**Constructivism vs Positivism**

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Description

“Constructivist (or interpretivist) approaches argue that the goal of social science is to understand the meaning of human behavior within its social and political context; whereas, positivist approaches argue that the goal of social science is to objectively explain human behavior by demonstrating causality and predictability. While these approaches might appear to be necessary components of the same social science, they rest on fundamentally different ontological and epistemological assumptions, as evidenced by the type of knowledge each considers valid. Constructivist epistemology argues that because humans construct their social and political realities, the ways in which we understand political behavior will always be shaped and limited by our social constructions and their underlying assumptions. It follows that our knowledge of social and political behavior necessarily will be contextual and relativistic. By contrast, positivist epistemology argues that because there is a ‘real world’ independent of the meaning actors attach to their actions, human behavior can be explained using scientific methods after the fashion of the natural sciences. Positivists criticize constructivists for being relativists incapable of producing scientific knowledge; whereas, constructivists criticize positivists for misapplying the methods of the natural sciences to human behavior which, they argue, is far too complex and contextually determined to be explained by methodologies whose ultimate goal is to discover universal causal laws. Whether political scientists realize it or not, the choices they make about what to study and how to study it depends fundamentally on their ontological and epistemological assumptions. To say that you can choose either a constructivist or positivist methodological approach depending on what you want to study is like saying that you can be an atheist one day and a true believer the next.”      Write an essay of 8-10 double-spaced pages in which you critically respond to this statement. Take a position on which approach – constructivist or positivist or some variation thereof such as critical realist – you believe is most appropriate for the social sciences. Explain your thesis clearly in the first paragraph.