

**Abstract:**

A Meta-Theoretical Foundation for the Study of International Relations in a Global Era: A Social Constructivist Approach.

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This thesis presents a meta-theoretical foundation for the study of international relations in a global era. The main body of this work presents and thereafter criticises a broad array of approaches to International Relations such as Realism, Liberalism, Marxism, Critical theory, Post-modernism, Feminism, and Post-colonialism. Three meta-theoretical property spaces form the basis of this presentation, critique, and ensuing synthesis. The first property space is ontological, and is constituted by two continuums: materialism—idealism, and individualism—holism. The second is epistemological, and is also constituted by two continuums, one with the end-points objectivism and subjectivism, and one, with epistemological individualism and holism. The third space is axiological. It is built upon a division between, on the one hand, problem-solving and critical approaches, and, on the other hand, “neutral” and “activist” approaches. After the paradigms, and paradigms criticisms are mapped into the three property spaces, the synthetic part of this work is introduced. Neo-classical Social Constructivism is presented as a corrective for overcoming the weaknesses identified in the meta-theoretical foundations that underlie existing approaches to International Relations. This approach is able to bridge the problematic continuums presented in the three property spaces. It is ontologically based upon the idea that agents make rules — rules form institutions — institutions form structure(s) — structure(s) form society/ies — society/ies forms actors and determine who is an agent and who is not — agents (inter)act informed and socialised by institutions thereby upholding or changing institutions. Epistemologically, the work is based upon American pragmatism, Sartrean situationism, and a combination of causal and intentional explanations. The axiological dimension of the meta-theory is based upon the moral minimalism of Waltzer as well as a combination of empirical and normative reasoning. Overall, this thesis strives towards bridging a number of well-established ontological, epistemological, and axiological dichotomies in order to create better International Relations theory. To do so is of vital importance for future substantive theoretical development in the discipline, since no substantive theory is stronger than the meta-theoretical foundation upon which it rests.

**Key Words:** International Relations Theory, Meta-theory (Ontology, Epistemology, Axiology), Social Constructivism, Structuration, Pragmatism, Moral Minimalism