

**International Theory: The Second  
Debate  
Realism versus Behavioralism**

**Or, to be more precise:  
Traditionalism versus Scientism  
Or also:  
the debate between  
Understanding and Explanation**



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# Basic Terms

**Ontological**: concerning itself with what exists  
- a 17th century coinage for the respective branch of philosophical metaphysics

**Epistemological**: concerning itself with the theory of knowledge → origin of knowledge, the role of experience in generating knowledge, the function of reason in generating knowledge, the relationship between knowledge and certainty, and the criteria according to which we decide on the validity and tenability of statements

**During the first part of today's seminar, we looked at the ontology of I.R., at the respective world views linked to particular Grand Theories.**

**Classic Example of different ontologies: the First Great Debate between Idealism and Realism (or between a Hobbesian & a Lockean/Kantian/Grotian view of IR)**

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**The Second Great Debate between Traditionalism and Scientism looks at the epistemology of I.R. How can we be sure that the statements we formulate are correct ??**

# Traditionalism I

## scientific/cognitive interest

Scientific advice to those who govern, and political education of those who are governed; evaluating comments, norm-based opinions, and recommendations for action regarding present political decisions on the basis of respective scientific research results

# Traditionalism II

## Problem statement:

striving for an *understanding* of politics on the basis of an insight into and of a knowledge of historical-social developments and processes

# Traditionalism III

**specific view of the object of enquiry**

- a) Politics is a specific social form of action full of sense and values – an *art* which can be learned on the basis of historical examples. Historical and social phenomena can be clearly distinguished from natural phenomena; thus, they are not susceptible to scientific explanations taking the form of if - then statements**
- b) International Politics**  
**competitive zero-sum-game for power and influence in an anarchic world of states, characterized by the security dilemma and the role of states as primary (if not near-exclusive) international actors**

# Traditionalism IV

## methods of analysis:

hermeneutic, ideographic, descriptive, or normative approaches typical for the arts and historical sciences

## validity criteria of scientific statements:

Common Sense – the view that we know most, if not all, of those things which ordinary people think they know and that any satisfactory epistemological theory must be adequate to the fact that we know such things

Value relationship: scientific statements are characterized by explicit dependence on values

# Traditionalism V

## Concept of Theory:

- a) **Constitution of a general theory of political action based on the regular appearance of phenomena and forms of international politics over time, formulating recommendations to political decision-makers for action in comparable situations**
  
- b) **Formulation of ideal types based on historical comparisons which help with the understanding and classification of concrete historical and political phenomena**

# Positivism I

- **Axioms**: correspondence theory of truth, methodological unity of science, value-free scientific knowledge
- **Premises**: Division of Subject and Object, Naturalism – deduction of all phenomena from natural facts, Division of statements of facts and statements of values

# Positivism II

- **Consequences:**
- **Postulated existence of a „real“ world (Object) independent from the theory- loaded grasp of the scientist (subject);**
- **identification of facts in an intersubjectively valid observation language independent from theories;**
- **methodological exclusion of idiosyncratic characteristics and/or individual (subject) identities assures objective knowledge of an intersubjectively transferable character**

# Positivism III

- **Postulate of like regularities in the natural as well as the social world, independent of time, place, and observer, enables the transfer of analytic approaches and deductive-nomological processes of theory formulation from the field of the natural to the field of the social sciences & to the analysis of social/societal problems**
- **Knowledge generated on the basis of positivist research approaches and methodologies is limited to the objective (i.e. empirical) world. Statements and decisions on values are outside the sphere of competence of science.**

# Positivism IV

- **Further Consequences:**
- ***Concept of Reason*** predicated on the purposeful rationality/rationality of purpose of instrumental action aiding the actor to technically master her/his environment
- ***Rationalisation*** of societal (inter-)action by its predication on planned/plannable means- end-relationships, technical (or engineering) knowledge, depersonalisation of relationships of power and dominance, and extension of control over natural and social objects (“rationalisation of the world we live in”)

# Positivism V

- ***Theory*** regards itself as problem-solving theory, which accepts the institutions and power/dominance relationships of a pre-given reality as analytical and reference frameworks, and strives for the explanation of causal relationships between societal phenomena; its aim is the elimination of disturbances and/or their sources in order to insure friction-less action/functioning of social actors
- ***International politics*** is regarded as the interaction of exogeneously constituted actors under anarchy, the behaviour of which is as a rule explained by recourse to the characteristics or parameters of the international system (top-down explanation)

# Thanx for your attention....

