

# Philosophy of Social Science Research

*The term is first used by John Huges  
in 1980 in his book*

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# Approach

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graph TD; A([Approach]) --- B(to know the nature of society, known as 'ontological' assumptions); A --- C(to know the nature of knowledge, known as 'epistemological' assumptions);
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to know the  
nature of society,  
known as  
'ontological'  
assumptions

to know the  
nature of  
knowledge,  
known as  
'epistemological'  
assumptions

# Scope

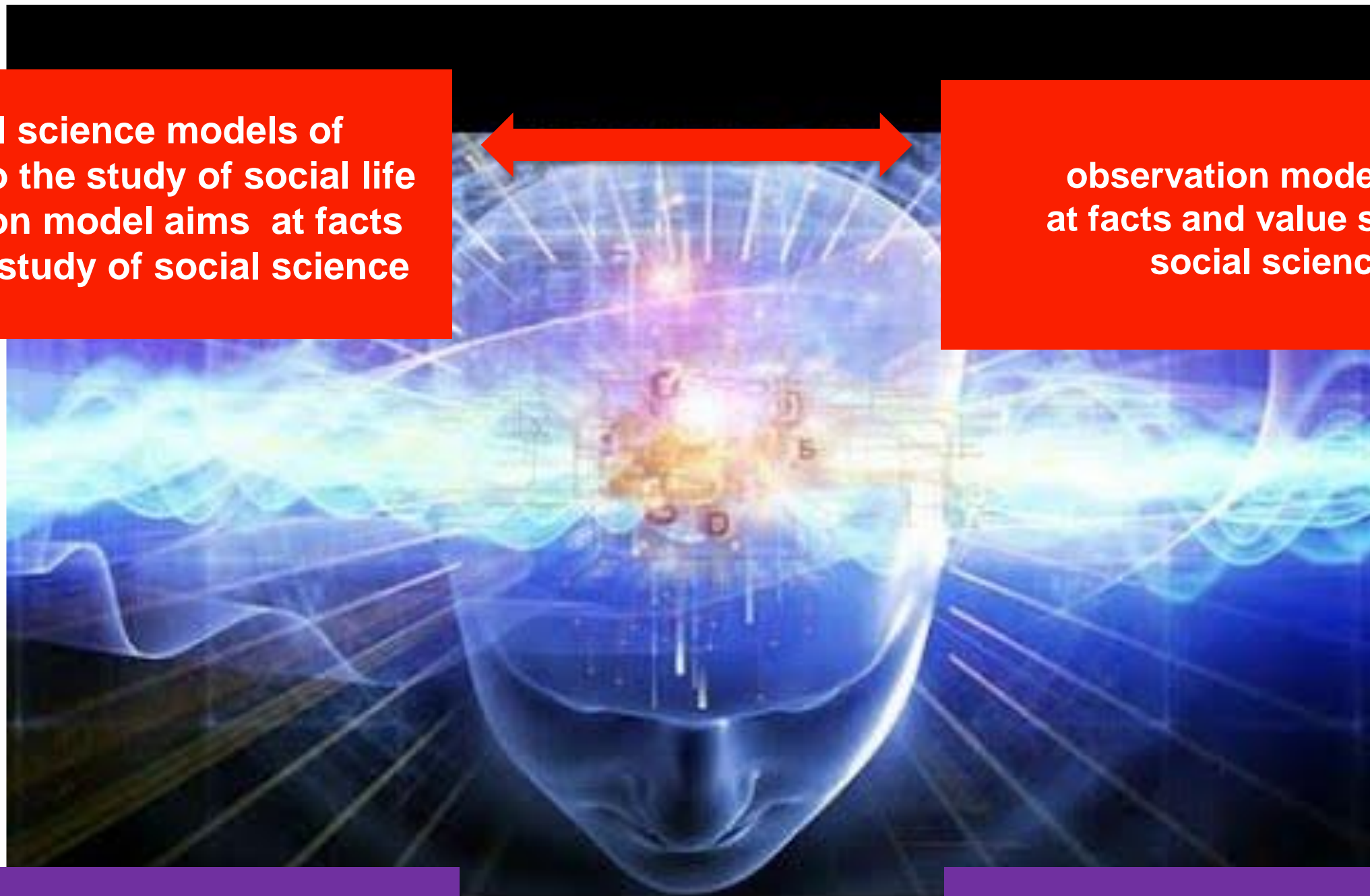
❖ deals very broad issues, i.e., nature of knowledge, nature of scientific knowledge, understanding of social life

❖ concerns with issues like the place of values in knowledge, ethics, and nature of human motivation

# Two Approaches in acquiring Knowledge

Natural science models of research to the study of social life  
observation model aims at facts and value study of social science

observation model aims at facts and value study of social science



based on  
'positivism' follow  
epistemological position

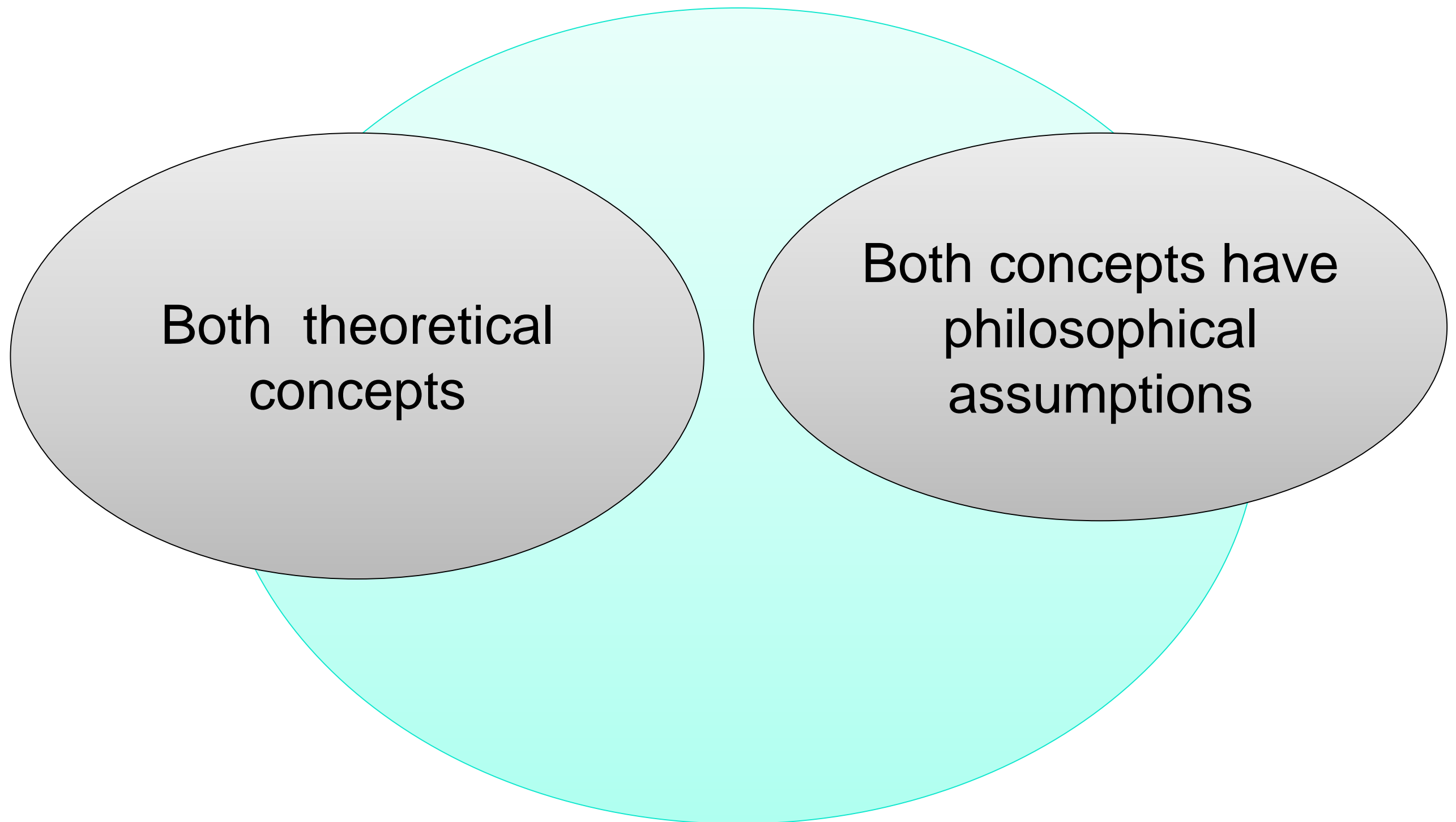
based on 'constructivism'  
follow ontological  
positions

# Both Model's Data Techniques

- ❖ Both models have different research practices & data collection techniques
  - (A) Positivism (Epistemology) adopt questionnaires, social surveys, and experimental research design
  - (B) Constructivism (Ontology) adopt unstructured interviews, ethnography and other qualitative techniques

- ❖ Both models findings, obviously, different kind of data
- ❖ The positivist / epistemological data : statistical
- ❖ The constructivist data :observatory & natural

# Epistemologies & Ontologies in Social Science Research





# Dictionary Meaning

## (A) Epistemology :

The theory of knowledge, especially with regard to its methods, validity, and scope, and the distinction between justified belief and opinion.(Google)

Epistemology, the philosophical study of the nature, origin, and limits of human knowledge.(Britannica)

## (B) Ontology :

The branch of metaphysics dealing with the nature of being.(Google)

Ontology, the philosophical study of being in general, or of what applies neutrally to everything that is real. (Britannica)



## (A) Epistemology :

The term is derived from the Greek epistēmē (“knowledge”) and logos (“reason”)

## (B) Ontology :

It was called “first philosophy” by Aristotle in Book IV of his Metaphysics.

# Views of the Knowledge

## (A) Epistemology:

- ❖ deals with the nature of knowledge
- ❖ involves knowledge and what that knowledge entails
- ❖ the assumptions about the kind of or the name of knowledge
- ❖ inquisitiveness about the world, how we can know the world

## (B) Ontology:

- ❖ deals with the nature of the world and what we can know about it
- ❖ involves social entities and whether these entities are independent or they act as social actors
- ❖ the assumptions about our beliefs; about the kind and nature of reality & the social world
- ❖ inquisitiveness about the kinds of things that exist within the society

# Epistemology

- ❖ concern with scope and legitimacy of human effort to know about the world
- ❖ how knowledge can be acquired and transfer to other human beings and what is the limit of such effort
- ❖ try to uncover knowledge of social behaviour
- ❖ Knowledge is hard, objective and tangible, therefore, require methods of natural science, 'positivist' methods like testing, measuring etc.



# Ontology

- ❖ concern with human activities and human interactions within the society
- ❖ how knowledge can be acquired about those questions appropriate to human society
- ❖ try to uncover perceptions, actions, and interpretations of the individuals in society
- ❖ knowledge is personal, subjective, and indefinite, therefore, require constructionist methods like observation

❖ Epistemology/positivism believes that knowledge about the world can be tested , statistically analysed and adopt quantitative methods

Ontology/constructionist believes that knowledge about the society can not be tested, only observed and adopt qualitative methods

Epistemology : views of the knowledge

Ontology : views of the world

*Which view a researcher should adopt ?  
Positivist or Constructionist ?*

*Depends upon the research context*



# Research Context: Positivist & Constructionist Approach

## Positivist

- ❖ follow epistemological position
- ❖ focuses on the importance of objectivity
- ❖ aims at to obtain truth
- ❖ facts and values are distinct

## Constructionist

- ❖ follow ontological position
- ❖ focuses on the importance of subjectivity
- ❖ aims at to obtain 'understanding'
- ❖ facts and values can not be separated

## Positivist

- ❖ objective and value free social research enquiries, facts and values are distinct
- ❖ concentrated on findings of research and not on impact
- ❖ believes that meaningful realities vested in objects in social world , social research should discover them

## Constructionist

- ❖ subjective and social research enquiries with value and facts, value free research not possible
- ❖ believes that our perceptions and interpretations of the society around us pave the way of knowledge

## Positivist

- ❖ truth is static and is always objective
- ❖ it can be studied , truth can be discovered
- ❖ knowledge in social sciences can be achieved similar to natural science by data collections, data interpretations

## Constructionist

- ❖ truth is dynamic , subjective
- ❖ it can be observed, truth can be understood by perceptions
- ❖ in society the source of knowledge :- the individuals own meanings and interpretations which can not be tested but observed

# Conclusion

## Philosophy of Social Science Research

	Positivism/ Epistemology	Constructionism/ Ontology
	Scientific method; statistical analysis of data, knowledge by experiences, findings tested	Observatory method, AI analysis possible today, knowledge by perception, beliefs
Characteristics	test data to verify already existing theory	inductive research, build theory collecting data
Assumption	Reality can be known accurately	Reality can be known approximately

Thank You