. A *security community* “is one in which there is real assurance that the members of that community will not fight each other physically, but will settle their disputes in some other way.” An *amalgamated security community* is the “merger of two or more previously independent units into a single larger unit, with some type of common government after amalgamation [e.g. USA].” A *pluralistic security community* “retains the legal independence of separate governments [e.g. USA and Canada functioning as a security community without being merged].”

⁴⁶ Wallander 1999: 29. Collective security means that the threat to any member of the arrangement is considered a threat to all the others.

in 1990 also affected the 1999 Kosovo-case. Maja Zehfuss has called this process “*altercasting*”, meaning that other states (mainly the USA) behaved towards Germany as if she already had a new role “in the hope that [Germany] would do what this new role, rather than the old demanded of it.”⁴⁷

From the interactionist perspective, national identities are constructed through material clashes as well, meaning for the most part wars. For example, it has been argued that Australian national identity was created on the beaches of Gallipoli in 1915, (Hoffenberg 2001: 114) and it would be fair to say that some characteristics of Finnish national identity were constructed through the Winter War in 1939. There are lots of examples like these.

Conclusions

Traditional Realist paradigm of the IR has approached their state-related research objects from empiricist perspective by using methods and terminologies that consider states as homogeneous ‘speaking billiard balls’, which compete for power, prestige and so forth with each other. But the states and societies are not similar, nor do they necessarily compete for power, but recognition, according to Constructivist social theory. However, by leaning on Constructivism one has to first clear out one’s ontological and epistemological points of departure for being able to operate with Constructivist social theory.

Ontologically Constructivist approach leans on scientific realism and social ontology, meaning that everything that we consider as a reality is based only on subjective perceptions, which are built on our cultural background, physical qualities and on our subjective sense-worlds. Epistemologically Constructivism leans on relativism, which relates closely to social ontology. This asserts that in the social sciences all beliefs and all knowledge are socially constructed, contextual and

⁴⁷ Zehfuss 2001: 322–323 and 329. See also Adler and Barnett 2000: 323; Wiberg 2000: 296. Security communities like NATO evolve around “cores of strength”, according to Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett. However, the Scandinavian “security community” has evolved around a common religion and language, rather than around a core of strength, according to Håkan Wiberg; there is no core of strength in the Scandinavian security community.

fallible. There are no ultimate truths available to us, only partial and relative ones. But despite epistemological relativism we may not judge all beliefs to be equally valid; beliefs are culture dependent phenomena. One culture may believe, for example, in one God, the other may believe in many Gods and the third may believe only in evolution theory and so forth.

By adopting realist ontology, social ontology and relativist epistemology, one may include such issues into his frame of reference and research frame, which are not possible, if leaning only on empiricism and one IR-paradigm alone. In this regard Constructivism is not to be considered as a paradigm, since it includes elements of Classical IR paradigms (such as Classical Realism and Neorealism) and can negotiate with reflectivist and normative approaches of IR-theory (such as Critical Realism) as well. Thus, according to Constructivism, there are e.g. states, but they should not be considered as similar. States are decentred; heads of governments are not the only voices, albeit official ones, of the people they represent any more, but only ones among many voices of the people they represent. Ideas and identities are prior to empirical world's explanations, according to Constructivism, but even ideas do not go all the way down; there can be found material variables also (e.g. country's geographical position) that affect on identities and ideas as well.

All in all, by combining pragmatist-constructivist philosophical points of departure (realist ontology, social ontology, relativist epistemology), Constructivism's 'social nature' and decentred subjectivity of the state (states and societies are different and may be considered as continuous social processes, defined by individuals, many sub-groups, institutions, history, past and current identity narratives, habituation as well as domestic and international interactions), it is possible to understand more deeply such topical state-related social phenomena as terrorism, strategic communities, spread of nuclear weapons, nuclear policies, world order, NATO-enlargement, EU-integration, threat scenarios, enemy images and so forth.

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