What Makes the World Hang Together? Neo-utilitarianism and the Social Constructivist Challenge

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Edward Teller, the nuclear physicist, used to draw overflow crowds to his "physics for poets" course at Berkeley, despite his hawkish views on military matters and unwavering conservative politics. Through a thick Hungarian accent he would announce at the outset, "I will show you what makes the world hang together." And he did just that.

An analogous puzzle has occupied theorists of international relations right from the start: what makes *this* world hang together? Traditionally, the intellectual protagonists have been realism and liberalism—from Machiavelli or Hobbes versus Kant on down—with the liberal tradition attributing greater efficacy to ideational factors. The postwar academic aversion to idealism in the United States, however, resulted in a widespread discounting of, and thus a poor grasp on, the role of such factors in international life, be they identities, norms, aspirations, ideologies, or simply ideas about cause–effect relations.

Two subsequent developments have reinforced this state of affairs. The first was the ascendancy of neorealism and neoliberal institutionalism in the 1980s and their convergence around neo-utilitarian precepts and premises.[1] Within the ontology of neo-utilitarianism, ideational factors, when they are examined at all, are rendered in strictly instrumental terms, useful or not to self-regarding individuals (units) in the pursuit of typically material interests, including efficiency concerns. The second development has been the widespread embracing in the field of a model of social science that in certain epistemological respects has become almost Newtonian in character. As the physicist Gerald Feinberg put it, "Newtonian mechanics . . . did not attempt to explain what forces might exist in nature, but rather described how motion occurred when the force was known."[2] One obtains the essence of mainstream theorizing in international relations today merely by substituting the terms "interests" or "preferences" for "forces" in Feinberg's characterization.

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1. Baldwin 1993.
2. Feinberg 1978, 9.

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The shift toward neo-utilitarianism has produced rigorous analytical results, some of which have been subjected to empirical tests. But it also has serious blind spots and silences, particularly regarding the ideational realm. The growing recognition of that fact has been most directly responsible for the blossoming in the 1990s of a very different approach to international relations theorizing, one that has come to be known as social constructivism.

Social constructivism rests on an irreducibly intersubjective dimension of human action. As Max Weber insisted at the turn of the century, "We are *cultural beings,* endowed with the capacity and the will to take a deliberate attitude towards the world and to lend it *significance.*"[3] This capacity gives rise to a class of facts that do not exist in the physical object world: social facts, or facts that, in the words of the linguistic philosopher John Searle, depend on human agreement that they exist and typically require human institutions for their existence.[4] Social facts include money, property rights, sovereignty, marriage, football, and Valentine's Day, in contrast to such brute observational facts as rivers, mountains, population size, bombs, bullets, and gravity, which exist whether or not there is agreement that they do.

In short, constructivism is about human consciousness and its role in international life. In contrast to neo-utilitarianism, constructivists contend that not only are identities and interests of actors socially constructed, but also that they must share the stage with a whole host of other ideational factors that emanate from the human capacity and will of which Weber wrote. The fact that human behavior at all levels of social aggregation is constrained is not in dispute. Nor is the likelihood that modal responses may exist to some types of structural constraints or situational exigencies. What social constructivists reject, however, is the presumption or pretense that their study constitutes the totality or even the main part of the social scientific enterprise.

My aim in this essay is to provide an analytical account of social constructivism in international relations today. No general theory of the social construction of reality is available to be borrowed from other fields, as is the case for neo-utilitarianism, and international relations constructivists have not as yet managed to formulate a fully fledged theory of their own. As a result, constructivism remains more of a philosophically and theoretically informed perspective on and approach to the empirical study of international relations. Hence, I present the constructivist project much as it has evolved in the field over the past fifteen years or so: as a critical reflection on the limits of neo-utilitarianism. I do so in three steps.

First, to gain a firmer grounding of what this approach is all about, I locate its roots in the sociology of Emile Durkheim and Max Weber, and I briefly note the analytical means whereby they resisted the ascending tide of utilitarianism and methodological individualism more generally in the late nineteenth century. Second, I inventory the increasingly extensive empirical results produced by constructivism in international

3. Weber 1949, 81, emphases in original.
4. Searle 1995, 2.

relations in recent years, as a result of which it is no longer possible to claim, as Judith Goldstein and Robert Keohane did in 1993, that constructivism "remains more an expression of understandable frustration than a working research program."[5] In addition, I explicate the philosophical bases informing this empirical work, showing how and why they differ from neo-utilitarianism. Third, I identify the common features of all constructivist approaches to the study of international relations and those that differentiate among the main variants. I conclude with a brief discussion of paradigmatic (ir)reconcilability between social constructivism and neo-utilitarianism, not to assert the primacy of the former, but to argue that the theoretical repertoire of our field must include it if we are to have a fuller understanding of the real world of international relations.

The Classical Roots

If neorealism and neoliberal institutionalism are contemporary theoretical branches that continue to draw sustenance from utilitarianism's nineteenth century roots, social constructivism in international relations today remains indebted to Durkheim and even more so to Weber.

Durkheim is perhaps best known to students of international relations as a result of being invoked by Kenneth Waltz to buttress his claim that the international system shapes and constrains the relations among its units.[6] Durkheim did propound such a perspective. But one would not know from Waltz's references that Durkheim's primary research concern was with moral phenomena in society. In his major empirical studies, Durkheim sought to demonstrate how a variety of social outcomes, ranging from patterns of social cooperation to individual feelings of anomie and differential suicide rates were influenced by the different interpersonal bonds of social order that are embodied within the reference groups to which individuals belong, from the family on up to society as a whole. Thus, in *Suicide* he attributed its lower incidence among Catholics to the fact that the practice of their faith makes more extensive use of integrative rituals within a stronger and more hierarchical moral community than does Protestantism.[7]

Durkheim's concern with moral phenomena is as interesting for our purposes as his attributing causality to forms of sociality. For it meant that he had to come to grips with two issues: the role of ideational factors in social life and how ideas, which can exist only in individuals' heads, become socially causative. On both issues, Durkheim differentiated himself from the utilitarians, on the one hand, and transcendentalists, on the other.

With regard to ideational factors, Durkheim wrote, "A third school is being born which is trying to explain [mental phenomena] without destroying their specificity."[8]

5. Goldstein and Keohane 1993a, 6.
6. Waltz 1979, 104, 115n, 121, 197.
7. Durkheim 1951.
8. Durkheim [1911] 1953b, 32.

For the Kantians and idealists, he stated, "mental life certainly had a nature of its own, but it was one that lifted the mental out of the world and above the ordinary methods of science."[9] For the utilitarians, on the other hand, mental life "was nothing in itself, and the role of the scientist was to pierce the superficial stratum in order to arrive at the underlying realities."[10] The third school, which he advocated, aimed to bring "the faculty of ideation . . . in its various forms into the sphere of nature, with its distinctive attributes unimpaired."[11] In short, Durkheim held that ideational factors have their own specificity and integrity as a result of which they cannot be reduced to other factors. But, at the same time, these ideational factors are no less "natural" than material reality and, therefore, are as susceptible to normal scientific modes of inquiry.

Durkheim's position on how ideas, of which individuals are carriers, come to express a social force is derived from his understanding of the nature of social order generally. Here, too, he differentiated himself vigorously from utilitarianism. If societies were based on its atomistic premises, he rebutted Herbert Spencer, "we could with justice doubt their stability."[12] And to the instrumental, contractarian view of social relations that Spencer represented he retorted, "Wherever a contract exists" it rests on "regulation which is the work of society and not that of individuals."[13]

But Durkheim also rejected organic conceptions of society and other forms of "substantial social realism," to use Ernest Wallwork's term,[14] notably that of Auguste Comte. Instead, Durkheim adopted what Wallwork describes as a "relational social realism," in which social facts are constituted by the combination of individual facts through social interaction. As Durkheim put it in an oft-cited formulation, "Whenever certain elements combine and thereby produce, by the fact of their combination, new phenomena, it is plain that these new phenomena reside not in the original elements but in the totality formed by their union."[15] Among the elements so transformed to become "social facts" are linguistic practices, religious beliefs, moral norms, and similar ideational factors. Once constituted as social facts, these ideational factors in turn influence subsequent social behavior.

Contemporary social constructivists in international relations remain indebted to Durkheim for his concept of social facts, the centrality of social ideas and beliefs *("la conscience collective")* in them, and for an ontology that steered clear of both individualism and transcendentalism. But Durkheim did not actually study the concrete processes whereby individual elements, including ideas, are transformed to become social facts. Instead, he inferred them from the forms of social expression *("représentations collective")* that he believed to be their products, ranging from liturgical practices to legal codes and similar expressions of civic morals. In other words,

9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Durkheim [1898] 1953a, 96.
12. Durkheim [1893] 1933, 203.
13. Ibid., 211.
14. Wallwork 1972, 16–26. On relational ontologies, also see Gilligan 1993.
15. Durkheim [1895] 1938, xlvii.

Durkheim "solved" a key methodological problem by means that are roughly analogous to stipulating "revealed preferences"—a problematic maneuver. However, doing so permitted him to use "objective" indicators and to adhere to positivist epistemological practices, which he believed necessary for establishing the scientific legitimacy of sociology. Weber's influence on social constructivism remains the greater for having tried to work this problem through.

Like Durkheim, Weber found himself amid disciplinary conflicts.[16] And, like Durkheim, Weber sought to avoid the pitfalls of the prevailing alternatives. The major methodological opposition he confronted was between the subjectivism of the German Historical School and the positivism of the Austrian Theoretical School (marginal utility theory) and Marxism. Although the latter two differed in many respects, both sought to reduce problems of social action and social order to material interests, and both embraced a naturalistic monism—that is, the belief that the natural sciences embody the only valid model of science to which the social sciences should, therefore, aspire.

Weber believed strongly in the possibility of a social science. But to be valid it had to give expression to the distinctive attributes of social action and social order, namely, the human capacity and will "to take a deliberate attitude towards the world and to lend it *significance*."[17] Thus, the task of interpreting the significance that social actors attribute to actions and the shared meanings that make that attribution possible fundamentally differentiates the social and natural sciences. Weber's major methodological innovations followed from this premise.

The natural and social sciences both use concepts, and both seek causal knowledge, according to Weber. But they use different kinds of concepts, and the way in which concepts are ordered to provide explanations differ. Natural science aims at the general, seeks to establish universally valid laws, and identifies individual events as types to be subsumed under those laws. Its concepts are constructed accordingly, to facilitate generalizability. But in the study of social behavior, concepts in the first instance must aid in uncovering the meaning of specific actions and in demonstrating their social significance. That is to say, they must be capable of grasping the distinctiveness of the particular. In Weber's words, "We wish to understand on the one hand the relationships and the cultural significance of individual events in their contemporary manifestations and on the other the causes of their being historically *so* and not *otherwise*."[18]

Meaning and significance are, of course, ideational phenomena, so the role of ideas is central to Weber's social science. He included not only their instrumental but also normative roles. "One thing is certain," he wrote, namely, "the broader [the] cultural significance [of a social phenomenon], the greater the role played [in it] by value-ideas."[19] Hence, when social scientists set out to attribute meaning to actions,

16. See Schluchter 1989, chap. 1. See also Ringer 1997; I became aware of this excellent study too late to incorporate it fully into this article.
17. Weber 1949, 81, emphases in original.
18. Ibid., 72, emphases in original.
19. Ibid., 56.

they must concern themselves with not merely the instrumental rationality of the means actors select but also the normative self-understanding of the ends held by the social groups in question. This premise implied, according to Wolfgang Schluchter, that Weber "had to go beyond the concept of utility."[20]

Weber proposed to uncover social meanings and significance by means of an analytic method he termed *Verstehen,* or, loosely, "understanding."[21] Somewhat simplified for our purposes here, Weber took this method to comprise three steps. The first is to discern a "direct" or an "empathetic" understanding of whatever act is being performed, from the vantage point of the actor. The second is to devise an "explanatory understanding" of that act by locating it in some set of social practices recognized as such by the relevant social collectivity—or identifying, as Searle puts it, what the act "counts as" within the intersubjective frameworks held by that collectivity.[22] The third is to unify these individualized experiences into a broader set of objectively valid truth statements or explanations—of "objectivating" *Verstehen,* as Schluchter depicts it.[23]

Weber accomplished this last task by a combination of probabilistic and counterfactual reasoning coupled with the use of ideal types. He described ideal types as "a conceptual construct which is neither historical reality nor even the 'true' [i.e., some underlying] reality. It is even less fitted to serve as a schema under which a real situation or action is to be subsumed as one *instance*. It [is] a purely ideal *limiting* concept with which the real situation or action is *compared* and surveyed for the explication of certain of its significant components."[24] Among the best-known ideal types devised by Weber are traditional, charismatic, and rational-legal forms of authority, the "modern Occidental type" of persons, and their distinctive institutions, including capitalism, bureaucracy, and the modern state.

In constructing his own causal explanations—whether of the impact of the distinctive spirit of Protestant asceticism on the rise of capitalism, or the growing pervasiveness in the West of a certain form of rationality and its positive as well as negative consequences for social order—Weber linked together multiple ideal types. Moreover, for analytical purposes, Weber had no objection to sequencing ideal types (for example, his concepts of authority). Lastly, he even accepted marginal utility theory (a precursor of rational choice theory) as an ideal type, defending it on that basis against claims that it needed a more robust psychological foundation.[25] But Weber warned that ideal types must not be confused either with social reality or (even in developmental sequences or axiomatic formulations) with causal explanation. They are selective and deliberately one-sided abstractions from social reality, and their methodological role is to serve as "heuristic" devices in the "imputation" of causal-

20. Schluchter 1989, 9.
21. For a summary with international relations examples, see Hollis and Smith 1990, 78–82.
22. Searle 1995, chap. 2.
23. Schluchter 1989, 19, according to whom Weber here built in part on Georg Simmel.
24. Weber 1949, 93, emphasis in original.
25. Weber 1975. I thank Guenther Roth for this reference.

ity[26]—for example, by helping to pinpoint differences between the logic of the ideal type and patterns of outcomes on the ground.

Actual causal knowledge of social action and social order, Weber insisted, remains concrete and is anchored in meaning, showing why things are historically *so* and not *otherwise*. The purpose of the various analytical tools that Weber used, then, was not to subsume specific social actions or events under putative deductive laws, of which he believed few existed, but to establish links between them and concrete antecedents that most plausibly had causal relevance within the social collectivity at hand. Though Weber gave it no name, today we would call his a "narrative explanatory protocol," in contrast to the deductive-nomological model that is favored by all forms of naturalistic monism, including neo-utilitarianism.[27]

It is not my aim to vindicate Durkheim or Weber, nor to suggest that social constructivists in international relations today directly apply or copy their insights or methods. It is their theoretical objectives that are of interest, and what they thought they had to do in order to achieve them, because these efforts illuminate the contemporary constructivist project. Both Durkheim and Weber held that the critical ties that connect, bond, and bind individuals within social collectivities are shared ideational ties, and they sought to establish these factors by rigorous social scientific means. In doing so, both rejected utilitarianism on the grounds of its methodological individualism and because it failed to encompass normative self-understandings of the ends of social action—without which, they believed, instrumental rationality was devoid of meaning.

For our purposes, the major difference between them is that Durkheim inferred ideational social facts from "objective" indicators represented by their institutionalized forms of expression and thereby was able to remain within a conventional positivist epistemological framework. In contrast, Weber explored actual processes whereby certain ideas had become social forces, as a result of which he felt the need to depart from several positivist precepts, in particular the influence of its naturalistic monism on concept formation, the study of meaning, and the character of causal explanation.

Searle is surely correct when he states that we—meaning contemporary social constructivists—"are much in debt to the great philosopher-sociologists of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—one thinks especially of Weber, Simmel, and Durkheim." Nevertheless, he adds, "they were not in a position to answer the questions that puzzle [us] because they did not have the necessary tools. That is, through no fault of their own, they lacked an adequate theory of speech acts, of performatives, of intentionality, of collective intentionality, or rule-governed behavior. . . ."[28] With these newer analytical tools in hand, and based on the classical foundations, what are the main features of constructivism in international relations today?

26. Weber 1949, 90, 103.

27. For a fuller discussion of narrative explanatory protocols, see Ruggie 1998, chap. 3. Mainstream international relations theorizing is utterly confused on this point. Virtually no theoretical account in our field meets the formal criteria of the deductive-nomological model, and when challenged most theorists readily admit that fact. Yet so strong is the ideal of naturalistic monism that general methodological discussions and teachings systematically ignore actual practice and hold up the deductive-nomological model as the only valid model.

The Emergence of Social Constructivism

Neorealism and neoliberal institutionalism are drawn directly from microeconomics. Although social constructivism in international relations is strongly influenced by the sociological tradition, as we have just seen, no corresponding theory exists elsewhere for it simply to import. Consequently, it has had to be a relatively homegrown and heterodox theoretical creation. Among its antecedents, neofunctionalism embodied elements that we now recognize to be social constructivist in character, but it did so largely unconsciously.[29] And the so-called English school anticipated constructivist concerns, but one of its major aims was to resist the influence of American social scientific modes of analysis and less to firm up its own theoretical basis.[30] The actual label of social constructivism may not have been affixed to or by any international relations scholar prior to 1989, when it was featured in an analytical study by Nicholas Onuf[31]—although Anthony Giddens's closely related term, "structuration theory," was in use earlier, and Giddens's work profoundly affected the emerging constructivist project.[32]

Beginning at the margins of the field, scholarly interest in the social constructivist approach has grown steadily as certain analytical and empirical limitations of conventional theories have become better understood, most emphatically after their neoutilitarian turn. The constructivist project has sought to open up the relatively narrow theoretical confines of the field—by pushing them back to problematize the interests and identities of actors; deeper to incorporate the intersubjective bases of social action and social order; and into the dimensions of space and time to establish the "duality" of structure, in Giddens's terms, at once constraining social action but also being (re)created and, therefore, potentially transformed by it. I briefly summarize these efforts.

Interests and Identities

Neorealism and neoliberal institutionalism treat the identity and interests of actors as exogenous and given. Some neorealists claim to "derive" state interests from the condition of anarchy but, as Helen Milner has argued persuasively, anarchy is an

28. Searle 1995, xii.

29. See, for example, Haas 1958, 1961, 1964a.

30. See Butterfield and Wight 1968; James 1973; Wight 1977; Bull 1977; Bull and Watson 1984; and Watson 1992. Good surveys may be found in Buzan 1993; and Little 1995.

31. Onuf 1989.

32. Giddens 1979, 1981. For discussions in the context of international relations theory, see Ruggie 1983a; Dessler 1989; and Wendt 1987.

exceedingly slippery concept, and the propositions one can derive from it are almost entirely indeterminate.[33] Hence, interests are, in fact, handled by assumption, notwithstanding claims to the contrary. The power and elegance of the neo-utilitarian model rests on this point of departure. But so, too, do some of its limitations.

First, neo-utilitarianism provides no answer to the core foundational question: how the constituent actors—in international relations, territorial states—came to acquire their current identity and the interests that are assumed to go along with it. Similarly, any potential future change in this identity and in corresponding interests is beyond the scope of the theory. States and the system of states simply *are*: endowed with the ontological status of being, but not of becoming, to borrow a phrase from Nobel laureate Ilya Prigogine.[34] Addressing these foundational issues requires the concept of constitutive rules, which I take up in a subsequent section.

Second, not only does neo-utilitarianism have no analytical means for dealing with the generic identities and interests of states *qua* states, it also excludes consideration of how specific identities of specific states shape their interests and, thereby, patterns of international outcomes. This is true even of treatments of the United States—the century's central great power and yet so atypical in its advantageous geopolitical position and internal political and ethnic makeup. I have indicated elsewhere how the postwar international order would have differed if the Soviet Union or Nazi Germany had ended up as its hegemon instead of the United States; indeed, important things would have differed if Britain had become the leading power. Thus, contra neorealism, I argued that *American* hegemony was every bit as important as American *hegemony* in shaping the postwar order.[35] And, contra neoliberal institutionalism, I noted that America's choice of the specific features of the postwar institutional frameworks—be it the United Nations, indivisible security commitments in NATO, or nondiscriminatory norms in trade and monetary relations—cannot be rendered accurately merely in terms of marginal utility but also reflected America's sense of self as a nation.

What is more, the identity of the same state can change and pull its interests along. Thus, Thomas Berger argues that Germany and Japan today differ significantly from their pre–World War II predecessors. Antimilitarism, he maintains, has become integral to their sense of self as nations and is embedded in domestic norms and institutions.[36] Peter Katzenstein makes a similar case for the police and military in postwar Japan and Germany.[37] Robert Herman explains the Gorbachev revolution in the Soviet Union and its international aftermath in terms of an identity shift leading to a radical recalibration of interests.[38] It may be true that constraints and opportunities led initially to changes in behavior, but in all three cases, the authors contend, a transformation of identity has taken place. Although it is possible that these changes

33. Milner 1991.
34. Prigogine 1980.
35. Ruggie 1992, 1997b.
36. Berger 1996.
37. Katzenstein 1996a,c.
38. Herman 1996.

are not irreversible, Katzenstein in particular identifies the specific normative and institutional practices in Japan and Germany that any move toward a reversal would have to contend with and overcome.

Third, there is growing empirical evidence that normative factors in addition to states' identities shape their interests, or their behavior, directly, which neo-utilitarianism does not encompass. Some of these factors are international in origin, others domestic.

On the international side, the literature that Martha Finnemore depicts as "sociological institutionalism" has documented successive waves in the diffusion of identical cultural norms to developing countries, which differ radically among themselves in their specific circumstances but which come to express identical preferences for policies and institutional arrangements.[39] The norms diffused are those of rationalized bureaucratic structures and, more generally, standards of what it means to be a modern state. Finnemore has extended this research to include the emergence of norms among the core countries, such as the Geneva conventions on warfare and the evolution of humanitarian intervention.[40] Others have addressed normative taboos on the use of chemical weapons[41] and nuclear weapons.[42] In a completely different (and far more robust institutional context), the European Court of Justice has been shown to shape domestic legal practices within the member states of the European Union.[43] Each of these studies specifies logics that depart significantly from neo-utilitarianism, even as they fully appreciate that power and interests are deeply implicated.

On the domestic side, Elizabeth Kier and Alistair Johnston raise serious questions about neo-utilitarian renderings of the origins of strategic cultures and military doctrines, contending that—at least in the cases of France and China, respectively—they are not simply functionally determined either by external or internal factors, but reflect broader cultural and political forces.[44]

In a frequently cited remark, Waltz has stated that his theory does not pretend to explain everything, but what it does explain is important.[45] He is right on both counts. But the subjects addressed in the studies noted here (and others like them) are hardly unimportant either. Indeed, all are important for precisely those dependent variables that Waltz's theory claims to explain. The same point also holds, correspondingly, for neoliberal institutionalism. More empirical work in the social constructivist vein is necessary, and the origins of identities and other normative factors need to be better theorized. But it is not an undue stretch to conclude, even at this point, that neo-utilitarianism's assumptions that the identities and interests of states are exogenous and given (in contrast to being treated as endogenous and socially constructed) pose potentially serious distortions and omissions, even as they provide the basis on which neo-utilitarianism's theoretical payoff rests.

39. Finnemore 1996b.
40. Finnemore 1996a,c.
41. Price 1995.
42. Price and Tannenwald 1996.
43. Burley and Mattli 1993.
44. See Kier 1996 and 1997; and Johnston 1995a and 1996.
45. Waltz 1986, 329.

Ideational Causation

Neo-utilitarianism has a narrowly circumscribed view of the role of ideas in social life. But because neorealism and neoliberal institutionalism differ somewhat in this respect, I discuss them separately.

Waltz's neorealist model is physicalist in character. Hence, ideational factors make only cameo appearances in it. Take his reference to the recurrent normative element in U.S. foreign policy: "England claimed to bear the white man's burden; France spoke of her *mission civilisatrice*. In like spirit, we [the United States] say that we act to make and maintain world order. . . . For countries at the top, this is predictable behavior."[46] It is Waltz's *sole* reference to the role of norms. Ideational factors enter the picture again briefly in the form of socialization, one of the mechanisms by which states, according to Waltz, learn to conform to the dictates of the system.[47] Numerous critics have been puzzled by the presence of socialization in a physicalist model that disclaims any sociality on the part of its actors. But perhaps even more serious is the fact that Waltz, in this instance as elsewhere in his *Theory,* turns what is supposed to be a methodological principle into an ontological one: Waltz has *actual states* becoming socialized to *his model* of the international system, not to the more variegated world of actual international relations.[48]

Other neorealists have modestly modified Waltz's model. Krasner has explored the role of ideology in North–South economic negotiations,[49] and more recently he has made reference to states'"ideational interests."[50] But neither factor has been fully squared with his enduring neorealist premises. Following the collapse of the Soviet system, several neorealists discovered nationalism, which was previously black-boxed into domestic factors, said to have no role in systemic theory.[51] However, as Yosef Lapid and Friedrich Kratochwil note, neorealists' interest in nationalism is largely limited to its role as a source of conflict or in affecting the capability of existing or would-be states to wage conflicts, thus "making it difficult to conceive of a nontautological relationship between 'nation' and 'state'."[52]

Finally, Katzenstein has pointed out that neorealists who seek to add greater determinative content to the predictions of Waltz's sparse model often do so by importing into it unacknowledged ideational factors, such as the role of culture as an instrument of social mobilization or in generating threat perceptions.[53]

Generally speaking, neoliberal institutionalism also assigns a limited causal role to ideational factors. In strictly rationalist explanations, Goldstein and Keohane observe, "ideas are unimportant or epiphenomenal either because agents correctly anticipate the results of their actions or because some selective process ensures that only agents who behave as if they were rational succeed."[54] Goldstein and Keohane believe otherwise, however, and present a framework for analyzing the impact of ideas on policy outcomes. It serves as a useful point of reference for our discussion because, even though the framework is posed as a challenge to both neo-utilitarianism and social constructivism, Goldstein and Keohane are quickly drawn back into the neo-utilitarian fold.

46. Waltz 1979, 200.
47. Ibid., 127.
48. For a discussion of the confusion between ontological and methodological principles in Waltz, see Ruggie 1983a.
49. Krasner 1978.
50. Krasner 1997, 3.
51. See Mearsheimer 1990; and Posen 1993a,b.
52. Lapid and Kratochwil 1996, 113.
53. Katzenstein 1996b, 26–27.

One part of the framework consists of three causal pathways for ideas to influence policy outcomes.[55] The first is by serving as "road maps," a role that "derives from the need of individuals to determine their own preferences or to understand the causal relationship between their goals and alternative political strategies by which to reach those goals." The second is as "focal points" in strategic situations of multiple equilibria, that is, several equally "efficient" outcomes. Here, ideas can help individuals select one from among the set of viable outcomes. The third causal pathway is through "institutionalization," whereby ideas, once they have become encrusted in institutions, continue to "specify policy in the absence of innovation."

Goldstein and Keohane also define three types of ideas that may do these things.[56] One they call "world views," which are "entwined with people's conceptions of their identities, evoking deep emotions and loyalties." Another is "principled beliefs," which "specify criteria for distinguishing right from wrong and just from unjust." The last is "causal beliefs," that is, beliefs about cause–effect relations, derived from the shared consensus of recognized authorities.

The framework holds promise, but the pull of neo-utilitarian precepts is stronger. Most significantly, what Goldstein and Keohane call world views are disposed of circumstantially: "Since all the subjects discussed in this volume [of which theirs is the introductory essay] have been profoundly affected by modern Western world views, and our authors all share this modernist outlook, we can say relatively little about the impact of broad world views on politics."[57] Set aside, thereby, are state identities and corresponding interests—the heart of the social constructivist project. Left unexplored, thereby, are ideas of the sort that John F. Kennedy had in mind when he honored Jean Monnet by saying: "you are transforming Europe by a constructive idea."[58] Nor is it clear where ideologies fit in, not merely those for which an instrumental rationalization can be claimed, like the resurgence of neo-laissez faire, but others, such as the American sense of exceptionalism,[59] Nazi doctrines of racial superiority, or Mao's Cultural Revolution.

But what of principled and causal beliefs? Do they not fare better? From a social constructivist vantage, not much. For the individuals featured in the Goldstein–Keohane story are not born into any system of social relationships that helps shape

54. Goldstein and Keohane 1993a, 4.
55. Ibid., 12–17.
56. Ibid., 8–10.
57. Ibid., 9.
58. Duchene 1994, 6.
59. See Lipset 1996; and Ruggie 1997b.

who they become. When we first encounter them, they are already fully constituted and poised in a problem-solving mode. As a result, neither principled beliefs nor ideas as road maps are intended to tell us much about those individuals, only about how they go about their business. By a process of elimination, then, the heavy lifting in the Goldstein–Keohane scheme ends up being done by principled and causal beliefs functioning as focal points in multiple equilibria situations and as sunk costs embedded in institutions—both fully consistent with neo-utilitarian precepts.

What is the social constructivist contribution to the ideational research program? Social constructivists have sought to understand the full array of roles that ideas play in world politics, rather than specifying a priori roles based on theoretical presuppositions and then testing for those specified roles, as neo-utilitarians do. Because there is no received theory of the social construction of international reality, constructivists have gone about their work partly in somewhat of a barefoot empiricist manner and partly by means of conceptual analysis and thick description. To briefly map constructivist research on ideational factors, I begin by using Goldstein and Keohane's own typology and then push beyond it.

As noted, a core constructivist research concern is what happens *before* the neo-utilitarian model kicks in. Accordingly, what Goldstein and Keohane call "world views" are of great interest: civilizational constructs, cultural factors, state identities, and the like, together with how they shape states' interests and patterns of international outcomes. I identified some of the empirical work on these subjects earlier. In addition, such world views include changing forms of nationalism in its constitutive and transformative roles, as Ernst Haas has studied it extensively, not merely as adjuncts to states and their power.[60] They include the globalization of market rationality and its effects, which has been of particular interest to constructivists who work in the tradition of Antonio Gramsci,[61] Karl Polanyi,[62] as well as the sociological institutionalists. And they include emerging bonds of "we-feeling" among nations, such as appear to have taken effect within the transatlantic security community—much as Karl Deutsch predicted forty years ago[63]—and, of course, in the European Union.

Constructivist empirical studies documenting the impact of principled beliefs on patterns of international outcomes include, among other subjects, decolonization,[64] international support for the termination of apartheid,[65] the growing significance of human rights,[66] the role of multilateral norms in stabilizing the consequences of rapid international change,[67] as well as the already-mentioned studies on increasingly nondiscriminatory humanitarian interventions and the emergence of weapons taboos.

60. Haas 1986 and 1997.
61. Gill 1995.
62. Ruggie 1995b.
63. Deutsch et al. 1957. For a useful update of Deutsch's concept of security communities, see Adler and Barnett 1996. For its application to the issue of NATO expansion, see Ruggie 1997a.
64. Jackson 1993.
65. Klotz 1995b.
66. See Forsythe 1991; and Sikkink 1993a.
67. Ruggie 1992.

The most important feature differentiating constructivist from other readings of these and similar phenomena is that they make the case that principled beliefs are not simply "theoretical fillers," to use Mark Blyth's apt term, employed to shore up instrumentalist accounts, but that in certain circumstances they lead states to redefine their interests or even their sense of self.[68]

One major route for constructivist explorations of the impact of causal beliefs has been through the roles played by transnational networks of knowledge-based experts, or "epistemic communities."[69] Here, the empirical research seeks to relate the impact of the shared beliefs held by such communities on resolving particular policy problems, such as ozone depletion;[70] specifying operational content to general and sometimes ambivalent state interests, as at Bretton Woods;[71] and helping to redefine states' interests, including in the case of the antiballistic missile treaty[72] as well as the Mediterranean pollution control regime.[73] Disentangling strictly ideational from institutional impacts is difficult in practice, but that problem is not unique to the epistemic community literature.[74]

The further up one climbs on this ideational impact ladder, the more is learning said to come into play.[75] At the upper rungs, learning no longer means adapting to constraints, imitating the successful, or undertaking bounded search processes until a viable solution is identified—its typical meaning in conventional theories. It progressively becomes second-order learning—or what Ernst Haas and his associates have termed "evolutionary epistemology."[76] This refers to the process whereby actors alter not only how they deal with particular policy problems but also their prevailing concept of problem solving, including in the direction of adopting what neo-utilitarians would describe as interdependent utility functions. That possibility takes us well beyond the Goldstein–Keohane typology.

Learning of this sort entails forms of communicative dynamics that are absent from neo-utilitarianism. Theoretical analysis along these lines is most advanced among German international relations scholars, more influenced by the work of Jürgen Habermas than their American counterparts.[77] One of the central questions they have posed is the extent to which Habermas' theory of communicative action can be reconciled with rational choice theory and neo-utilitarianism more generally.[78] The consensus is that to accommodate communicative action, including acts of deliberation and per-

68. Blyth 1997.
69. The concept of epistemic communities was introduced by Ruggie 1975; and productively elaborated by Haas 1992a.
70. See Haas 1992b; and Litfin 1994.
71. Ikenberry 1992.
72. Adler 1992.
73. P. Haas 1990.
74. See Yee 1996; and Blyth 1997.
75. For the most extensive discussion, see E. Haas 1990.
76. This perspective draws on the work of Toulmin 1972; and Campbell 1987. See E. Haas 1983, 1990; Adler 1991, 1992; and Adler and Haas 1992.
77. Habermas 1979, 1984, 1987.
78. See the debates in Müller 1994; Keck 1995; Risse-Kappen 1995a; Schmalz-Bruns 1995; and Müller 1995. Also consult Kratochwil 1989; and Alker 1990 and 1996.

suasion, one must devise a conception of actors who are not only strategically but also discursively competent, a feat that is unlikely to be achieved, at least within currently available neo-utilitarian formulations.[79]

A final major difference between social constructivism and neo-utilitarianism on the issue of ideational causation concerns how "causation" itself is understood. Some ideational factors simply do not function causally in the same way as brute facts or the agentive role that neo-utilitarianism attributes to interests. As a result, the efficacy of such ideational factors is easily underestimated. The role of aspirations is one instance, the impact of legitimacy is another, and the power of rights a third. This is too complex a problem to be fully explored here.[80] Suffice it to say that these factors fall into the category of *reasons for actions,* which are not the same as *causes of actions*. Thus, the *aspiration* for a united Europe has not *caused* European integration as such, but it is the *reason* the causal factors (which presumably include bipolarity and economic interests) have had their specific effect—in Weber's words, produced an outcome that is historically *so* and not *otherwise*. Absent those "reasons," however, and the same "causes" would not have the same causal capacity.[81]

Collective Intentionality

When all is said and done, the critical differences between the social constructivist and neo-utilitarian ideational research programs does not lie in empirical issues of the sort we have been looking at, as important as they are. They have to do with more fundamental, even philosophical, issues.

One such issue concerns the neo-utilitarian misspecification of certain kinds of ideas. For example, Goldstein and Keohane define ideas exclusively as "beliefs held by individuals."[82] It is, of course, true, physiologically speaking, that only individuals can have ideas or beliefs. But the reverse proposition, that all beliefs are individual beliefs or are reducible to individual beliefs, does not follow. It is the product of the methodological individualism on which neo-utilitarianism rests. Social constructivism, in contrast, also deals in the realm of "intersubjective beliefs," which cannot be reduced to the form "I believe that you believe that I believe," and so on. They are social facts and rest on what Searle calls "collective intentionality."[83] Searle stresses that the concept of collective intentionality does not require "the idea that there exists some Hegelian world spirit, a collective consciousness, or something equally implausible."[84] Why not? Because the intentionality remains in individual

79. Keohane seems to be entertaining moves in a similar direction, if I correctly understand his remarks on the desirability of a supplementary "extra-rationalistic research program." He specifically mentions wanting to accommodate acts of persuasion, for which, he notes, there is no need within the logic of what he calls "intra-rationalistic analysis." Keohane 1996b.
80. See Kratochwil 1989; and Ruggie 1998, chap. 3.
81. On the concept of causal capacity, see Yee 1996.
82. Goldstein and Keohane 1993a, 3.
83. Searle 1995, 24–25.
84. Searle 1995, 25.

heads. But within those individual heads it exists in the form of "we intend," and "I intend only as part of our intending."[85]

Constructivists have explored the impact of collective intentionality, so understood, at several levels in the international polity. At the deepest is the question of who counts as a constitutive unit of the international system. The mutual recognition of sovereignty, I have argued elsewhere, is a precondition for the normal functioning of a system of sovereign states.[86] Sovereignty, like money or property rights, exists only within a framework of shared meaning that recognizes it to be valid—that is, by virtue of collective intentionality. But its impact is not limited to a one-time designation, "you are in this game, and you are out." Over time, sovereignty has affected patterns of conflict between sovereign states and other types of political formations.[87] And it empowers and provides resources to some states irrespective of how dysfunctional they may be, states that might not survive except for such external recognition.[88] Though this is not the place to pursue the issue, constructivists also tend to believe, as a working hypothesis, that insofar as sovereignty is a matter of collective intentionality, in the final analysis, so, too, is its future.

In addition to this constitutive role, collective intentionality also has a deontic function within the system of states—that is, it creates new rights and responsibilities. The process that Inis Claude called collective legitimation includes an entire class of such functions that, if anything, has expanded since he wrote his classic article.[89] For example, Finnemore observes that humanitarian intervention is not only becoming more nondiscriminatory, but states are increasingly seeking endorsement by international organizations before undertaking such interventions.[90] Searle, viewing the subject through a philosopher's eyes, finds that human rights are "perhaps the most amazing" instance of creating rights through collective intentionality—amazing because it ascribes rights "solely by virtue of being a human being."[91] Equally amazing, from the vantage of conventional international relations theory, is the fact that it ascribes these rights to individuals vis-à-vis their own states.

At the most routine level, collective intentionality creates meaning. To cite one well-documented instance, the Bretton Woods negotiations and the corresponding efforts to establish an international trade regime produced more than external standards of behavior and rules of conduct in monetary and trade relations. They also established intersubjective frameworks of understanding that included a shared narrative about the conditions that had made the regimes necessary and the objectives they were intended to accomplish and generated a grammar, as it were, on the basis of which states agreed to interpret the appropriateness of future acts that they could not possibly foresee.[92]

85. Ibid., 26.
86. Ruggie 1993.
87. Strang 1991.
88. See Jackson 1990; and Ruggie 1993.
89. Claude 1966.
90. Finnemore 1996c.
91. Searle 1995, 93.
92. The original formulation in these terms was Ruggie 1993b. For an update, see Ruggie 1996b, chap. 5, 6. See also Ikenberry 1992.

Constitutive Rules

Perhaps the most consequential difference between neorealism and neoliberal institutionalism, on the one hand, and social constructivism, on the other, has to do with the distinction between constitutive and regulative rules. The distinction goes back to a seminal article by John Rawls.[93] Searle offers an easier point of entry.

Let us begin with a simple illustration. We can readily imagine the act of driving a car existing prior to the rule that specified "drive on the right(left)-hand side of the road." In an account perfectly consistent with neo-utilitarianism, the rule would have been instituted as a function of increased traffic and growing numbers of fender-benders. Specifying which side of the road to drive on is an example of a regulative rule; as the term implies, it regulates an antecedently existing activity. To this rule were soon added others, such as those requiring licenses, yielding at intersections, imposing speed limits, and forbidding driving while under the influence of alcohol.

Now imagine a quite different situation: playing the game of chess. "It is not the case," Searle notes sardonically, "that there were a lot of people pushing bits of wood around on boards, and in order to prevent them from bumping into each other all the time and creating traffic jams, we had to regulate the activity. Rather, the rules of chess create the very possibility of playing chess. The rules are constitutive of chess in the sense that playing chess is constituted in part by acting in accord with the rules."[94] Regulative rules are intended to have causal effects—getting people to approximate the speed limit, for example. Constitutive rules define the set of practices that make up a particular class of consciously organized social activity—that is to say, they specify *what counts as* that activity.

This basic distinction permits us to identify an utterly profound gap in neo-utilitarianism: it lacks any concept of constitutive rules. Its universe of discourse consists entirely of antecedently existing actors and their behavior, and its project is to explain the character and efficacy of regulative rules in coordinating them. This gap accounts for the fact that, within their theoretical terms, neorealism and neoliberal institutionalism are capable of explaining the origins of virtually nothing that is constitutive of the very possibility of international relations: not territorial states, not systems of states, not any concrete international order, nor the whole host of institutional forms that states use, ranging from the concept of contracts and treaties to multilateral organizing principles. All are assumed to exist already or are misspecified.

Why is this the case, and is it inherent to the enterprise? The reason is not difficult to decipher: neo-utilitarian models of international relations are imported from economics. It is universally acknowledged that the economy is embedded in broader social, political, and legal institutional frameworks that make it possible to conduct economic relations—which are constitutive of economic relations. Modern economic theory does not explain the origins of markets; it takes their existence for granted. The problem arises because, when neo-utilitarian models are imported into other fields, they leave those constitutive frameworks behind.

93. Rawls 1955.
94. Searle 1995, 28.

This problem appears not to matter for some (as yet unspecified) range of political phenomena, domestic and international, which has been explored by means of microeconomic models and the microfoundations of which are now far better understood than before. But there are certain things that these models are incapable of doing. Accounting for constitutive rules—which they were not responsible for in economics—is among the most important.[95]

Nor can this defect be remedied within the neo-utilitarian apparatus. Alexander James Field has demonstrated from within the neoclassical tradition, and Robert Brenner the neo-Marxist, that marginal utility analysis cannot account for the constitutive rules that are required to generate market rationality and markets[96]—an insight that Weber had already established at the turn of the century[97] and Polanyi demonstrated powerfully a half century ago.[98] The terms of a theory cannot explain the conditions necessary for that theory to function, because no theory can explain anything until its necessary preconditions hold. So it is with modern economic theory.

Social constructivists in international relations have not yet managed to devise a theory of constitutive rules, but the phenomenon itself is of central concern to them.[99] Take first the states system. The very concept of the modern state was made possible only when a new rule for differentiating the constituent units within medieval Christendom replaced the constitutive rule of heteronomy (interwoven and overlapping jurisdictions, moral and political). And the modern system of states became conceivable only when the constitutive rule of reciprocal sovereignty took hold.[100]

Moreover, Hedley Bull of the English school has argued that norms regarding promise keeping and contracting are constitutive of order in the international realm no less than the domestic.[101] But the *concept* of promises and the *institution* of contracts must be understood and enjoy legitimacy before there can be any talk of regulative rules designed to deal with problems of cheating on agreements or incomplete contracting. Kratochwil elaborates on these issues fruitfully in an explicitly constructivist vein.[102]

In addition, even as they acknowledge that the specific (as opposed to generic) identities of states are defined primarily internally, constructivists have shown that to some extent such identities are also interactively constituted. Alex Wendt draws on

95. Art Stein points out that economists create property rights in pollution and markets in emissions, for example, and he claims that these are constitutive acts. Art Stein, personal communication with the author, March 1998. But they represent specific instances of creating property rights and markets, whereas the concept of constitutive rules pertains to the class of actions of which they are an instance.
96. See Field 1979, 1981, 1984; and Brenner 1977. The reason the so-called new economic history does such a poor job at retrodicting actual outcomes in the origins of capitalist economies and territorial states stems from its practice of retrojecting actor responses to alleged incentives, which yield those responses only under modern market rationality, into the very differently constituted economies of premodern Europe. See, for example, North and Thomas 1973.
97. Weber 1958b.
98. Polanyi 1944, 1957b.
99. For general theoretical treatments, see Kratochwil 1989; Onuf 1989; and Wendt forthcoming.
100. See Ruggie 1983a, 1993.
101. Bull 1977.
102. Kratochwil 1989.

G. H. Meade's theory of symbolic interactionism to elucidate the process.[103] On the premise that every identity implies a difference, constructivist scholars have also explored the role of "the other"—denigrated, feared, or emulated—in the interactive constitution of identities: Ivar Neumann and Jennifer Welsh on the role of the Ottoman Empire, "the Turk," in consolidating the civilizational construct of Europe;[104] David Campbell on the "old world," the communist menace, as well as various internal "others" in forging America's sense of self;[105] and James Der Derian on the mediating role of diplomacy in sustaining relations among culturally estranged entities.[106]

Lastly, it is necessary to take note of an epistemological point: in some cases, constitutive rules themselves provide the desired explanation. If we are asked to "explain" the game of chess, the appropriate response consists of its constitutive rules. In Searle's simple formulation, constitutive rules are of the type "*X* [a move] counts as *Y* [checkmate] in context *C* [chess]."[107] Because *X* does not temporally precede and is not independent of *Y*, it follows that these are noncausal explanations. (A causal explanation is called for in response to questions like, "why do I keep losing at chess?") Precisely the same holds for "explaining" modern international politics in contrast to the medieval or classical Greek systems: the relevant answer is provided by their respective constitutive rules. Indeed, it also holds for social constructions that are closer to the surface level of the international system, such as the Cold War or the embedded liberalism compromise. The point to note is this: lacking a conception of constitutive rules makes it impossible to provide endogenously the noncausal explanations that constitutive rules embody and that are logically prior to the domain in which causal explanations take effect.[108]

Constitutive rules are the institutional foundation of all social life. No consciously organized realm of human activity is imaginable without them, including international politics—though they may be relatively more "thin" in this than in many other forms of social order. Some constitutive rules, like exclusive territoriality, are so deeply sedimented or reified that actors no longer think of them as rules at all. But their durability remains based in collective intentionality, even if they started with a brute physical act such as seizing a piece of land. The sudden and universally surprising collapse of the Soviet Union's East European empire illuminates vividly what can happen, Searle observes, "when the system of status-functions [assigned by constitutive rules] is no longer accepted"[109]—despite the fact that, in that instance,

103. Wendt 1992.
104. Neumann and Welsh 1991.
105. Campbell 1992.
106. Der Derian 1987.
107. Searle 1995.
108. This argument is not uncontroversial. For example, King, Keohane, and Verba find the whole notion of noncausal explanation "confusing," though the concept is hardly alien to the philosophy of social science. King, Keohane, and Verba 1994, 75. My point would not be compromised if these "accounts" were called something else so long as it is understood that they go well beyond even compound definitions, well beyond even very thick descriptions, and function in a logical domain that precedes the scope of causal relations as we normally understand that term.
109. Searle 1995, 92.

brute force remained *entirely* on the side of the status quo.[110] A similar erosion of collective intentionality, only partly related to shifts in brute force or material interests, was evidenced in the termination of colonialism and of the slave trade before it. Under certain circumstances, it seems, collective intentionality can "will" the rules of the game to change.

Constructivists do not claim to understand the extraordinarily complex processes regarding constitutive rules fully (or even mostly). But neorealists and neoliberal institutionalists lack even a place for them in their ontology. The scope of their theories, as a result, is confined to regulative rules that coordinate behavior in a preconstituted world.

Transformation

In light of the foregoing discussion, it follows almost axiomatically that neoutilitarian models of international relations theory would have little to offer on the subject of systemic transformation: doing so would require them to have some concept of constitutive rules. Waltz's model, I have shown elsewhere, contains only a reproductive logic, but no transformative logic.[111] Neorealists have made some effort to respond by claiming, in essence, that no such logic is necessary. Neoliberal institutionalism has remained relatively silent on the subject.

The neorealist claim that no theory of transformation is necessary takes two forms. One argues that there is no decisive difference between medieval Europe and the modern system of states—the "case" on which this debate has focused—because conflict groups, striving for advantage, forging alliances, and using force to settle disputes existed in both and were not visibly affected by whatever common norms medieval Christendom may have embodied.[112] This realist historiography and the selection bias on which it rests have been ably challenged.[113] But even if the basic point were correct, it is irrelevant to the issue at hand because the identity of the constituent "conflict groups" was transformed: the personalized and parcelized structure of political authority relations in feudal society collapsed and was replaced by the entirely different institutional form of modern states.

The second neorealist argument is that not enough is happening in the world today to warrant a theory of transformation. This position has been elaborated most extensively by Krasner.[114] Krasner maintains that the "Westphalian baseline"—the Peace of Westphalia (1648), symbolizing the beginning of the modern state system—was never as clear-cut as some analysts have made it out to be, has been compromised from the start by recurrent forces, and with some exceptions (notably the European Union) it remains the rough approximation of the international polity that it has always been. Nevertheless, as Krasner acknowledges when he grapples with the

110. See also Koslowski and Kratochwil 1995.
111. Ruggie 1983a.
112. See Fischer 1992. See also Mearsheimer 1994.
113. Hall and Kratochwil 1993.
114. Krasner 1993, 1995a, 1997.

elusive concept of sovereignty, even the markers of international transformation are badly underspecified and ill-understood in the literature. A deeper theoretical grasp of transformation would go some way toward clarifying its indicators.

Here again, constructivists have not yet managed to devise a fully fledged theoretical formulation. But its general thrust has become evident. It consists of historicizing the concept of structure in international politics: that is to say, rescuing it from being treated as the reified residue left behind by long-ceased historical processes. Doing so involves addressing both macro and micro dimensions of international political life.

Giddens's theory of structuration has been found helpful at the macro level.[115] It expresses what he calls the "duality" of structure: at once constraining human action but also being (re)created by it. "Structural principles," Giddens states, "are principles of organization implicated in those practices most 'deeply' (in time) and 'pervasively' (in space) sedimented into society."[116] To understand system transformation, therefore, requires that the contingent nature of structure, conceived of as social practices situated in time and space, be made transparent.

Temporality plays little role in international relations theorizing, and when it does it denotes little more than "elapsed time." Pushing beyond that everyday meaning without giving way to Heideggerian flights of mysticism is not easy. The *Annales* school of historiography is suggestive, especially the works of Fernard Braudel and Jacques Le Goff.[117] The key, as they make clear, is to understand time not merely as duration but as comprising different temporal forms. Thus, the history of *la longue durée* differs from *l'histoire événementielle* not merely in its longer duration but, more importantly, in its deeper and wider framing of relevant causal factors. The implication for the study of international transformation is this: one is unlikely to fully grasp its potential if time is conceived merely as a succession of increments, rather than as different temporal forms that bring deeper and wider "presents" into view. Structure as constraining residue becomes structure as contingent practice only when it is located in its own "present," even though the sources of its contingency may not be subject to immediate volition.[118]

If structure is brought to life, as it were, through the dimension of time, its effects on social practices are inscribed in space: in the case of the modern international polity, the system of fixed, disjoint, and mutually exclusive territorial formations. But space is not given in nature. It is a social construct that people, somehow, invent. Moreover, space serves not merely as an inert container for the effects of structure. It generates emergent properties of its own—the need for open and secure diplomatic relations across mutually exclusive territorial formations, for example—that may lead states to modify the structural principles that had defined that space—such as the

115. Giddens 1979, 1981. For international relations applications, see Ruggie 1983a; Wendt 1987; and Dessler 1989.
116. Giddens 1981, 55.
117. See Braudel 1980; and Le Goff 1980. See also Koselleck 1985. For elaborations in the context of international relations, see Ruggie 1986, 1989, 1993.
118. See also Koselleck 1985; and Emory and Trist 1973.

invention of the concept of extraterritoriality. Indeed, the "unbundling of territoriality" more generally has been shown to be a fruitful terrain in which to explore the possibility of postmodernity in international politics.[119]

And so the loop closes. The duality of structure is operationalized; it is made time–space contingent. And the possibility of transformation is not foreclosed as an artifact of theoretical presupposition; it remains an open empirical question, as indeed it should be.

Having identified the possibility of system transformation at the macro level, corresponding micro practices that may have transformative effects must be identified and inventoried. Recent examples in a constructivist vein include Saskia Sassen's work on the institutional mechanisms that are reconfiguring global economic geography today, ranging from legal practices and financial instruments to accounting rules and telecommunication standards.[120] Kathryn Sikkink's work on "advocacy networks" similarly exemplifies this genre.[121] So too does a host of studies on the growing role of nongovernmental actors and the emergence of transnational civil society.[122] Finally, even though there is little sign that the modern state is becoming irrelevant in the face of these and other global institutional developments, there is growing evidence that the state is, nevertheless, increasingly playing international roles that involve a degree of collective legitimation that is not traditionally associated with the Westphalian model—most notably in the European Union, but also in certain aspects of economic relations, the environment, and even security policy. In short, having been the political instantiation of single-point perspective, the expression of a single political subjectivity, the modern state may be becoming more of a "multiperspectival" political form.[123]

The Question of Agency

"Men [people] make their own history," Marx wrote in the *Eighteenth Brumaire*, "but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found."[124] The two major international relations theories today, neorealism and neoliberal institutionalism, are mostly about "circumstances" that states "find" in the object world around them and that constrain their behavior. Based on particular renderings of those circumstances (such as polarities for neorealism and instances of market failure for neoliberalism), and by assuming the interests of states to be given and fixed, these theories seek to explain patterns of outcomes. The actors, in the context of these models, merely enact (or fail to) a prior script.

119. For a fuller discussion, see Ruggie 1993; and Kratochwil 1986.
120. Sassen 1996.
121. See Sikkink 1993a; and Keck and Sikkink 1998.
122. See, for example, Wapner 1995.
123. Ruggie 1993.
124. Tucker 1978, 595.

Constructivism, we have seen, is interested as much in the "making" of circumstances, to extend Marx's aphorism, as in their being "found"—without, however, lapsing into subjectivism or idealism. It takes "making" to have at least two meanings: What do people make of their circumstances in the sense of understanding them? And what do they make of them in the sense of acting on whatever understanding they hold? Here, the actors engage in "an active process of interpretation and construction of reality,"[125] as Frank Ninkovich has put it in his study of the domino theory in U.S. foreign policy.

The distinction between finding and making circumstances is especially critical at times of discontinuity such as the world has experienced since 1989. The core foreign policy problem for states then becomes precisely how to redefine their interests and preferences vis-à-vis the international order. It is not surprising that the mainstream theories have been so incoherent in the face of these discontinuities.[126]

For example, NATO features centrally in all "what now?" scenarios concerning European and transatlantic security relations. But highly regarded realists have argued with equal certitude and based on the same core premises that NATO has become irrelevant and is likely to collapse;[127] remains alive by dint of inertia but will wither away sooner rather than later;[128] and is as important as ever and should expand.[129] Neoliberal institutionalists, for their part, have said relatively little systematically about security relations. Concerning NATO, Robert Keohane and Lisa Martin claim that demand for its services remains high, including in Central and Eastern Europe.[130] But the countries that are "functionally" in greatest need of NATO's services (the Baltics, Ukraine, Belarus) are not even in the queue for future membership.

The constructivist approach has received a ringing (though presumably unintended) endorsement from Czech President Václav Havel, whose country has been invited to join NATO: "If we in 'postcommunist countries' call for a new order, if we appeal to the West not to close itself off to us, and if we demand a radical reevaluation of the new situation, then this is not because we are concerned about our own security and stability. . . . We are concerned about the destiny [in our countries] of the values and principles that communism denied, and in whose name we resisted communism and ultimately brought it down."[131] In short, according to Havel, the would-be NATO members are asking for affirmation that they belong to the West—an affirmation of identity *from which* concrete interests and preferences flow.[132]

125. Ninkovich 1994, xv.
126. See Lebow and Risse-Kappen 1995; and Koslowski and Kratochwil 1995.
127. Mearsheimer 1990.
128. Waltz 1993.
129. Henry Kissinger, "Expand NATO Now," *Washington Post,* 19 December 1994, A27.
130. Keohane and Martin 1995.
131. Havel 1994, 4.
132. It may be that Poland and Hungary are more concerned about their security situations, but their actions are not entirely consistent with that view. Well before they were invited to join NATO, both countries shortened the terms of military conscription, and the Polish army (along with the Czech) reduced some divisions and disbanded others; see Brown 1995, 37.

An outright concession by the master practitioner of realist statecraft affirms the same point from a different vantage. Without the Soviet threat, Henry Kissinger concludes ruefully in his book *Diplomacy,* realism by itself cannot suffice to frame U.S. foreign policy. In the new era, a foreign policy strategy based merely on interest calculations is simply too unreliable. Hence, realism, Kissinger contends, must be coupled with a "vision" that provides the American people with a sense of "hope and possibility that are, in their essence, conjectural."[133] To put it plainly, Kissinger now looks for salvation to the "idealism" that he spent his entire career mocking—but which is more properly described as the animating ideas and values that emerge out of America's own sense of self as a nation and which have always framed successful U.S. foreign policy, even during the era of strategic bipolarity. They include the desire to reform the international politics of the "old world" by moving beyond the system of bilateralist alliances, as well as to promote nondiscriminatory economic relations, democracy, and human rights as general milieu goals.[134]

In summary, "making history" in the new era is a matter not merely of defending the national interest but of defining it, nor merely enacting stable preferences but constructing them. These processes are constrained by forces in the object world, and instrumental rationality is ever present. But they also deeply implicate such ideational factors as identities and aspirations as well as leaders seeking to persuade their publics and one another through reasoned discourse while learning, or not, by trial and error. As a result, nothing makes it clearer than the question of agency at times such as ours why the constructivist approach needs to be part of the theoretical tools of the international relations field.

The Social Constructivist Project

Social constructivism in international relations has come into its own during the past decade, not only as a metatheoretical critique but also increasingly in the form of empirical findings and insights. Constructivism addresses many of the same issues that neo-utilitarianism has addressed, though typically from a different angle. But it also concerns itself with issues that neo-utilitarianism treats by assumption, discounts, ignores, or simply cannot apprehend within its ontology and/or epistemology. We are now in a position to specify more systematically the core elements of the constructivist approach. I first summarize the analytical features that are shared by all forms of social constructivism and then those that differentiate them.

Constructivism's Core Features

As noted at the outset, constructivism concerns the issue of human consciousness in international life: the role it plays and the implications for the logic and methods of

133. Kissinger 1994, 835.
134. Ruggie 1997b.

inquiry of taking it seriously. Constructivists hold the view that the building blocks of international reality are ideational as well as material; that ideational factors have normative as well as instrumental dimensions; that they express not only individual but also collective intentionality; and that the meaning and significance of ideational factors are not independent of time and place.

The most distinctive features of constructivism, then, are in the realm of ontology, the real-world phenomena that are posited by any theory and are invoked by its explanations.[135] As summarized in the previous section, at the level of individual actors constructivism seeks, first of all, to problematize the identities and interests of states and to show how they have been socially constructed. Neorealists come close to believing that states' identities and interests are, in fact, given and fixed. For neoliberal institutionalists, this premise is more likely to reflect a convenient assumption, intended to permit their analytical apparatus to function. When neoliberal institutionalists are pressed about the origins of either, however, they turn immediately to domestic politics.[136] Social constructivists, in contrast, argue and have shown that even identities are generated in part by international interaction—both the generic identities of states qua states and their specific identities, as in America's sense of difference from the Old World. Still at the level of individual units, constructivism also seeks to map the full array of additional ideational factors that shape actors' outlooks and behavior, ranging from culture and ideology to aspirations and principled beliefs, onto cause–effect knowledge of specific policy problems.

At the level of the international polity, the concept of structure in social constructivism is suffused with ideational factors. There can be no mutually comprehensible conduct of international relations, constructivists hold, without mutually recognized constitutive rules resting on collective intentionality. These rules may be more or less "thick" or "thin," depending on the issue area or the international grouping at hand. Similarly, they may be constitutive of conflict or cooperation. But in any event, these constitutive rules prestructure the domains of action within which regulative rules take effect. In some instances, collective intentionality includes an interpretive function—as in the case of international regimes, which limit strictly interest-based self-interpretation of appropriate behavior by their members. And in others collective intentionality also includes a deontic function—creating rights and responsibilities in a manner that is not simply determined by the material interests of the dominant power(s). In short, constructivists view international structure to be a social structure—the concept of "relational social realism" that Wallwork uses to describe Durkheim's ontology is apt—made up of socially knowledgeable and discursively competent actors who are subject to constraints that are in part material, in part institutional.

These ontological characteristics have implications for the logic and methods of constructivist inquiry. First, constructivism is not itself a theory of international relations, the way balance-of-power theory is, for example, but a theoretically informed

135. For a good discussion of ontology in the context of international relations theorizing, see Dessler 1989.

136. See, for example, Keohane 1993, 294.

approach to the study of international relations. Moreover, constructivism does not aspire to the hypothetico-deductive mode of theory construction. It is by necessity more "realistic," to use Weber's term, or inductive in orientation. Additionally, its concepts in the first instance are intended to tap into and help interpret the meaning and significance that actors ascribe to the collective situation in which they find themselves. It is unlikely that this function could be performed by concepts that represent a priori types derived from some universalizing theory-sketch or from purely nominal definitions.[137]

Finally, constructivism differs in its explanatory forms. As discussed earlier, for some purposes constitutive rules themselves provide appropriate and adequate, albeit noncausal, explanatory accounts. And in its causal explanations, constructivism adheres to narrative explanatory protocols, not the nomological-deductive (N-D) model prized by naturalistic monism. The N-D model establishes causality by subsuming the explanandum under a covering-law or lawlike generalization—of which there are relatively few valid ones at the level of the international system.[138] Causality in the narrative explanatory form is established through a process of successive interrogative reasoning between explanans and explanandum, anticipated by Weber with his heuristic use of ideal types and called "abduction" by the American pragmatist philosopher Charles Peirce.[139] At least in these respects, then, constructivism is non- or postpositivist in its epistemology.

These epistemological practices of constructivism have not been well received in the mainstream of the discipline. Part of the problem is that the mainstream has become so narrow in its understanding of what constitutes social science that on the dominant conception today Weber might no longer qualify—his approach to concept formation, method of theory construction, and model of explanation all fail to conform to the norm. The other part of the problem is that there are different strands of constructivism in international relations and they differ precisely on epistemological grounds, not surprisingly creating confusion thereby. I briefly summarize the main differences.

Variants of Constructivism

Any distinction ultimately is arbitrary, and so it is with constructivism. There are sociological variants, feminist variants, jurisprudential approaches, genealogical approaches, an emancipatory constructivism and a more strictly interpretive kind. What

137. On the theoretical as well as practical significance of the difference between nominal and principled definitions of multilateralism, see Ruggie 1992.

138. Lawlike generalizations can be established either statistically or by means of randomized experiments or quasi-experimental research designs. The former require reasonably large and robust sets of observational data, whereas the latter require that causal variables be subject to manipulation at least in principle. In the field of international relations, neither condition holds for the international system *as a whole*. How many cases have there been of nuclear bipolarity? Or of any other kind, for that matter? How many hegemons have there been "like" the United States in the twentieth century, or Britain in the nineteenth?

139. Peirce [1940] 1955, 151–52. See also Ruggie 1995c.

matters most for the purposes of this article is their underlying philosophical bases and how they relate to the possibility of a social science. Accordingly, I differentiate among three variants.[140]

I propose to call the first *neo-classical constructivism*—not to strive for parity with the two mainstream "neos" but to indicate that it remains rooted in the classical tradition. The analytical means by which this foundation is updated differs among scholars who work in this genre but typically includes an epistemological affinity with pragmatism; a set of analytical tools necessary to make sense of intersubjective meanings, be it speech act theory, the theory of communicative action, their generalization as in the work of Searle, or evolutionary epistemology; and a commitment to the idea of social science—albeit one more plural and more social than that espoused in the mainstream theories, while recognizing that its insights will be temporary and unstable. I put myself in this category—and also the work of Ernst and Peter Haas, Kratochwil, Onuf, Emanuel Adler, Finnemore, recently Katzenstein, as well as some feminist scholars, such as Jean Elshtain.[141]

A second variant may be termed *postmodernist constructivism*. Here the intellectual roots are more likely to lead back to Friedrich Nietzsche, and any updating to the writings of Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, marking a decisive epistemic break with the precepts and practices of modernism. Richard Ashley first drew the attention of the field to this constructivist genre.[142] Other contributors include Campbell, Der Derian, R. B. J. Walker, and such feminists as Spike Peterson.[143] Here the linguistic construction of subjects is stressed, as a result of which discursive practices constitute the ontological primitives, or the foundational units of reality and analysis. Little hope is held out for a legitimate social science. In its place, a "hegemonic discourse" is seen to impose a "regime of truth," instituted through disciplinary powers in both senses of that term.[144] Lastly, causality is considered chimerical: "I embrace a logic of interpretation that acknowledges the improbability of cataloging, calculating, and specifying the 'real causes'," Campbell proclaims, and which "concerns itself instead with considering the manifest political consequences of adopting one mode of representation over another."[145]

A third constructivist variant is located on the continuum between these two. It combines aspects of both: like the neoclassical variant, it also shares certain features with mainstream theorizing; but it is grounded in the philosophical doctrine of scientific realism, particularly the work of Roy Bhaskar.[146] The writings of Alexander Wendt and David Dessler exemplify this third genre. Scientific realism, according to Wendt, offers the possibility of a wholly new "naturalistic" social science.[147] On its basis, it is no longer necessary to choose between "insider" and "outsider" accounts

140. For a different, less philosophically grounded categorization, see Adler 1997.
141. Elshtain 1987 and 1996. The other authors were cited earlier.
142. Ashley 1984, 1987, 1988.
143. See Campbell 1992; Der Derian 1987; Walker 1989 and 1993; and Peterson and Runyan 1993.
144. Keeley 1990, 91.
145. Campbell 1992, 4.
146. Bhaskar 1979.
147. Wendt 1991, 391.

of social action and social order—not because social science is made to emulate the natural sciences, as it was under the old naturalistic monism, but because there is little difference in their respective ontologies to begin with. Scientific inquiry of both material and social worlds deals largely in nonobservables, be they quarks or international structures, and much of the time even the intersubjective aspects of social life exist independently of the mental states of most individuals that constitute it. I call this *naturalistic constructivism*.

As of yet, little empirical research has been informed by this perspective, so we do not know what difference it makes in practice. On theoretical grounds, the dilemma identified by Martin Hollis and Steve Smith poses a serious challenge: "To preserve naturalism, the scientific realist must either subordinate the interpreted social world to [the] external mechanisms and forces [that govern the physical world] or inject similarly hermeneutic elements into 'outsider' accounts of nature."[148] Bhaskar struggles heroically with this problem, but, Hollis and Smith conclude, "we do not believe that he has settled the matter, nor even that he would claim that honour."[149]

In summary, distinctive attributes differentiate constructivism from mainstream theorizing, especially the neo-utilitarian kind. But significant differences exist among the various strands of constructivism. As a result of the latter, Neufield observes astutely, "the debate within the camp of [constructivists] may prove to be as vigorous as that between [them] and their positivist critics."[150]

Paradigmatic (Ir)Reconcilability

The "great debates" that have swept through the field of international relations over the decades typically have been posed in terms of the alleged superiority of one approach over another. But the fact that these debates recur so regularly offers proof that no approach can sustain claims to monopoly on truth—or even on useful insights. The current encounter between neo-utilitarianism and social constructivism exhibits the additional feature that the strength of each approach is also the source of its major weakness. As a result, the issue of any possible relationship between them must be addressed.

The strength of neo-utilitarianism lies in its axiomatic structure, which permits a degree of analytical rigor, and in neoliberal institutionalism's case also of theoretical specification, that other approaches cannot match. This is not an aesthetic but a practical judgment. Rigor and specificity are desirable on self-evident intellectual as well as policy grounds. At the same time, neo-utilitarianism's major weakness lies in the

148. Hollis and Smith 1991, 407.
149. Ibid. Searle critiques a corresponding attempt by David Chalmers to bridge the brain–mind divide on similar grounds. Searle 1997.
150. Neufield 1993, 40. See, for example, Campbell's comment that Wendt and I "seem to be exhibiting a fear, a (Cartesian) anxiety" in the face of his and other postmodernist challenges, this after taking me to task for my criticism (in 1993) of what I regard as certain fetishist and nihilist tendencies in postmodern constructivism. Campbell 1996, 16–17.

foundations of its axiomatic structure, its ontology, which for some purposes is seriously flawed and leads to an incomplete or distorted view of international reality. That problem is particularly pronounced at a time, such as today, when states are struggling to redefine stable sets of interests and preferences regarding key aspects of the international order.

The obverse is true of constructivism. It rests on a deeper and broader ontology, thereby providing a richer understanding of some phenomena and shedding light on other aspects of international life that, quite literally, do not exist within the neo-utilitarian rendering of the world polity. At the same time, it lacks rigor and specification—indeed, it remains relatively poor at specifying its own scope conditions, the contexts within which its explanatory features can be expected to take effect. Improvements are inevitable as work in the constructivist vein continues to increase in quantity and quality, but given its nature there are inherent limits.

Where do we go from here? Can a systematic relationship between the two approaches be articulated, and if so, how? A sizable number of adherents to each is unlikely to be interested in any such effort. Hard-core rational choice theorists, postmodernist constructivists, and most neorealists will reject out of hand any need to do so. But even coalitions of the willing may find the going tough as they discover the analytical limits beyond which their respective approaches cannot be pushed.

The first instinct of willing neo-utilitarians is to expand their analytical foundation in the direction of greater sociality. For example, Keohane claims that his version of institutionalist theory "embeds it selectively in a larger framework of neoliberal thought," which includes commercial, republican, and sociological liberalism.[151] This provides a richer and more robust social context for neoliberal institutionalism, Keohane believes. He is right up to a point: the point defined by the boundaries of methodological individualism and instrumental rationality. Commercial liberalism poses few problems in this regard, nor does the transnational bureaucratic politics that comprises one aspect of what he calls sociological liberalism. But republican liberalism? It would be enormously surprising if the ties among democratic societies today, especially those in "the West," did not reflect an intersubjective cultural affinity, a sense of we-feeling, a shared belief of belonging to a common historical project, falling well beyond the "selectively" expanded foundation of neoliberalism that Keohane proposes.

Indeed, Keohane himself is obliged to concede that not even the most fundamental attribute of liberalism, that which distinguishes it from all other views on the nature of humanity, justice, and good government, can be accommodated within his version of neoliberalism. He writes, "the emphasis of liberalism on liberty and rights only suggests a general orientation toward the moral evaluation of world politics," but it does not lend itself to the analysis of choice under constraints that he wishes to employ. As a result, he finds it "useful" to put that "emphasis" aside for analytical purposes.[152] All deontic features of social life go with it.

151. Keohane 1993, 289.
152. Keohane 1990b, 174.

In short, a selective expansion of neo-utilitarianism's core is possible. But we should not expect it to carry us far toward a "social"—ideational and relational—ontology.

The first instinct of the willing constructivist is to incorporate norms, identities, and meaning into the study of international relations with minimum disruption to the field's prevailing epistemological stance, on which hopes for analytical rigor and cumulative knowledge are believed to rest. Typically, this takes the form of maintaining that constructivist concerns are a useful tool in the context of discovery, but that at the end of the day they do not affect the logic of explanation.[153] I view the methodological discussions in Katzenstein's important edited volume *The Culture of National Security* as an instance. The essays in that book, Jepperson, Wendt, and Katzenstein insist, neither advance nor depend on "any special methodology or epistemology. . . . When they attempt explanation, they engage in 'normal science,' with its usual desiderata in mind."[154]

Everything hinges, of course, on what is meant by "normal science." On my reading, normal science in international relations cannot grasp truly intersubjective meanings in social collectivities, as opposed to aggregations of meanings held by individual actors; it lacks the possibility that ideational factors relate to social action in the form of constitutive rules; it is exceedingly uncomfortable with the notion of noncausal explanation, which constitutive rules entail; and it doggedly aspires to the deductive-nomological model of causal explanation even though it is rarely achieved in practice, and at the level of the international system probably cannot be,[155] while dismissing the narrative mode as mere storytelling.

The sanguine view of normal science expressed by Katzenstein and his colleagues may have something to do with the fact that, as the self-criticism they include in their volume notes, "the essays that make up the body of this book tend to treat their own core concepts as exogenously given."[156] To underscore the importance of this point, let me relate it back to our earlier discussion of Durkheim and Weber. In a manner reminiscent of Durkheim, Katzenstein and his colleagues cut into the problem of ideational causation at the level of "collective representations" of ideational social facts and then trace the impact of these representations on behavior. They do not, as Weber tried, begin with the actual social construction of meanings and significance

153. For an extended criticism of this line of argument, see Neufield 1993.
154. Jepperson, Wendt, and Katzenstein 1996, 65.
155. Even a philosopher of science so firmly committed to scientific monism as Ernest Nagel conceded long ago that the N-D model is inappropriate in explaining "aggregative events." Nagel [1942] 1961, 568–75. He specifically mentions revolutions as an example: there are too few of them, they are highly complex, and there are bound to be important differences between them, all of which render problematic the necessary condition that they be instances of recurring "types." Nagel suggests that aggregative events and large-scale social structures be "analyzed"—that is, broken down into their component parts or aspects. The parts, Nagel believes, may still be susceptible to covering-law explanations even when the larger whole is not. Waltz rejects this "analytic" method, however, on the grounds that it is reductionist, and he clings to the (inappropriate, according to Nagel) N-D model for the "aggregative" phenomenon of the international system as a whole. Waltz 1979. Neither Nagel nor Waltz entertains the possibility that other explanatory protocols exist to account for such phenomena.
156. Kowert and Legro 1996, 469.

from the ground up. It will be recalled that Durkheim, too, felt no need to move beyond the normal science of his day as a result, whereas Weber did.

Having said all that, I nevertheless conclude with the conviction that both moves can be fruitful. In the hope of gaining at once a deeper and more precise understanding of the structure and functioning of the world polity, neo-utilitarians should strive to expand their analytical foundations, and constructivists should strive for greater analytical rigor and specification. The two approaches are not additive, and they are unlikely to meet and merge on some happy middle ground. But by pushing their respective limits in the direction of the other, we are more likely to discover precisely when one approach subsumes the other, when they represent competing explanations of the same phenomenon, when one complements or supplements the other, and when they simply describe different and incommensurate worlds.[157] The stakes are high enough, and the limits of the two approaches inherent and apparent enough, for claims of universal superiority at this point to be summarily dismissed as pretense or delusion.

157. For an excellent beginning, see Jepperson, Wendt, and Katzenstein 1996, 68–72.