



# ***Constructivist approaches to European integration***

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## Abstract

Constructivist approaches to the study of Europe are trendy. Deliberation, discourses, norms, persuasion, socialization, identity, arguing – such concepts and terms are now frequently invoked in debates over the past and future of the European project. As I argue in this essay, however, constructivism as applied to the European Union (EU) may have come of age too soon. In the rush to bring its insights to bear, important issues have been neglected – including meta-theory (an unclear epistemology), methods (taking the linguistic turn seriously), concepts (power's underspecified role) and theory (domestic politics). For a relatively new research program, such problems are understandable. Indeed, they are not that hard to fix – especially if constructivists overcome their internal divisions, and simultaneously view the EU less as a *sui generis* political order and more as an exciting laboratory for exploring themes of relevance to the broader academic community.

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# I. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The complexities and challenges for a chapter such as this are captured in the very phrase ‘social construction of Europe.’ Should the emphasis be on Europe – thus suggesting the *sui generis* nature of the post-war European project and the special, regional-specific (constructivist) conceptual tools needed to study it? Or, should it be on the words social construction, implying a particular analytic orientation that can be applied across regions – including but not limited to Europe and the EU?

This essay comes down heavily in favour of the latter, as this would seem a natural choice. After all, within political science, constructivism’s origins and two-decade long gestation were within the subfield of international relations, not in EU studies (Adler 2002; see also Haas 2001). The latter in fact only discovered it quite recently (Christiansen, Joergensen, Wiener 2001).

I thus view constructivism as a particular analytic orientation that, in this case, is applied to Europe. This leads me to evaluate the literature under review in a certain way. I am less interested in ascertaining whether we have or are developing a specific constructivist theory of integration – something to compete with intergovernmentalism or neofunctionalism. Indeed, I would argue this is precisely not the development to be encouraged (see also Risse 2004a, 174). Rather, I ask how constructivist insights as applied to Europe are shedding light on issues – the nature of political order, the (re-) construction of identity, the formation of political community – of more general interest.

My bottom line is that constructivists studying Europe and their counterparts elsewhere (mainly located in North America) have much to gain from a more sustained encounter and dialogue. Conventional constructivists need to get serious about meta-theory and power, while interpretative and

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<sup>1</sup> Forthcoming in Knud Erik Joergensen, Mark Pollack, Ben Rosamond, Editors, *Handbook of European Union Politics* (London: Sage Publications, 2006). I thank Knud Erik Joergensen and Mark Pollack for detailed and helpful comments on earlier drafts. Parts of this chapter were previously published in *Review of International Studies* 30 (2004).

critical/radical ones would do well to take more care in operationalizing arguments at the level of methods. As such weaknesses are largely off-setting - where one side is weak the other is strong - they will be more easily addressed to the extent that constructivists overcome their internal divisions. Furthermore, all constructivists will benefit from a more systematic integration of domestic politics into their arguments.

The remainder of this essay is organized as follows. I begin with a discussion of three types of constructivist scholarship - their generic features and how they are being applied to the EU and the study of Europe - highlighting key differences among them. The core of the essay is four sections each using a different prism - epistemology, methods, power, domestic politics - to evaluate constructivist scholarship on Europe. I conclude with a plea for bridge building among different constructivist scholars studying the EU as well as the broader international arena.

## II. Social Constructivisms: Conventional, Interpretative and Critical/Radical

Constructivist approaches to the study of Europe are trendy. Deliberation, discourses, norms, persuasion, identity, socialization, arguing - such concepts are now frequently invoked in debates over the past and future of the European project. To make better sense of such terms - and the very different ways in which they are employed - I distinguish among conventional, interpretative and critical/radical variants of constructivism (Checkel 2004, 230-31; see also Adler 1997; Ruggie 1998; Christiansen, Joergensen, Wiener 2001, 1-21).

Conventional constructivism, which is the school dominant in the US, examines the role of norms and, in fewer cases, identity in shaping international political outcomes. These scholars are positivist in epistemological orientation and strong advocates of bridge building among diverse theoretical perspectives; the qualitative, process-tracing case study is their typical methodological starting point. Institutional and organizational theory (March and Olsen nd; see also

Finnemore 1996b; Trondal 2001), as well as sociology (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998; Barnett and Finnemore 1999, 2004; Wendt 1999) are sources of theoretical inspiration.

Within EU studies, conventional constructivism has been applied in a variety of ways. Caporaso, Jupille and colleagues, for example, have explored the functioning of EU institutions with the explicit goal of building bridges between rationalist and sociological work (Caporaso, Checkel, Jupille 2003a, b; see also Beach 2005). Lewis has examined the causal effect of norms by focusing on mechanisms of persuasion and role playing, and done so in a hard case for constructivism – the EU’s highly intergovernmental Committee of Permanent Representatives, or COREPER (Lewis 2005; see also Lewis 1998).

Interpretative constructivism, which enjoys greater popularity in Europe, explores the role of language in mediating and constructing social reality. Given its commitment to various forms of post-positivist epistemologies, this role is not explanatory in the sense that A causes B. Rather, constructivist scholarship of this sort asks how possible questions. For example, instead of examining what factors caused what aspects of a state’s identity to change – as would the conventional mainstream (Checkel 2001) – interpretative constructivists would explore the background conditions and linguistic constructions (discourses) that made any such change possible in the first place. In an interpretative study of German identity, Banchoff argues precisely that his analytic task is not to “establish the effects of identity on state action.” Rather, it is to “demonstrate the content of state identity in a particular case – a necessary first step in the constructivist analysis of action” (Banchoff 1999, 271).

Put differently, interpretative constructivists are committed to a deeply inductive research strategy that targets the reconstruction of state/agent identity, with the methods encompassing a variety of linguistic techniques. Consider Hopf’s recent study of Soviet and Russian identity. He begins not with some hypotheses or theory about what might cause that identity to change, as would scholars with a strong commitment to positivist methods (Laitin 1998). Rather,

Hopf seeks to uncover Soviet-Russian identity as it emerges from a variety of texts, ranging from novels to minutes of Politburo meetings; his methods are textual and narrative. Furthermore and to the extent possible, he engages in no prior theorization, instead letting the texts speak for themselves, as it were (Hopf 2002).

Critical/radical constructivists maintain the linguistic focus, but add an explicitly normative dimension by probing a researcher's own implication in the reproduction of the identities and world he/she is studying. Discourse-theoretical methods are again emphasized, but with a greater emphasis on the power and domination inherent in language. For both interpretative and critical/radical constructivists, key sources of theoretical inspiration lay in linguistic approaches – Wittgenstein, say – and continental social theory – Habermas, Bourdieu and Derrida, among others (Hopf 1998; Price and Reus-Smit 1998; Neumann 2002).

To continue with the example of Germany, a critical/radical constructivist might argue as follows.

German military involvement abroad, within an approach that starts from norms [as would most conventional constructivists – JTC], becomes the result of a reasoning process within a given and unquestioned norm structure. And the use of the military becomes the only feasible alternative in a world limited by material conditions, such as the possibility of death. In other words, by attempting to start from 'reality' the status quo is privileged as independent, and binding conditions that limit our possibilities are asserted (Zehfuss 2002, 254-55).

The scholarly enterprise is not neutral. Our choices, be they analytic (starting with given norms) or methodological (adopting the foundationalist assumption that there exists a reality external to our theorizing) are not innocent. They have consequences for which we, as scholars, should bear responsibility. This politicized view of the academy – which is heavily indebted to the insights of Derrida – is far, far removed from the problem-driven, 'let's-just-get-on-with-the-research' perspective of the conventional constructivist.

Post-positivist constructivists – be they interpretative or critical/radical – explore the EU and European institutions in a manner quite different from their conventional counterparts. Instead of starting with certain givens – say, a set of social norms – and exploring their causal impact on outcomes, they might explore the discursive practices that make possible certain EU norms in the first place (Schwellnus 2005a). For these scholars, language becomes much more fluid. Thus, in studying the politics of integration through a linguistic prism, the focus would be less on language as acts of persuasion (as conventional constructivists would argue – Gheciu 2005b) and more on underlying speech acts, structures of argumentation, or discursive power structures (Diez 1999; Waever 2004).

Another strand of post-positivist constructivist theorizing on Europe bases itself on the critical social theory of Juergen Habermas.<sup>2</sup> If the buzzwords for conventional constructivists are norms and identity, and those for interpretative and critical/radical scholars are power and discourse, then for Habermasians studying Europe, they are deliberation and legitimacy (Eriksen and Fossum 2000; Neyer 2003; CIDEL 2005). While conventional constructivists would be interested in exploring the degree to which supranational institutions like the Commission affect the values and identities of social agents (Hooghe 2005), Habermasians orientation would instead ask what kind of identity the EU should possess if it is to be a democratic and legitimate entity (Fossum 2003; Eriksen and Fossum 2004).

This review in hand, we can now explore in more detail constructivist contributions to EU studies and the challenges they face.

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<sup>2</sup> Not all the scholars named here would accept the designation constructivist, preferring instead to self identify as students of deliberative democracy. I include them because, like constructivists, their underlying ontology is deeply social and they view language – arguing and deliberation, in their case – as constitutive of actor identity.

### III. The Trouble with Positivism

The conventional constructivists who study Europe or the EU are empirically oriented scholars who just want to get on with it – that is, conduct research on the fascinating world of European politics. The paradigm wars and meta-theoretical bloodletting are for others. ‘To get on with it,’ they often rely on a method known as process tracing.

The process-tracing method attempts to identify the intervening causal process – the causal chain and causal mechanism – between an independent variable (or variables) and the outcome of the dependent variable. ... Process tracing forces the investigator to take equifinality into account, that is, to consider the alternative paths through which the outcome could have occurred, and it offers the possibility of mapping out one or more potential causal paths that are consistent with the outcome and the process-tracing evidence in a single case (Bennett and George 2005, 206-07).

The use of this method has allowed mainstream constructivists to advance nuanced, carefully documented claims on, say, the socializing power of European institutions (Lewis 2005). Indeed, one leading text sees process tracing as a central element in the constructivist methodological tool kit (Bennett and George 2005, 206).<sup>3</sup>

This is all fine and good, but empirical insight on Europe is being purchased at the expense of a very basic lack of meta-theoretical clarity. By meta-theory, I refer here not so much to ontology, which means to advance claims about existence, as to epistemology or how we come to know. On the level of ontology, virtually all constructivists are on the same page, recognizing the deeply social nature of the world around us. However, as the last section indicated, there is no common epistemological ground for constructivists.

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<sup>3</sup> For sure, conventional constructivists employ methods other than process tracing – quantitative-statistical techniques or survey research, say (Finnemore 1996b). However, irrespective of methodological choice, the epistemological tension outlined below remains.



In fact, process tracing would appear to be fundamentally at odds with the interpretative epistemologies at the core of constructivist social theory (Guzzini 2000, 155–62; see also Checkel 2005c). It only works if you hold things constant in a series of steps: A causes B; B then causes C; C then causes D; and so on. Such an approach simply cannot capture the recursivity and fluidity of post-positivist epistemologies. Not surprisingly, the very few interpretative constructivists who do employ process tracing are careful to separate it from the discursive and narrative techniques at the heart of their approach (Hopf 2002).

Why is this a problem for conventional constructivists? After all, they made a conscious choice to ground their scholarship in positivism – one that has had significant empirical pay offs. Yet, there are both principled and practical reasons for being worried about such a move. On the former, questions of philosophy and conceptual coherence do matter, even in subfields such as EU studies or American IR, where neglect of such topics is widespread (Wight 2002, 26–37). Mixing apples and oranges can be a recipe for intellectual disarray. Put bluntly, without more attention to basic philosophical issues, conventional constructivists are setting themselves up for a reprise of Legro and Moravscik’s superb and on-the-mark critique of the conceptual confusion that characterizes contemporary realist scholarship (Legro and Moravscik 1999). Their title – “Is Anybody Still a Realist?” – could simply be replaced by “Is Anybody Still a Constructivist?”

In practical terms, this lack of attention to questions of epistemology is seriously limiting the bridge building efforts of conventional constructivists, a much cherished goal to which I return below.

If these principled and practical issues are such problems, why have they received very little attention to date? Two factors are at work, one generic to American IR scholarship, and one specific to conventional constructivism. For the former, meta-theory has not been a topic of primary concern for many years. Moreover, the normalization of epistemological discourse – ‘we’re all positivists, so why talk about epistemology’ – in mainstream US international relations

journals such as *International Organization* and *International Studies Quarterly* furthers this sense that all is in order.

An example is helpful. For over a decade, one of the most influential – if not the most influential – treatises on methods and design for American IR has been King, Keohane and Verba's *Designing Social Inquiry* (King, Keohane and Verba 1994). This book was and is used by many conventional constructivists – and has helped these scholars significantly at the levels of research design and methods. While King, Keohane and Verba was the subject of many reviews, their focus was telling. They examined and questioned not the manuscript's underlying positivist philosophical basis, but its practical suggestions. The critique was 'in house' (positivist), as it were (Johnson 2006, 227, 236–40).

Only now are we seeing the first, detailed assessments that question the positivist epistemological basis of King, *et al*, exploring how this seriously limits the utility of their advice for qualitative researchers, including conventional constructivists (Johnson 2006; Lebow 2006; Lebow and Lichbach 2006). Consider the centrally important question of causation. King and colleagues endorse a view of it that renders irrelevant the causal mechanisms that are crucial for so many conventional constructivists (Johnson 2006, 236–37). If this is indeed the case, why have the latter been content to accept such a state of affairs?

At this point, my story intersects with the second, conventional-constructivist-specific, reason for why epistemology has been neglected. Virtually all conventional constructivists have taken their theoretical and meta-theoretical inspiration from the work of Alexander Wendt. A consistent theme in Wendt's writing has been that the real meta-theoretical issues to address are more ontological than epistemological, and that once we agree on ontology – as most constructivists do – the rest (epistemology) will fall into place (Wendt 1999). While this view has more recently come under attack (Chernoff 2002; Chernoff 2005, ch.2), it was appealing to many as it allowed constructivists to get on with their work without getting caught up in the complicated and at times highly personalized world of epistemological debate.

Yet, such debate and epistemological reflection can no longer be avoided. My section heading was no mistake – there *is* a ‘trouble with positivism.’ As many interpretative and critical/radical constructivists have noted (Zehfuss 2002, chs. 1, 6; and, especially, Guzzini 2000), conventional constructivists do need more carefully to explicate their epistemological assumptions. This is true in general and all the more so for those who endorse methods like process tracing. And such a rethink will likely require a turn to post-positivist philosophies of science.

To develop this line of criticism, I consider the debate about bridge building between rational choice and constructivism, and how it has been applied to EU studies. This has been an exciting and, increasingly, controversial topic among constructivists in recent years. Researchers have followed up general calls for bridge building (Adler 1997) with increasingly sophisticated conceptual schemas for fitting constructivism better with its rivals. These include ideas on how one can integrate the ideational and the material, game theory and social constructivism, strategic-choice and cognitive perspectives, and other-regarding and self-interested behavior (Katzenstein, Keohane and Krasner 1998; Lepgold and Lamborn 2002; Lebow 2001; Hemmer and Katzenstein 2002; Fearon and Wendt 2002). At the level of research designs and strategies, scholars have been equally creative, advocating notions of sequencing, domains of application and scope conditions as ways to integrate constructivism with its theoretical rivals (March and Olsen nd).

Most important, though, a growing number of empirical projects are testing these integrative schemes and designs on a variety of different topics in Europe or EU studies. These include institutional theory and the European Union (Caporaso, Checkel, Jupille 2003a); compliance and European regional organizations (Kelley 2004); compliance and the European Union (Boerzel 2002; Tallberg 2002; Beach 2005); international institutions and socialization in Europe (Checkel 2005b); and the transposition of EU directives (Mastenbroek 2005; Dimitrova and Rhinard 2005). Collectively, these bridge-building efforts

demonstrate that scholars have gotten down to the hard work of better specifying their alternative constructivist and rationalist theories, thus providing more complete yet still methodologically sound explanations for understanding developments in the EU or Europe more generally.

The point of increasing controversy is that the bridges being built have just one lane, going from conventional constructivism to rational choice (Zehfuss 2002, chs.1-2). Given that in principle they could have two lanes (with the second going from conventional constructivism to interpretative and critical/radical work), we need to understand better why this is not happening. If the process tracing, conventional constructivists are metatheoretically inconsistent, then these bridge builders face a more practical problem of constructing multi-lane bridges. In both cases, however, the culprit is positivism (see also Friedrichs 2003, 2-7).

Epistemology is thus not so easy to get around, and this is all the more true at the day-to-day, empirical levels. To see why, return to the Caporaso, *et al*, EU/institutional-theory process-tracing, bridge-building project. Caporaso and collaborators had hoped to include one or more interpretative constructivists doing work on European integration. As they thought about it more, however, worries arose. How would they integrate these individuals into the collaboration? Would their emphasis on why questions unfairly limit and constrain the interpretative focus on how possible? How would (could?) interpretative constructivists implement a process-tracing technique within their own discursive studies?

In the end, they chose not to include such scholars, not out of sinister motives to delegitimize research agendas, but out of a practical concern to finish within a reasonable time frame. In the project's introduction, they discuss this dilemma.

This choice bears an inevitable cost in the practical exclusion of a body of scholarship of a different epistemological bent. We thus knowingly proceed partially and incrementally, aware of the terrain left uncovered. If Aspinwall and Schneider are right in suggesting that transcending epistemological differences represents a bridge too far, then our choice is one that prevents the best (epistemological

agreement) from being the enemy of the good (intraepistemological, intertheoretical progress) (Caporaso, Checkel, Jupille 2003b, 24-25).

This is not an ideal state of affairs. Basically, it implies that we build bridges where we can control for epistemology, which, in turn, means they have only one lane – be it in the study of EU institutions or elsewhere. As Sil has argued more generally, continuing epistemological disagreements “militate against the emergence of a genuinely collaborative, truly integrated field of comparative analysis” (Sil 2000, 354; see also *Are Dialogue and Synthesis Possible in International Relations* 2003).

This is where interpretative and critical/radical constructivists studying Europe can offer their conventional colleagues a helping hand. The former, who tend to highlight much more questions of meta-theory,<sup>4</sup> could well argue that the conclusions in that last paragraph are too bleak. Indeed, if one takes epistemology – in its various post-positivist guises – more seriously, there may be hope for the process tracers and bridge builders.

One possible post-positivist starting point would be scientific realism. The latter is a philosophical position, one that should be sharply distinguished from the various forms of theoretical realism in IR. Developed by philosophers such as Hilary Putnam and Roy Bhaskar, it is the “view that the objects of scientific theories are objects that exist independently of investigators’ minds and that the theoretical terms of their theories indeed refer to real objects in the world” (Chernoff 2005, 41). For many scientific realists, these ‘real objects’ are precisely the causal mechanisms highlighted in conventional constructivist, process-tracing case studies of European institutions (Risse-Kappen 1995; Schimmelfennig 2003, for example). Scientific realism is also epistemologically opportunist in that “no one method, or epistemology could be expected to fit all cases” (Wight 2002, 36; more generally, see Lane 1996).

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<sup>4</sup> Consider the *European Journal of International Relations*. Recent volumes of this important outlet for interpretive and critical/radical constructivists contain a good number of essays specifically devoted to philosophy of science and epistemology.

With such qualities, it would seem ideally placed both to give process tracing conceptual grounding and – equally important – create an epistemological platform broad enough to unite nearly all constructivists in a renewed effort at (multi-lane) bridge building. Indeed, pragmatic realism – as Adler calls it – may “provide a way to consolidate the common ground within IR constructivism (Adler 2002, 98).

Given such conceptual foundations, process tracers and bridge builders can then begin to ask hard questions about their community standards – standards anchored in a philosophically coherent base. What counts as good process tracing? How do we know process tracing when we see it? How can discourse/textual and process-tracing approaches be combined in any bridge building effort (see also Hopf 2002)? Does bridge building require a special methodology of its own?

Answers to such questions need not only come from scientific realism. Analytic eclecticism (Katzenstein and Sil 2005), various forms of pragmatism (Cochran 2002; Johnson 2006) or conventionalism (Chernoff 2002, 2005) can achieve the same end. That end is to give IR – in my case, constructivists studying Europe – a middle-ground philosophy and epistemology that can fill the vast methodological space between American-style positivism and European post-structuralism (see also Lebow and Lichbach 2006, ch.1).

## IV. Methods and the Linguistic Turn

In recent years, there have been a growing number of calls by both conventional and interpretative constructivists for greater attention to methods (Adler 2002, 109-111; Milliken 1999; Neumann 2003). This trend needs to continue, with future methodological discussions transcending the positivist-interpretive epistemological divide (see also Lin 1998; Caprioli 2004).

The importance of such boundary crossing can be seen in the following example, taken from my own, conventional constructivist work on new citizenship and membership norms in Europe. I have been concerned with

tracking the initial development of these norms within committees of several European regional organizations. My hunch was that arguing dynamics played some role in these settings, thus shifting the preferences of national agents. In theorizing such processes, I turned to a laboratory-experimental literature on persuasion taken from social psychology, from which I developed hypotheses on the roles of agent properties (for example, their degree of authoritativeness) and of privacy in promoting persuasion (Checkel 2001; see also Johnston 2001, nd). To test these arguments, I relied on a traditional positivist methodological tool kit – process tracing, triangulation across sources and interviews (Checkel 2003).

When I presented my findings at several meetings, however, interpretative constructivists pointed to a theoretical-methodological gap in the analysis. Particular agents are not only persuasive because they are authoritative or because they argue in private. Their arguments are also persuasive because they are enabled and legitimated by the broader social discourse in which they are embedded. Did a particular agent's arguments in a particular committee resonate with this broader social discourse?

Constructivist colleagues were thus suggesting that I had lost sight of the (social) structural context. In positivist-empiricist terms, I had a potential problem of omitted variable bias, while, for interpretivists, the issue was one of missing the broader forces that enable and make possible human agency. Whatever you call it, the point and lesson are the same. To provide a more complete account of persuasion's role, it will be necessary to supplement my positivist methodologies with others grounded in interpretative techniques (see also Jacobsen 2003, 58).

This theme of epistemological cross-fertilization can be developed in more detail by exploring how various constructivists studying the EU and Europe have operationalized the linguistic turn.

*Taking Language Seriously.* Knowledgeable readers may be puzzled by this subtitle. Do not constructivists already take language very seriously? After all, it is a central analytic category in their narratives and causal stories. Interpretative

and critical/radical constructivists focus on discourse, speech acts and textual analysis. The conventional sort, by theorizing roles for arguing, persuasion and rhetorical action, see language as a causal mechanism leading to changes in core agent properties. Thus, the question is not “whether language is important; the question is rather *which* approach to language” - and, I would add, how to use it as a practical research tool (Fierke 2002, 351 [emphasis in original]).

For interpretative and critical/radical scholars studying the EU and Europe, a central challenge is to continue the methodological discussion begun by individuals like Milliken and Neumann. Among the issues that should be addressed are the proper balance between textual approaches and those emphasizing practice (Hopf 2002, 269-70; Neumann 2002), and the degree to which these scholars need explicitly to describe and justify the sources and techniques they use to reconstruct discourses (Milliken 1999). On the latter, I am not suggesting a positivist primer that puts discourse into variable language or seeks to establish a single way of conducting such analyses. Rather, the time is ripe for further debate about best practices for those working with discourse and texts.

The importance of such a move is highlighted by two examples, one specifically on the EU and one on Europe more generally. On the former, Schweltnus has recently developed an innovative argumentative approach for exploring the role of norms in the process of EU enlargement. Convincingly showing the limitations of conventional constructivist approaches to EU enlargement that view arguments as causes for action (Schimmelfennig 2003), Schweltnus adopts an interpretative stand point that instead explores the role of arguments in providing reasons and justifications for action. This is then applied to the case of Polish accession to the EU and the issue of minority rights. Schweltnus thus begins to operationalize and apply empirically arguments about arguing (Schweltnus 2005a; Schweltnus 2005b, 62-70).

A key phrase in that last sentence is ‘begins to operationalize.’ Indeed, the reader is often left wondering how the rich textual analysis was actually



conducted. How do we know that certain arguments about minority rights became dominant? What was the pool of source material? What were the counting rules? How were choices made by the author? We are never told, which is a pity for it undercuts the plausibility of the story Schweltnus so nicely otherwise tells. Put differently, the reader needs to know the (interpretive) community standards to which the author adheres when applying his argument empirically. Given that his is decidedly not an ‘anything goes’ post-modern project, these issues must be addressed.

A second example concerns the exercise (or lack thereof) of German military power in a radically changed post-Cold War Europe. In a richly empirical study, Maja Zehfuss offers a critical/radical constructivist account of contemporary Germany’s role in international military operations. Her goal is not to explain why German policy took certain directions – intervening or not in a disintegrating Yugoslavia in the 1990s, say. Consistent with an epistemological underpinning that draws upon the work of scholars like Derrida, Zehfuss instead shrinks the gap between analyst and object, exploring the political responsibility of scholars in studying and interpreting German policy in particular ways. In this manner, she captures the ethical and critical dimensions that are so often missing in conventional and interpretative constructivist studies on the EU or Germany more specifically (Banchoff 1999; Rittberger 2001, ch.5).

Zehfuss’s method for connecting theory and empirics is discourse analysis. Yet, quite surprisingly – and especially for a volume with such a strong empirical focus – the reader is given no indication for how this analysis will be conducted. Surely, Zehfuss has some rules or hunches for identifying when normative commitments are “shared amongst a number of people,” for recognizing “prominent narratives,” or for how she identifies and reconstructs instances of “shared meaning” (Zehfuss 2002, 120–21, 121–22, 127–28). Her silence raises questions about the validity and reliability of the reconstructions, which, as Hopf (2002) so nicely shows, are key issues for critical/radical constructivists as well.

In sum, interpretative and critical/radical constructivists studying the EU and Europe could profit from more sustained attention to methods (see also Waever 2004, 213-14). Here, their conventional constructivist counterparts might offer a useful role model regarding methodological self-awareness.<sup>5</sup> The point would not be to mimic the particular methods employed by the latter. Process tracing is not what Zehfuss's study requires! Rather, the goal would be to state, operationalize and adhere to the appropriate community methodological standards given the questions asked (see also Hopf 2006; Lebow 2006, 10). This is precisely the achievement of the best conventional constructivist work on the EU or Europe more generally (Farrell and Flynn 1999; Parsons 2003; M. Smith 2004; Lewis 2005; Sedelmeier 2005).

*Taking Arguing Seriously.* For a second group of conventional and interpretive constructivists, the challenge is of a different sort. In this case, it is time for a discussion and debate between proponents of arguing-deliberation and persuasion perspectives. Both groups are united in a concern for exploring how social communication and language can affect the outcomes and dynamics of European and international politics. Both also operate with a much thicker conception of language than rational choice scholars – one where language constitutes the identities and interests of actors, and not merely constrains them.

Despite such common ground, the two groups disagree on the best micro-mechanism for studying language. Students of arguing draw upon Habermas' theory of communicative action (Lynch 1999, 2002; Risse 2000; Sjursen 2002; Forum 2005), while proponents of persuasion make use of insights drawn from social psychology and communications theory (Johnston 2001; Checkel 2003).

This debate should have a theoretical, methodological and empirical component. Theoretically, a key question is whether Habermas' social theory can be specified and operationalized in such a way as to allow for the development of

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<sup>5</sup> For example, conventional constructivists are playing an active role in the new – and highly successful – qualitative methods organized section within the American Political Science Association. Symposium 2004.

a robust empirical research program. Risse has suggested this is possible (Risse 2000). However, scholars like Johnston have questioned the very basis of Habermas' theory, arguing that the real heavy lifting in his approach is done by persuasion (Johnston 2001). It is thus not the force of the better argument that changes minds, as students of Habermas would claim. Rather, arguments carry the day when advanced by individuals with particular characteristics who operate in particular kinds of institutional settings that are conducive to persuasion.

Methodologically, a central challenge for proponents of both arguing and persuasion is recognizing it when they see it. While scholars like Johnston have proposed specific methodological strategies (Johnston nd), we still have only preliminary empirical tests of them, especially as applied to Europe and the EU (Sjursen 2002; Pollack 2003; Checkel 2003). Moreover, there is continuing and worrying confusion on the question of agency. In particular, do robust explanatory claims about arguing and persuasion need to control for actor motives? Habermasians answer in the negative (Schwellnus 2005a), while students of persuasion suggest that 'getting between the earlobes' is both necessary and possible (Johnston 2001; Gheciu 2005b).

Empirically, a key question is how publicity affects dynamics of arguing and persuasion. Students of arguing see publicity's role as critically important. Making arguments publicly – to an audience – means one must provide reasons and give justifications. This very act renders unimportant the search for motivations as publicity induces an agent to behave in a way that is perceived as impartial and credible, even if – deep down – he/she is being strategic and hypocritical (Eriksen and Fossum 2000, 48-49; Kleine and Risse 2005; 11-12). Moreover, the gap between what is publicly stated and privately believed will likely shrink over time as preferences are adapted to behavior (Elster 1998, 111; see also Zuern and Checkel 2005, 1053-54). Theorists of persuasion argue the exact opposite. That is, publicity creates a situation where agents are more likely to play to the audience and 'grand stand' than to rethink their basic preferences. In contrast, privacy creates a setting where actors can truthfully speak their minds

and argue in a principled way (Johnston 2001; Checkel 2001; see also Kleine and Risse 2005, 12).

Ironically and very much in keeping with a central theme of this essay, both sides in this debate would benefit by rethinking, or perhaps better said, broadening their respective epistemological starting point. For Habermasians, a turn to positivism would have two benefits. For one, it might better alert them to the highly instrumental view of theoretical concepts they are developing (Wight 2002, 29, 41), and how this will lead them down the same problematic theory-building route as the rational choice theorists they so often criticize. The latter build their theories – in a very instrumental fashion – on ‘as if’ assumptions. Agents act as if they are egoistical and self interested.

If agent motivations are likewise bracketed as we develop theories on the role of arguments, we end up with the same type of ‘as if’ reasoning, only now assuming that agents are other-regarding and moved by the force of the better argument. In both cases, the result is weak substantive theory that tells us little about how preferences are actually constituted (see also Wendt 1999, 119–22).

For students of European institutions, this matters – tremendously. From numerous sources – memoir literature, observations of the recent constitutional convention, interviews – we know that arguments and elements of deliberation are present and seem to play an important role in the integration process. Missing is the substantive theory that might better tell when and under what conditions they matter. Here, a little positivism could help. Indeed, substantive theories about arguing and deliberation do exist, but are being developed by IR scholars who have integrated Habermasian insights with elements of positivism (Lynch, 1999, 2002; Mueller and Risse 2001; Crawford 2002; Deitelhoff and Mueller 2005; Kleine and Risse 2005).

There is a second – an equally important – reason why a bit of positivism might be healthy for Habermasian students of the EU. Many of these scholars, like Habermas himself, are normative theorists. Yet, the best normative theory updates its arguments in light of new empirical findings – findings typically

anchored in a positivist epistemological frame. On the hotly debated question of publicity, for example, several recent projects, which examine both European and international institutions, report that publicity has precisely the negative affects predicted by persuasion theorists (Deitelhoff and Mueller 2005, 174; Naurin nd; see also Stasavage 2004, 696, *passim*). This result must have some bearing on the normative argumentation. As Lebow so nicely puts it, “normative theorizing must deal with facts just as empirical research must address norms. They do not inhabit separate worlds” (Lebow 2006, 17-18).

Proponents of persuasion in this debate face the opposite problem – a surfeit of substantive, problem-solving theory. These scholars have advanced hypotheses for when persuasion should have causal force and begun developing methodological tools for measuring such dynamics in the European context (Gheciu 2005a; Lewis 2005). Absent, however, is critical-ethical reflection concerning the implications of their findings.<sup>6</sup>

Consider recent conventional constructivist work on persuasion that assesses the socializing power of European institutions – that is, the degree to which bodies like the European Commission induce a (partial) shift in the allegiances and identities of national agents. Are such value shifts normatively desirable? What are the implications for democratic and legitimate governance within and beyond the European nation state? These questions are centrally important, but remain unanswered (Checkel 2005b; see also Zuern and Checkel 2005, 1072-74). To address them, recourse to critical epistemologies and perspectives will be necessary; positivism and problem solving theory will not be enough.

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<sup>6</sup> This same imbalance – where positive, substantive theory far outstrips critical reflection – is found in conventional constructivist work on EU enlargement – Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2002, 2005; Schimmelfennig 2003; Kelley 2004.

## V. Conceptual Lacuna – Where’s Power?

Those familiar with the EU literature – and especially that on its foreign and security policy – might question whether there is any such conceptual gap. We have numerous studies of normative or civilian power Europe, and of the EU’s will and ability to exercise soft power (Manners 2002; K. Smith 2004; Hyde-Price 2004; Sjursen 2006b). Missing in this discussion and in much of the constructivist literature on Europe and the EU more generally, however, is an understanding of power that is both more hard-edged and multi-faceted. By hard-edged, I simply mean the compulsive face of power (the ability of A to get B to do what B otherwise would not do).

By multi-faceted, I refer to conceptions of power that go beyond this standard coercive-compulsive notion to capture its institutional and productive dimensions as well. Specifically, institutional power is actors’ control of others in indirect ways, where formal and informal institutions mediate between A and B; working through the rules of these institutions, A constrains the actions of B. Productive power is generated through discourse and the systems of knowledge through which meaning is produced and transformed (Barnett and Duvall 2005, 51, 55, *passim*; see also Bially Mattern 2004, 2005, ch.4).

It is the students of deliberation and conventional constructivists studying the EU who have been especially remiss in neglecting power’s role. With Habermasian studies of deliberation and arguing in EU institutions, one gets the sense that compulsory power is present but nonetheless ignored (Joerges and Neyer 1997a, b; Neyer 2003; Magnette 2004). As Hyde-Price argues more specifically on deliberative studies of EU foreign and security policy, there often seems to be an “almost total neglect of power” (Hyde-Price 2006, 218, citing E.H. Carr). It makes matters no better to invoke power, but to do so in ways that run counter to common-sense understandings. One analyst, for example, defines the EU’s “communicative power” as the ability of its policies and principle to endure critical public scrutiny (Sjursen 2006a, 174).

Thus, while Habermas may enjoin us to background power (Risse 2000), reality is more complex. One need not be a hard-nosed intergovernmentalist or bargaining theorist to recognize the plain truth that arguments are often used to shame, twist arms and compel, as a growing conventional constructivist literature in IR and EU studies confirms (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Risse, Ropp and Sikkink 1999; Schimmelfennig 2003).

For sure, compulsory-coercive power is mentioned in many of these Habermasian studies. However, they are typically not designed to test competitively the ‘power of the better argument’ against the power-based alternative explanation, where arguments are used to compel. Given that empirical research in this tradition appears to draw upon a standard positivist toolkit (Sjursen 2004, 117; Romsloe 2004; Haacke 2005, 185–86), such competitive testing is a requirement, not an option (see also Pollack 2003).

Conventional constructivist studies of persuasion and socialization in the EU provide a second example of power’s under-specified role, in this case, missing its institutional and productive dimensions. The earlier critique (IV. above) of my own work on persuasion was precisely about a neglect of productive power. Yes, acts of persuasion occurred in the institutional settings studied (Checkel 2001, 2003), but productive power – the background, discursive construction of meaning (see also Doty 1993, 299) – likely played a role as well. It did this by enabling and legitimating the arguments of individual persuaders.

In addition, institutional power would seem to play a central, albeit unspecified, role in conventional constructivist studies of socialization within European institutions (Checkel 2005b). All too often, this work reifies institutions, imbuing them with fixed values and meaning, but not asking from where these came or why certain ones are simply absent (see also Johnston 2005). Why does the EU, say, promote one conception of minority rights vis-à-vis candidate countries, but refuse to apply this same standard to its own member states (Schwellnus 2005a, b)? Perhaps this discrepancy (and hypocrisy) is

explained by the exercise of institutional power, in this case, the ability to keep certain issues off the EU agenda.

The bottom line is that both Habermasians and conventional constructivists studying the EU need to bring power back in, and should do so in two ways. Epistemologically, they will need to draw upon insights from interpretive and critical/radical forms of constructivism, where power plays a much more central role (Waeber 2004). In disciplinary terms, they should look to IR theory, where there is renewed interest in the conceptualization and study of power (Guzzini 1993; Hurrell 2005; Barnett and Duvall 2005; Bially Mattern 2005).

## VI. Domestic Politics and the European Project

There is an understandable temptation when studying the EU and other European institutions not to worry too much about – or, more formally, to bracket off – domestic politics. After all, much is happening in Europe – supranational polity building, the creation of the Euro, socialization beyond the nation state, the constitutionalization of the EU, the creation of an European identity – that is strongly suggestive of a Westphalian system being transformed and of a nation state in retreat. While recognizing the undeniable importance of such trends and facts, it would be a signal mistake for scholars to neglect the domestic and national. Unfortunately, all too many researchers – be they classic integration theorists or constructivists – commit precisely this error (see also Zuern and Checkel 2005, 1068-72).

Start with those integration warhorses – neofunctionalism and intergovernmentalism. Both focused overwhelmingly on the European level, seeking to explain supranational loyalty transfers or interstate bargaining, respectively. More recent approaches – supranationalism, policy networks, institutional analysis – have continued the European-level focus, albeit with a broader range of dependent variables – from the emergence of European governance structures to the multi-layered nature of European policymaking (Diez and Wiener 2004).



In all this work, systematic attention to, let alone explicit theorization of, domestic politics is notable mainly by its absence. For sure, the domestic is present in integration theory. As Haas argued many years ago, “nationally constituted groups” – largely in the form of political elites – play a central role in integration (Risse 2005, 293, quoting from Haas 1958).

More recently, the starting point for Moravcsik’s liberal intergovernmentalism is a clear specification of domestic interests. Yet, these are simply read off a country’s structural position in the global political economy (Moravcsik 1998). Such arguments by Haas and Moravcsik, while intriguing, are not the same as a theory of domestic politics. A similar theoretical gap is also found in Europeanization studies (Caporaso, Cowles, Risse 2001, ch.1) and work on multi-level governance (Hooge and Marks 2001).<sup>7</sup>

Do constructivists studying the EU or Europe avoid this trap, instead robustly theorizing the domestic political? It would appear not. Consider recent work on two quintessentially constructivist topics – socialization and identity. A central finding of this research is that domestic politics play a key, if under-theorized, role in any socialization dynamic or process of identity change in the EU or in Europe more generally. Depending upon the author and his/her disciplinary and epistemological orientation, European identity or socialization experiences appear to be shaped decisively by a wide array of domestic factors – deeply entrenched social discourses, previous bureaucratic experience, or the structure of national institutions (Risse and Maier 2003).

Several examples highlight the extent of this theoretical under-specification. In her study of NATO and socialization, Gheciu argues that noviceness plays an important role in determining the likelihood of successful socialization (Gheciu 2005a, b). Using a more explicit domestic politics language,

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<sup>7</sup> To be fair to students of Europeanization, their focus is the effects of Europe on the nation state and its domestic politics. The latter is thus their dependent variable, which one typically does not attempt to theorize.

one might simply argue that noviceness is all about measuring the degree of national bureaucratic or cultural embeddedness of particular individuals.

Schimmelfennig theorizes that socialization outcomes promoted by the EU and other European institutions are heavily influenced by the structure of domestic party constellations (Schimmelfennig 2005). Quantitative studies of identity change and socialization within the Commission (Hooghe 2005) or within Council working groups (Beyers 2005) exercise great care in controlling for the independent effect of domestic factors, be these prior national bureaucratic experiences, exposure to federal national structures, or the like.

While all this attention to the domestic political should be welcomed, more needs to be done (see also Gourevitch 2002). At this point, the tendency is too often for ad-hocism to prevail, where domestic factors are added, but unguided by some broader and overarching theoretical argument. Such arguments – be they about elites, institutions or pluralism – are readily found in work on comparative politics, a point made forcefully over a decade ago by Milner (Milner 1992). More recently, Cortell and Davis have argued that “[f]urther research into the relationship between the effects of socializing forces on the international system and states’ domestic politics is required because it remains poorly understood” (Cortell and Davis 2000, 83–84). If students of international relations are going to push comparativists to give up an exclusive focus on “methodological nationalism” in which national political systems are compared as if they were independent of each other (Zuern 2002, 248), then it is only fair to ask that students of integration – constructivists or otherwise – reciprocate by systematically building arguments about domestic politics into their approaches.

In making these connections to the domestic, EU constructivists should dynamically integrate factors across different levels of analysis – national and European, in this case. Dynamic means that one goes back and forth across levels, emphasizing the simultaneity of international and domestic developments. This stands in contrast to an additive or residual variance approach – for many years the norm among integration and IR theorists – where the researcher explores one

level at a time, explaining as much as possible there, before considering factors at other levels (Mueller and Risse-Kappen 1993; Moravcsik 1993).

To see the difference, consider again Hooghe's study of socialization and identity change within the European Commission (Hooghe 2005). Her main finding is that much of the European-level socialization we see in the Commission is in fact a product of prior, national socialization. The approach here is basically additive, which suits her design well. Yet, an intriguing possibility is that those national-level experiences are themselves enmeshed with and shaped by European factors. A dynamic integration of the two levels could better capture such interplay (see also Risse 2005, 305).

For sure, there are complicated methodical issues involved in any such integration. With conventional constructivists, their positivist understanding of explanation presents a problem and challenge. After all, to argue and show that A is a cause of B requires that something be held constant, which is seemingly at odds with the dynamic approach sketched above. Yet, work on feedback loops (Johnston 2005) and bracketing techniques (Finnemore 1996a) suggests this particular problem is surmountable (see also Martin and Simmons 1998, 749; Katzenstein 2003, 737-39).

Interpretive and critical/radical constructivists, in contrast, would seem ideally placed to exploit the benefits of such a dynamic integration of the domestic and European. The recursivity at the heart of their epistemological world view allows precisely for an exploration of the simultaneity of international and domestic developments (Diez 1999; see also Price 1997). While no interpretivist himself, Risse has recently made a remarkably similar claim in regards to constructivist research on European identity. In what he calls a marble cake model, the various components of an individual's identity cannot be separated on different levels; rather, different components – German and European, say – “influence ... mesh and blend into each other” (Risse 2005, 296; see also Risse 2004b, 251-52).

Such a dynamic approach would benefit constructivist research on the EU/Europe in two ways. First, an emphasis on simultaneity and cross-cutting influences would keep the focus on process, where it should rightly be, given existing biases toward structural accounts in the literature. This is as true of conventional constructivist studies of European socialization (Checkel 2005a) as it is of interpretive analyses offering highly structural readings of European identity focused either on discourses (Rosamond 2001) or public spheres (Fossum and Trenez 2005).

Second, a dynamic, cross-cutting approach might better alert constructivist students of EU socialization to an understudied element in their analyses – feedback effects. What happens to the socializing agents or structures themselves – the EU Commission and Council, or the Committee of Permanent Representatives, say – when they attempt (and perhaps fail) to socialize a target group? There is a tendency for the causal arrows to point mainly in one direction: from socializer to socializee. To take one example, it would be a fascinating follow-on study to Gheciu’s exploration of NATO’s socializing role in Romania and the Czech republic to consider the effect on NATO if her ‘baby generals’ talked back, thus reversing the causal arrows (see also Johnston 2005, on emergent property effects).

My arguments on the importance of domestic politics in EU constructivist research find support in three closely related literatures. Among IR constructivists, there is now a growing recognition that, as Hopf so nicely puts it, “constructivism [starts] at home,” which in more operational terms means that “domestic society ... must be brought back into any constructivist account of world politics” (Hopf 2002, 1, 278).<sup>8</sup>

Within the field of European studies, two similar – and very recent – trends are at work. Scholars of integration are coming to recognize that the EU – and

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<sup>8</sup> Here, IR rationalists are ahead of their constructivist counterparts, as they have been working to theorize the domestic political for nearly a decade – Keohane and Milner 1996, Milner 1997, Martin 2000, for example.

theory about it - is to some extent becoming a victim of its own success. The deepening of integration over the past decade and the current process of constitutionalization have spawned increasing domestic political resistance to and mobilization against the European project. In turn, this has led prominent theorists of integration to add a strong domestic politics-politicization element to their arguments. In the context of integration theory, Leon Lindberg's permissive consensus appears to have been transformed into its opposite - a constraining dissensus (Hooghe and Marks 2004, 5; see also Diez and Wiener 2004, 238-46).

In addition, new work on Europeanization emphasizes domestic cultural context, theorizing and documenting how religious communities that are at once both deeply national and transnational are likely to slow the degree of Europeanization in an enlarged European Union (Byrnes and Katzenstein nd).

## VII. Conclusions - Can't We Get Along Better Than This?

To talk of a constructivist scholarly community studying Europe is to invoke an oxymoron. The devil is in that word community, for it implies shared standards and identity. As suggested throughout this essay, such common community standards - especially at the level of epistemology and methods - do not exist.<sup>9</sup> This state of affairs suggests two ways forward. The first is the path of least resistance, which means to let present trends continue. Conventional constructivists studying Europe could continue their courtship of the rationalist (US) mainstream, while Habermasian deliberation theorists could create their own life world disconnected from empirical reality - to take just two examples. However, down this path lie group think, closed citation cartels and, most important, intellectual closure.

The second way forward is more ambitious and intellectually challenging. It is a way defined by bridge building - not between rational choice and

constructivism, but *within* the community of constructivist scholars studying Europe. As an American-trained academic who has lived and worked in Europe since 1996, I am often struck by the parochialism of much of the constructivist scholarship on both sides of the Atlantic.

Clearly, there are understandable (and hard to change) sociology-of-knowledge reasons why national or regional academic communities develop in certain ways (Waever 1998). Yet, the way forward – defined as better knowledge of the (European) world around us – is by connecting these diverse communities. Constructivists studying the EU have an extraordinary, real time, laboratory for addressing issues – political order within and beyond the nation state, the construction of community, the formation of actor identity and interests – of central concern to the broader disciplines. By anchoring their research programs in these larger disciplinary frames and by speaking more to each other, they could learn an awful lot.

My call here is for conceptual and meta-theoretical *pluralism* in the constructivist study of Europe – not unity. The latter would be a recipe for a make-everyone-happy analytic and conceptual mush. Rather, the point is to encourage dialogue, conversation and mutual learning – about epistemologies, methods, power and domestic politics. Done properly, such a bridging exercise could turn the tables a decade hence, with EU constructivists teaching their disciplinary colleagues a few new tricks. Indeed, the ultimate sign of success would be if that adjective EU in front of constructivists were to vanish.

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<sup>9</sup> This is where Moravcsik's hard-hitting but largely fair critique of constructivist research on the EU goes astray. He assumes a universality of (positivist) community standards where in fact none exists. Moravcsik 2001.

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