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Constructivism and EU Politics

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INTRODUCTION

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 et al. 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 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.

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVISTS: 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 2001: 230–1; see also Adler 1997; Ruggie 1998; Christiansen et al. 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, forthcoming; 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 et al. (2003a, b), for example, have explored the functioning of EU institutions with the explicit goal of building bridges between rationalist and sociological work (see also Beach 2005). Lewis (1996, 2005) 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.

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) – interpretive constructivists would explore the background conditions and linguistic constructions (discourses) that made any such change possible in the first place. In other words, German identity, Bandholtz (1999) 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’ (Bandholtz 1999: 271).

Put differently, interpretive 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; 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 given, and binding conditions that limit our possibilities are asserted (Zehfuss 2002: 254–5).

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 real- ity 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 interpretive or critical/radical – explore the EU and European institutions in a manner quite different from their conventional counterparts. Instead of starting with certain given – 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 (Schwelling 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 – Ghecili 2005b) and more on underlying speech acts, structures of argumentation, or discursive power structures (Diez 1999; Vaever 2004).

Another strand of post-positivist constructivist theorizing on Europe bases itself on the critical social theory of Jürgen Habermas. 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 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.

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 equivalency into account, that is, to consider the alternative paths through which the outcome could have occurred, and it offers the possibility of studying not one or more potential causal paths that are consistent with the outcome and the process-tracing evidence in a single case (Bennett and George 2000: 206–7).

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).1

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.

In fact, process tracing would appear to be fundamentally odd with the interpretative epistemologies at the core of constructivist social theory (Guzzini 2000: 155–62; see also Chubb 2002). It works if you keep 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 set it apart from others and carry it forward into 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 and political effects. 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 Moravcsik’s (1999) superb and on-the-mark critique of the conceptual confusion that characterizes contemporary realist scholarship. Their title is ‘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 et al.’s (1994) Designing Social Inquiry. This book was and is used by many conventional constructivists – and has helped these scholars significantly at the ‘rise of the software’ from those who endorse more careful methods like process tracing. And such a rethink will likely require a turn to post-positivist philosophies of science.

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 (Chenoff 2002, 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 works if there is a trouble with positivism. As many interpretative and critical/radical constructivists have noted (Zhufhus 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 especially from 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 managed by both constructivists and rational choice theorists. 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 idealist and the material, game theory and social constructivism, strategic-choice and cognitive perspectives, and other-regarding and self-interested behaviour (Katzenstein et al. 1998; Lebow 2001; Legg and Lamborn 2001; Fearon and Wendt 2002; Henmmer and Katzenstein 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, forthcoming).

Most importantly, 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 et al. 2003a); compliance and European regional organizations (Kelley 2004); compliance and the European Union (Boezel 2002; Tallberg 2002; Beach 2003); international institutions and socialization in Europe (Checkel 2005b); and the transposition of EU directives (Dimitrova and Rhinard 2005; Mastenbroek 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 yet one more, equally difficult role to accomplish: linking constructivism to rational choice (Zhufhus 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 conventional constructivists are methodologically inconsistent, then these bridge builds face a more practical problem of constructing multi-lane bridges. In both cases, however, the culprit is positivism (see also Friedrichs 2002: 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 interpretive focus on how? How would (could?) interpretive 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 requires 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 et al. 2009b: 24-5).

This is not an ideal state of affairs, but if we are to offer conventional colleagues a helping hand, the former, who tend to highlight much more the virtue of meta-theory, could well argue that the conclusions in that last paragraph are too bleak. Indeed, if one takes the epistemological — 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 Baskar, 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 opportunistic in that ‘no one method, or epistemology could be expected to fit all cases’ (Wight 2002: 36; more generally, see Lane 1996).

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 (2002: 98) calls it — may provide a way to consolidate the common ground within IR constructivism.

Toward such a foundation, 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 ‘researcher-generating’ techniques 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 (Cochrane 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 Lichtbakh 2006: ch.1).

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 (Milliken 1999; Adler 2002: 109–11; 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 mechanism leading to changes in core agent properties. Thus, the question is not whether language is important; he question is rather which approach to language — and, I would add, how to use it as a practical research tool (Ferlie 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: 269–76; Neumann 2002), and the degree to which these scholars need explicitly to describe and justify the sources and techniques they use to reconstruct discourse (Milliken 1999). On the latter, I am not suggesting a positivist primer that puts discourse into subjective 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, Schwellnus has recently developed an innovative argumentative approach for
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: 120–2, 127–8). 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 serve as a timely warning. Is the belated interest in methodological self-awareness the point not to be mimicked 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. As a rule, it might be advisable to develop a more articulated and methodological 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 ways in particular situations 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 (2007) have proposed specific methodological strategies, we still have only partial answers to 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; Smith 2004b; Lewis 2005; Sedelmeier 2005).

Takmg Arguing Seriously

For a second group of conventional and interpretative 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 a robust empirical research programme. Risse (2000) has suggested this is possible. However, scholars like Johnston have questioned the very basis of Habermas’ theory, and other students of diplomacy might still doubt the persuasiveness of an 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 ways in particular situations that are conducive to persuasion.

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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 Habermaskan 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, 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, forthcoming; see also Stasavage 2004: 696, passim). This result must have some bearing on normative argumentation. As Lebow (2006: 17–18) so nicely puts it, ‘normative theorizing must deal with facts just as empirical research must address norms. They do not inhabit separate worlds’.

Proponents of persuasion in this debate face the opposite problem – a surplus 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.1

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 Zürn and Checkel 2005: 1072–4). To address them, recourse to critical epistemologies and perspectives will be necessary; positivism and problem-solving theory will not be enough.

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 (March 1994; Smith and Rose 2004; Aman 2004a; 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 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 Habermasan 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; Magunette 2004). As Hyde-Price (2006: 218, citing E. H. Carr) argues more specifically on deliberative studies of EU foreign and security policy, there often seems to be an ‘almost total neglect of power’.

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 inter-governmentalist 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 (Keeley 1998; Risse et al. 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 (Haacke 2005: 185–6; Romsloe 2004; Sjursen 2004: 117), 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 (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 Habermasian 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 (Waever 2004). In disciplinary terms, they should look to IR theory, where there is renewed interest in the conceptualization and study of power (Guzzini 1993; Barnett and Duvall 2005; Bially Mattern 2005; Hurrell 2005).

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 – than 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, too many
researchers be they classic integration theorists or constructivists – commit precisely this error (see also Zürn 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 such as supranationalism, policy networks and 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 quipped many years ago, "[t]he consti-
tuated 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 et al. 2001: ch. 7). At the level of governance (Hooge and Marks 2001.5)

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 quintessen-
tially 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, Ghelici (2005a, b) argues that noviceship plays an important role in determining the likelihood of successful socialization. Using a more explicit domestic politics language, one might simply argue that noviceship is all about measuring the degree of national bureaucratic or cultural embeddedness of particular individuals.

Schimmelfennig (2005) theorizes that socialization outcomes promoted by the EU and other European institutions are heavily influenced by the structure of domestic party constellations. Quantitative studies of identity change and socialization within the Commission (Hooge 2005) or within Council working groups (Risse 2005) suggest that constit-
tuted groups – largely in the form of political elites – play a central role in integration (Risse 2005: 293, quoting from Haas 1958).

While all this attention to the domestic political should be welcomed, more needs to be done (see also Schimmelfennig 2005). At this point, the tendency is too often for ad-
hocism to prevail, where domestic factors are added, but guided by some broader and overarching theoretical argument. Such arguments – be they about elites, institutions or pluralism – are readily found in work on comparative political culture (see also Schimmelfennig 2005). One notable example is on multi-level governance (Hooge and Marks 2001.5)

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CONSTRUCTIVISM AND EU POLITICS

1. 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 — argued and deliberated, in their case — as constitutive of actor identity.

2. 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.

3. 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.

4. For example, conventional constructivists are playing an active role in the — and highly successful — qualitative methods organization within the American Political Science Association, (Symposium 2004).

5. This same imbalance — where positive, substantive theory far outruns critical reflexion — is found in conventional constructivist work, on EU enlargement (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2002, 2005; Schimmelfennig 2010; Kelly 2004).

6. 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.

7. 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 Nye 1995, Nye 1997, Martin 2000, for example).

8. This is where Moravcsik's (2001) hard-bitten but largely fair critique of constructivist research on the EU goes astray. He assumes a universality of (post)patriotic community standards where in fact none exists.

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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. 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 academically trained 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 of 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 programmes 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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CONCLUSIONS — CAN'T WE GET ALONG BETTER THAN THIS?

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 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 2006).

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INTRODUCTION

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