Approaches to Political Science

Science, Critics, and the State of the Discipline
TOPICS

• Types of knowledge
• Social research philosophies
• Social research strategies (deduction & induction)
• Types of social research
August Comte has been considered by many as the father of sociology and also he wrote a very influential book on human history that serves to identify types of knowledge. Comte identifies three stages linked to types of knowledge that humanity has used to explain the natural and social world.

1. **Theological**
2. **Metaphysical**
3. **Positivist or scientific**
Types of knowledge

1. **Theological**
   - Humans explain nature as the wish of a superior force (s) beyond the control of human beings

2. **Metaphysical or Normative**
   - Normative view of the world. The focus is not in what is but how it should be

3. **Positivist or scientist**
   - Nature follows some laws and patterns that can be studied, modeled and replicated objectively using standard procedures
Social research philosophies

1. Positivism

- An objective reality exists that can be analyzed, modeled & replicated
- Ideas and theories are confronted with facts
- Regularities and patterns are present
- Social reality can be analyzed systematically
- Social reality can be quantified and measured systematically
- Example: poverty exists and can be measured
Quantitative/Qualitative terms

• Note that McNabb and use different labels for various traditions or approaches.

• By quantitative he is unclear whether he means simply statistical studies or anything that observes and measures reality.

• One can use qualitative, case study methodologies along with the scientific, behavioral approach!
McNabb states that the behavioral approach is more typically inductive.

However, this was more true back some decades ago.

In reality, it is almost impossible not to approach a research project without some idea of theory or expectations.
Social research strategies

Irrc: What we think

THEORY

DATA

Reality: What we observe

DEDUCTIVE REASONING

INDUCTIVE REASONING
Deductive and Inductive Logic

• Research that comes from observation with little prior theory is inductive, whereas logical theory tends to be more deductive.

• However, the formulation of new research questions usually contains elements of both since the real world must motivate our curiosity, although reformulations of questions may be more deductively motivated based on work of others.
Social research philosophies

2. **Interpretivism** (postmodern or post positivist thought)
   - An objective reality does not exist; instead reality is socially constructed
   - The goal is to understand what meaning people give to reality
   - Reality is relative depending on how the group or the person perceives it
   - Example: poverty is in the eye of the beholder
Other Approaches in McNabb

• Rational Choice Theory (game theory)
• Feminist Views (many different types)
  – Liberal, Difference, post-modern
• Marxist Approaches
Social research philosophies

3. Constructivism

- Reality is constructed by the actors
- Explores how different stakeholders in social settings construct their beliefs
- Example: I have less than average Joe, therefore, I must be poor
State of Political Science Research

• Subfields: Amer, CP, IR, Theory, Public Admin, Public Law
• Paradigm?
• Behavioral vs. Others: Perestroika movement (APSR etc.)
• Graduate degrees: MA vs. Ph.D.
• Being a Professor? Being an Analyst?