Gender and the social construction of int’l politics

I. What determines individual & state behavior?
II. How do these notions lead us to political theory?
III. Theories of social behavior more problematic
IV. Constructivism is analytical method, not a theory
V. Gender is a social construction with real effects
I. What determines individual & state behavior?

**Nature**

- Autonomous actor subject to biology, self-interested, violent, evil
- The world is an ungoverned, dangerous place in which actors must help themselves
- Failure to protect oneself, and eschewing violence, may lead to injury or death.

**Nurture**

- Socialized actor who learns to behave in certain ways under specific circumstances.
- The world is a social construction in which actors learn they are isolated individuals who must help themselves
- Other behaviors are possible, although it is difficult to change beliefs and practices.
II. How do these notions lead us to political theory?

Theories are statements of cause and effect

Explanation  Prediction  Control

Scientific theories are “empiricist” and rely on observation of physical evidence: e.g., gravity

But not always the case: theories may be formulated in absence of physical evidence.
III. Theories of social behavior more problematic

Realism

Observed behavior or conditions

Why does N. Korea have nuclear weapons?

Why does the U.S. have nuclear weapons?

Why does Israel have nuclear weapons?

Constructivism

Social purpose or meanings

Offense, defense or status?

Deterrence, coercion or business?

Self-protection or “Masada option?”
IV. Constructivism is analytical method, not a theory

- Things, phenomena, arrangements, practices, rituals, etc. are “real”

Is existence best explained by meanings or outcomes?

Empiricism: We deduce fixed meanings from outcomes, e.g., if I am laying down on something, it must be a bed.

Constructivism: We construct meanings through language, e.g., I may be laying down on a table, but this violates social practices & order

Yet, social constructions can generate material effects, including death

If we imagine a “beast” and arm against it, we can also use our weapons to kill innocent people
V. Gender is a social construction with real effects

- Gender is not biological; it is a social category that structures human relations.
- Public sphere is male; private sphere is female (not-male).
- Males work outside the household; women work inside.
- Males have political voice and shape political institutions.
- Males do the “heavy” lifting; women, the double shift at home.
- Production is “public”; reproduction is private.
- But the state reserves the right to intervene in the private sphere.
- Most basic way is by division of labor in household & state.