Constructivism

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Russia and Crimea

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

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

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

Peer Discussion

- How would you characterize constructivism?

Constructivism

- Not opposed to neorealism and neoliberalism per say
  - Contrasts against rational foundations of the Neos
- Constructivism ≠substantive theory
- Constructivism = social theory
- Ruggie: "Constructivism is about human consciousness and its role in international life."

Constructivism

- What do we mean by agents and structures?

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

- Structures: overarching cultural and normative forces
  - Sovereignty

Constructivism

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

Structuration

- Anthony Giddens (1984): The Constitution of Society
  - Agents and social structures create and recreate each other
    - Agents, though their action, generate social structures.
    - Social structures, in turn, shape actors behavior though norms, ideas, identity, roles.
  - Social structures are not permanent
  - However, changing structure is not necessarily as easy; ideas, identities, norms, and roles become sedimented over time, constraining actors.

Social construction of Reality

- What do we mean by the social construction of reality?

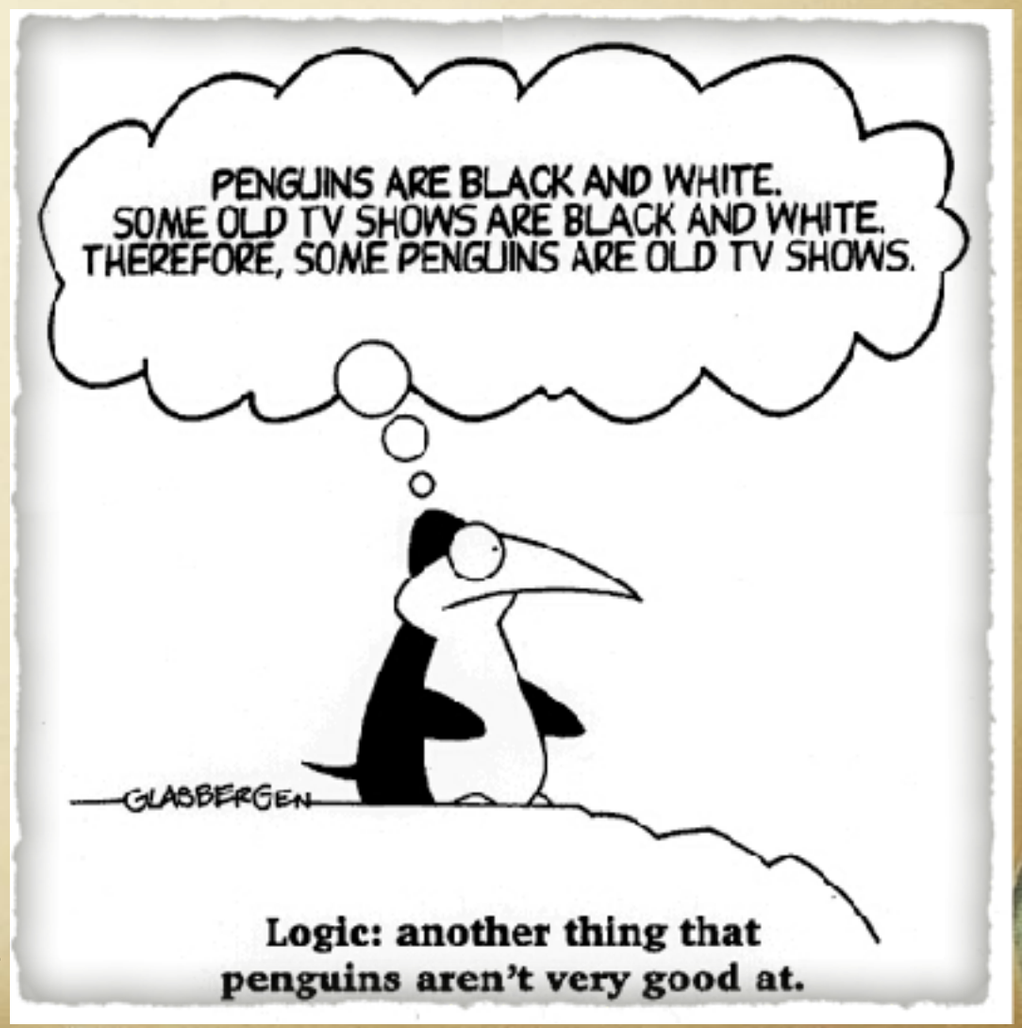
- Socially constructed nature of actors and their identities and interests

- Actors are produced and created by their cultural environment

- Knowledge (symbols, rules, concepts, and categories) shapes how actors construct and interpret the world

Logics of Action

- Two 'logics' for understanding the calculations of actors:
  - Logic of consequences
  - Logic of appropriateness



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Norms

- What are norms? What are regulative versus constitutive norms?

Regulative vs. Constitutive

- What is the difference between regulative and constitutive norms/rules

- Regulative norms: guide the behavior of actors by indicating what is appropriate or not for a given identity.

- Constitutive norms: the observation of these norms defines membership in a particular identity.

Anarchy

- What does Wendt mean when he says "Anarchy is what states make of it"?
- Three cultures of anarchy defined by dyadic identity dynamics (or amity and enmity roles)
  - Hobbesian - Enemy
  - Lockean – Rival
  - Kantian – Friend

Meaning

- Constructivists attempt to recover social systems of meaning and in turn the meaning actors give to their practices and the objects they construct.

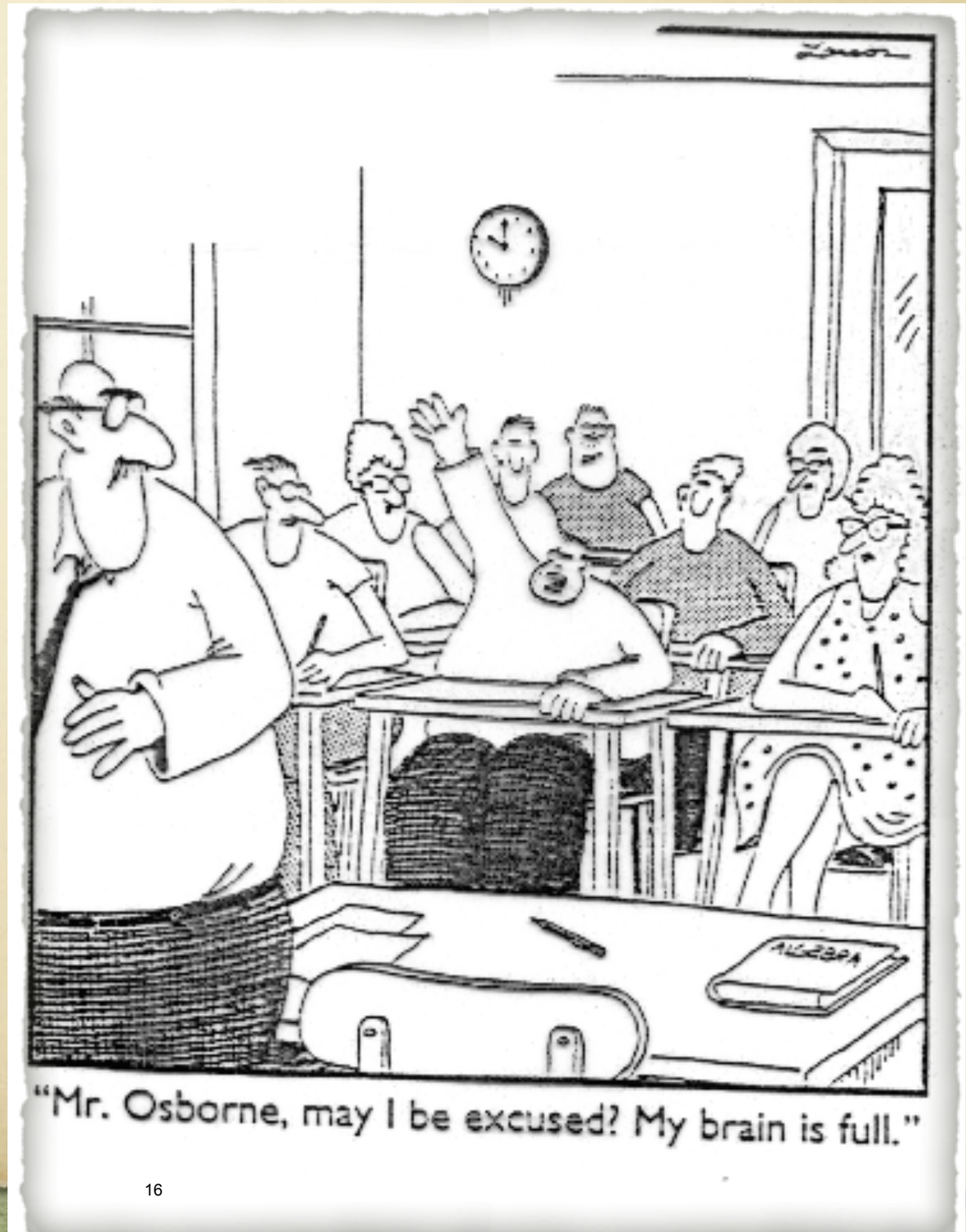
- Adds ideational power to material power
  - Legitimacy, reputation
  - Power also includes how knowledge, the fixings of meanings, and the construction of identities allocate differential regards and capacities.

Nature of Scientific Inquiry

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

Rationalism vs. Constructivism

- What is the difference?



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Norms

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

Norms

- Norms Lifecycle
  - Emergence
  - Cascade
  - Internalization

- Is norms diffusion unidirectional?

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Social structures

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

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

Identity

- What then is identity?

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

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

Constructivism

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

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