

## Three Roads to Europe or the Social Construction of European Affairs

**Abstract:** The paper draws on social constructivism with regard to European politics. Even so, there are many constructivist approaches, which claim to have the greatest explanatory power, with three of these approaches being considered as especially important in recent research. Therefore, Checkel's concept of social learning, Risse's notion of argumentative action, and Schimmelfennig's approach of rhetorical action are at the center of the paper.

All three scientists favor a constructivist ontology. Moreover, they all depart from a common ground, the "middle ground", which constructivists claim to seize. This, via media, puts constructivism between reflectivism and rationalism.

In the first section I elaborate on Adler's notion of the "middle ground." I then outline the above mentioned three social constructivist approaches. The point, however, is to compare these approaches and to demonstrate their explanatory power as well as to show their inherent weaknesses.

### **"Seizing the middle ground"**

In his article "Seizing the Middle Ground," Emanuel Adler (1997) recommended to place constructivism between rational and reflectivist theories. He was not the first who pledged for a via media, but Adlers work received much attention and is considerably influential.

Ultimately, rationalist and reflectivist theories circle around one question. Is there a real world out there independent of our minds? Can we refer to a existing physical reality that determines human behavior or are material kinds only important because we give them a meaning? Rationalism claims the former, reflectivism the latter.

According to realism or neorealism, states act out of their material capabilities or constraints. An individualist ontology prevails. In a rather simple mechanism, states react only to changes in the material world. Physical forces from outside determine the behavioral response of international actors. Interests and preferences are given in an exogenous manner. A cause-effect relationship is central in rationalist approaches.

The rationalist worldview finds its strongest opponent in postmodernism and post-structuralism, which can be regarded as reflectivist approaches. They follow a more interpretivist sociology of knowledge. As a result, only social kinds, like ideas, matter and should be examined.

In contrast to rationalism and reflectivism, constructivism claims to seize the middle ground between them. International politics, constructivists argue, are socially constructed. Cognitive structures give meaning to the material world. Nonetheless, they do not deny that the material world shapes human action. But material factors are not causally central, nor do they entirely prescribe a unchallengeable manner of action. Constructivists "believe that the identities, interests and behavior of political agents are socially constructed by collective meanings, interpretations and assumptions about the world" (Adler 1997:324). Furthermore, social actions cannot be reduced to individual attributes and motives, for instance, to states and their capabilities. Social constructivism takes ideas, norms, and identities seriously. Ideas are more than just intervening variables or transmission belts. They constitute a cognitive frame, which to a great extent makes up international life. In contrast to rationalism, the constructivist ontology stresses much lesser individualism and materialism. Central to the constructivist approach is the assumption, that collective understandings and inter-subjective meanings provide actors with "indications as to how they should use their material abilities and power" (Adler 1997: 322).

If intersubjective knowledge is a fundamental momentum in international relations we can no longer follow exclusively the rationalist epistemology. Intersubjectivity bears in it not only a causal relationship but also mutual constitutive effects. Consequently, the character of international life is determined by the beliefs and expectations states have about each other. Actors do not only follow the rules of the game, because "agents and structures are by themselves processes, in other words, on-going accomplishments of practices" (Wendt 1999:313 and 1992:413), they have also the power to change the rules. The construction of the social world is a two way process. On the one hand, we can investigate how structures (e.g. collective identities) constitute agents or on the other hand, how agents construct these structures. Here, it becomes most clear that constructivism can be placed in the middle ground. It stands at two "intersections": that between materialism/idealism and agency/structure (Adler 1997:325). Moreover, constructivism takes into account causal and constitutive effects. "In a causal relationship an antecedent condition X generates an effect Y. This assumes that X is temporally prior to and thus exists independently of Y. In a constitutive relationship X is what it is in virtue of its relationship to Y. X presupposes Y, and as such there is no disjunction; there relationship is necessary rather than contingent." (Wendt, 1999:25)

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Social ontologies which constructivism focuses on include not only intersubjective meanings, or ideas but also norms, rules, formal and informal practices, communicative actions (arguing, persuasion, deliberation, rhetorical action, speech act), collective identity formation, and symbolic interaction. These social kinds are reproduced through interaction. Identities play a key role. They are the basis of interests. Interests are defined in the process of defining identities (Wendt 1992: 398). State identities are to a great extent the outcome of relational processes. The self needs the other to constitute its identity. For this reason, identity relates to these intersubjective aspects of social structures. The point is, that agents engage in an ongoing identity building process, which is constituted in relation to the other and furthermore constitutes the other in parts.

Put differently, interaction establishes identity. Constructivism claims those agents' behavior correlates with their identity i.e. the agents' action should not contradict their identity (Banchoff: 278). Identity and international norms, which can be treated as having similar effects, define a code of conduct. State behavior is supposed to be inline with the notion of legitimate statehood.

### **Social Learning**

Jeffrey Checkel (1999, 2001) showed that sometimes agents comply with norms out of social processes. Social learning and deliberations can result in a preference change. His main attention is directed toward the underlying social mechanisms that led states comply with norms. The goal is to operationalize these mechanisms.

A rational agenda sees norm compliance explicitly as resulting from instrumental calculations. Rationalists maintain that the costs of compliance should not exceed the benefits. Especially material factors exert influence. If costs actually exceed benefits this is due to the use of coercion. Compliance is the pure alignment to the material world. Communication processes are portrayed as strategic and instrumental interaction. Actors are egoistic and self-centered entities. Egoism is a given feature in the states' world.

Checkel calls himself a modernist constructivist. He favors a "loosely causal epistemology" but is critical of individualism (Checkel 2001:554). His notion of compliance entails processes of complex social learning. To illustrate, rational approaches prefer models in which simple learning prevails. They follow a cause-effect model, whereas complex learning takes into account mutual constitutive effects. As we have seen, agents' interests and identities are constructed through interaction. Social learning does not place individualism at the center of attention.

Checkel has developed five conditions under which agents are supposed to be open to argumentative persuasion, and norm compliance. He strictly separates argumentative and manipulative persuasion. The latter is described as asocial and lacking interaction. It is close to an instrumental use of norms. The former is a "social process of interaction that involves changing attitudes about cause and effect in the absence of overt coercion" (Checkel, 2001:562). A persuader or communicator attempts to change the beliefs and practices of another agent. Social learning is most likely to occur:

1. When actors are in a novel and uncertain situation
2. When actors have "few in-grained beliefs" that oppose the learning process
3. When the persuader is an authoritative member of an in-group
4. When the persuader can base his arguments on legitimacy
5. When interaction occurs in a private insulated and less politicized environment. (Checkel/Moravcsik 2001:222, Checkel 2001:562, 1999:550).

Checkel is interested in national-level compliance. He aims to show how international norms bring about domestic change. In addition, he pledged for an inclusion of domestic factors into the constructivist research agenda. Communication and social interaction, however, are at the heart of his approach. Checkel does not claim that social learning occurs at any time in any place. Rather is it a question of fitting. If international communication fits in the five scope conditions the likelihood of social learning processes increases.

Empirical data support his theoretical assumptions. Two cases, Ukraine and Germany, provide evidence of norm-based behavior as relying on persuasion and on cost-benefit calculations.

Most states in Europe possess an inclusive citizenship. Germany was over many years an exception. Thus, dual-citizenship is a controversial issue. Finally, international pressure and a massive domestic campaign led to a change in law. Norm compliance was hindered because citizenship was attached with an ethnic conception of Germans over a long period of time. Not argumentation, persuasion, or deliberation led to a change in preferences. Instead, social pressure and sanctioning changed preferences. Social learning was excluded because the citizenship issue was highly politicized. Due to the low level of political insulation and a longstanding ethnic definition of German citizenship, social learning was largely impossible. Norm compliance was a result of strategic adaptation to lessen the pressure on decision-makers.

In the Ukraine the adaptation of an inclusive citizenship law followed a completely different pattern. After the Cold War, the Ukrainian state found itself in a novel situation. It was no longer a part of the USSR. The Ukraine became a member of the Council of Europe. No conception of citizenship or nationality could be described as predominant. Western norms and prosperity were seen as desirable ends. Therefore, a dialogue between Ukrainian officials and staffers from the Council of Europe took place. Ukrainian politicians acted out of a learning process. Their incentive to adapt new information was high. No interference from pressure groups distorted the dialogue. In the end, social learning seems to have the greatest explanatory power.

### **Argumentative Action**

Thomas Risse (Risse 2000) investigates processes of argumentation, which also entail persuasion and deliberative communication. Risse places his approach in the "middle ground" insofar as he stresses to stand between rational-

ism and sociological institutionalism. In argumentation processes, he claims, "human actors engage in truth seeking with the aim of reaching a mutual understanding based on a reasoned consensus" (Risse 2000:1). The "mutual understanding" is based on the social constructivist notion of mutual constitutiveness of norms and agents. As we have seen, engaging in social interaction encompasses in some parts putting your/our own system of meaning at the risk or chance to be changed. Thus social constructivism is consistent with argumentative actions, because the latter has constitutive effects on agents, norms, and identities. "Arguing implies that actors try to challenge the validity claims inherent in any causal or normative statement; and to seek a communicative consensus about their understanding of a situation as well as justifications for principles and norms guiding their action" (Risse 2000:7). Risse implies that agents who interact through arguing are open to be persuaded by the better argument. Consequently, relationships of power are neglectable. Argumentative processes are goal oriented as much as rational actors which try to attain their given ends. What sets arguing apart from rational action is the incentive to reach a reasoned consensus. Furthermore, processes of argumentation have the potential to change the interests of all participants.

Forms of arguing can be found in many situations. Often actors must convincingly explain why they pursue a certain goal. Arguing can help to justify their behavior (Risse 2000:8). Here, the instrumental use of arguments is not excluded from arguing. In all European countries the public sphere and democratic rules demand regularly that decision-makers justify or at least explain their behavior (Risse 2000:21). Nevertheless, Risse understands communicative action not as driven by egoistic cost/benefit calculations. Instead, processes of arguing are guided by a mutual thrust to find a common, agreeable understanding. Argumentative consensus with the other is a key element in Risse's approach.

Communicative action reproduces and constructs the intersubjective meaning which actors need to interact.

What preconditions are needed for communicative action? Risse singles out two necessities (Risse 2000:11). First, a "common lifeworld" i.e. a collective interpretation of the world. Common historical experiences or cultural ties may also establish a common lifeworld. Second, equality. Hierarchies and power relations distort communicative action. Therefore, actors must recognize each other as equals. In conclusion, the more international organizations rely on non-hierarchical procedures the more likely are communicative actions as arguing (Risse 2000:19).

The EU as a densely institutionalized area can be described as a common lifeworld. Risse implies that if the less powerful convinces the more powerful, argumentative action occurs. Moreover, if actors change their preferences although they contradict their instrumental interest, processes of arguing are likely to work (Risse 2000:19).

Finally, Risse underscores his theoretic frame with empirical data. He draws on the demise of the Soviet Union and German unification within NATO. Moscow's influence in world politics declined after the end of the Cold War in 1989, nonetheless, the Russians were strong enough to press for a neutral Germany. Gorbachev wanted a neutralized Germany without weapons of mass-destruction and outside NATO. But ultimately, he changed his mind during the famous Two plus Four negotiations. George Bush was able to persuade Gorbachev by changing his arguments. First Bush argued that the German membership would stabilize Europe and maintain security in the region. For Western European countries this argument was convincing and consistent with past experiences. But not so for Gorbachev. Bush tried again, this time he referred to a liberal argumentation. He pledged for self-determination of the German state. Gorbachev agreed and the unified Germany remained a member of NATO.

### ***Rhetorical Action***

Frank Schimmelfennig (2001) wants to know why the EU decided to expand itself to Central and Eastern Europe, and, more precisely, why it was necessary to go beyond association treaties. He tries to overcome the dichotomy between rational intergovernmentalism based on egoistic preferences and relative bargaining power on the one hand, and norm-driven argumentation's to enter the EU based on sociological institutionalism, on the other. Rhetorical action, Schimmelfennig argues, is able to bridge the gap which rational intergovernmentalism and sociological institutionalism cannot fill.

The rhetorical action approach assumes actors to belong to a community whose values, norms, and practices they share. While a collective identity shapes preferences, day to day politics often follow a more material and egoistic pattern. Schimmelfennig takes this into account and defines rhetorical action as strategic use of norm-based arguments.

Material interests may compete with the community norms. Nevertheless, collective identities exert influence because they are the origin of standards of legitimacy. Identities define legitimate and appropriate behavior. Thus, deviation becomes problematic. Inconsistencies between proper state action and standards of legitimacy make actors vulnerable to processes of shaming in which the actor's reputation is at stake. Losses in credibility can cause severe consequences. States may comply with norms out of egoistic motives notwithstanding "they can become entrapped by their arguments and obliged to behave as if they had taken them seriously" (Schimmelfennig 2001:65). Not only the full internalization of norms into actors beliefs and practices but also their rhetorical commitment affects international life.

In contrast to intergovernmental approaches in which states interests reflect patterns of bargaining power, Schimmelfennig emphasizes that "rhetorical action changes the structure of bargaining power in favor of those actors who possess and pursue preferences in line with, though not necessarily inspired by, the standard of legitimacy" (Schimmelfennig 2001:64). Appropriateness and being in-line are key terms here, they may compensate deficits in bargaining power.

How can we explain the incentive of EU member states to come along with enlargement? By and large, Schimmelfennig implies the geographical position of member states determines states preferences towards EU enlargement. Border states like Germany, Austria, and Finland are strongly affected through economic and security changes in the region. These states want to stabilize Eastern Europe and expand the zone of economic prosperity and peace. They

also expect future gains from their investments in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). Border states have disproportionately high shares in exports to CEE. Close proximity leads to a positive position towards EU enlargement.

On the other hand, states like Ireland, Portugal, and Spain slow down the enlargement process because they fear severe cuts in structural funds and disadvantages after reforms in the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Eastern enlargement would also cause a power shift that possibly favors Germany and the northeastern countries. Especially France is sensitive to new power constellations. Schimmelfennig admits, "The divergent state preferences on enlargement are best understood as individual and self-centered" (Schimmelfennig 2001:33). States are preoccupied with the maintenance of security and welfare. The traditional intergovernmental model tries to mediate the opposing interests through compensations for the losers and concessions by the winners. But the winners can only compensate if their benefits from enlargement exceed the compensation costs. What can constructivism and especially rhetorical action add to rational approaches?

Collective identity does not shape concrete preferences. Day to day politics follow a more material and egoistic pattern. But sooner or later agents "are obliged to justify their political goals on the grounds of institutionalized identity, values, and norms" (Schimmelfennig 2001:63). Actors whose interests are not inline with the community norms must legitimize their position through norm-based arguments and/or actions. For this reason, the bargaining power depends on the ability to create legitimacy. Ultimately, legitimacy depends on intersubjective meanings about what others and we consider as legitimate.

After World War II the European integration process was based on pan-European ideas, only the Cold War limited cooperation. Eastern states couldn't join the common institutions because of the Iron Curtain. Since the Iron Curtain disappeared CEE states use the pan-European idea to support their membership application, also because they lack the necessary material capabilities to press for enlargement. By using the pan-European concept, enlargement has become an issue of credibility for the west. CEE states argue that they belong to Europe because they share the values and norms of the European culture. Western states got under pressure to "complete Europe", which means enlargement of the EU. A common European heritage demanded the completion.

This pan-European rhetoric prevented some member states from openly opposing the goal of enlargement. They became rhetorically entrapped because opposing would have meant rejecting the values and norms on which the EU rests. The credibility costs of non-enlargement rose over time with the repeatedly stressing of a wider Europe.

In sum, rationalism can explain some actors' preferences and much of their bargaining behavior, but it fails to account for the collective decision of enlargement. Rhetorical action offers a *via media* between norm-guided behavior and rational-choice models. It does not ignore the material and causal needs of states but it adds a highly valuable insight: the power of political legitimacy.

### **Three Roads, one direction? A Critical Analysis**

The first section of this paper delineated a common starting point for most constructivist theories. Adler's notion of the "middle ground" is a unifying element in Checkel's, Risse's, and Schimmelfennig's approach. But constructivism does not exactly seize the middle ground. In other words, it fills the space between rationalism and reflectivism. This space is broad enough to be the home of a great variety of constructivist approaches (Christiansen, Jørgensen, Wiener 1999:535-37). Schimmelfennig's theoretical frame is much more influenced by rational assumptions than Risse or Checkel's are. Nonetheless, all three are placed somewhere between the two extreme poles of rationalism and reflectivism. I proceed by discussing all three authors separately in detail, and I finally elaborate on constructivism as such.

According to Checkel, his main incentive is to strengthen constructivism. Thereby he follows Moravcsik's critique that accused constructivists of not theorizing on the precise socialization process. Especially, constructivists take for granted the outcomes of socialization (Moravcsik 1999:227). Actors act "as if" they were already socialized. Constructivism misses a decision-making theory. Checkel is highly aware of Moravcsik's objection and tries to theorize about those mechanisms that facilitate social learning. Five hypotheses or scope conditions make up the core of Checkel's approach (page 6-7).

I will not discuss every single hypothesis, but some remarks are necessary. It is striking that Checkel strictly separates manipulative and argumentative processes from social learning. Manipulative learning means learning through enforcement in which coercive capabilities of actors dominate. This entails a huge variety of action, such as brute military force or social sanctioning, for instance, initiated by human rights groups. In sum, manipulative persuasion is externally given.

Checkel claims that social learning is more likely to occur if it happens in a less politicized setting. Not surprisingly, he is convinced that NGO's or other pressure groups distort processes of social learning (Checkel 2001:569-70). His approach is close to sociological institutionalism and its view of socialization, where an intrinsically motivated actor internalizes collectively held values. States adapt norms because they identify themselves with these norms.

For three reasons this cannot be the whole story. First, politicization does not always equal manipulative persuasion as Checkel implies. Particularly non-governmental groups rely on non-coercive capabilities because their material basis is thin compared with those of state actors. Therefore, arguing becomes important. It also seems strange to me that, for instance, moral consciousness raising as practiced by human right-groups would be *per se* a manipulative technique. Truthful arguing is convincing out of its arguments, it does not need necessarily to be reinforced by other means but it can be and often appears to be useful to back up norms and values with material kinds. Checkel implies that truthful arguing becomes implausible when power relations enter the scene. But the sheer existence of power does not necessarily impede social learning. This leads to a confrontation of power relations and social mechanisms, which seems less fruitful. Power is not an isolated monolithic block that is immune to socializing effects. It should rather be integrated into a social logic of action that takes into account the mutual constitutive effects of power relations. Precisely, the ex-

clusion of power relations is unnecessary because power is to some extent a social kind and as a social kind it is sensitive to interaction.

Second, social learning is supposed to happen in a rather apolitical environment, but it is hard to find such a place. Therefore, EU affairs seem to be ill suited for social learning. Checkel's mistake is to expect apolitical behavior in a politicized world. Above all it is not wise to exclude power relations from social learning. The opposite would be helpful. In many situations neither brute force nor utterly idealized agents are at work. Most often it is a mixture of power constellations based on material kinds and socialized behavior.

Third, even instrumental adaptation of norms and opportunistic behavior to foster egoistic goals may lead in the long run to a truthful internalization of norms. In "The power of human rights" Risse, Sikkink, and Ropp (1999) describe, in many case studies around the world, how states first denied human rights violations, but then adapted human rights norms instrumentally to avoid international sanctions, and in a final stage how states institutionalized and internalized these norms. There is ample evidence that instrumental adaptation of norms or reinforced learning can lead to a truthful internalization of them in the long run.

Mechanism of social learning and socialization are at work in European relations. It is highly likely that the arrangement of rules, procedures, and practices exert influence on those who are exposed to them (Risse, Wiener 1999: 778). The challenge is to detect those mechanisms that drive socialization and social learning. Checkel's approach is a useful step forward to operationalize constructivist thinking but it should not be the last.

Like Checkel, Risse makes visible the constructive power of language or communicative action. His approach is oriented towards arguing. In an ideal speech situation the best argument has the greatest influence. Similar to Checkel, he claims that power relations distort the picture. In many cases this is true but fundamentally it misses the point. Risse and Checkel try to show that social learning and arguing have effects independent of power relations. This is less important than they think because the sheer existence of power relations does not impede arguing or social learning. There is simply no evidence that power hinders social learning or communicative action in every case. It would be even more convincing to demonstrate how socialization and communication have effects despite the presence of power structures. Risse must admit that his model of arguing is not the dominant in international relations. This is ultimately true because he excludes power structures.

In contrast to Checkel, Risse connects politicization not automatically with power structures. The public sphere, he argues, forces decision-makers to justify their behavior regularly. Besides manipulative techniques, arguing is crucial to maintain or create political credibility. Although argumentative action departs from the constructivist middle ground, Risse's approach is a rather weak synthesis. His approach is most convincing when ideal speech situations occur that exclude power relations. But I doubt that we can find many of these ideal situations in the international or European arena. As a consequence, his theoretical determinants limit the explanatory range.

A fruitful combination of causal and constitutive effects delivers Schimmelfennig. He tries to overcome the dichotomy between rationalism and reflectivism. Therefore, rhetorical action is the strategic use of norm-based arguments. He understands socialization "as a process of rational action in a normatively institutionalized environment" (Schimmelfennig 2000:109). Decision-makers must show compliance to community norms and values in order to be perceived as legitimate leaders. Nevertheless, Schimmelfennig assumes that norm adaptation is less likely if actors recognize that their adaptation costs exceed the adaptation benefits (Schimmelfennig 2000:117). Schimmelfennig draws on the constructivist implication according to which state behavior should not contradict state identity. He showed how the CEE countries threatened the collective EU identity. They point to the tension between past promises and the dragging enlargement process (see also Fierke and Wiener 1999:732). Schimmelfennig is aware of the fact that identity is not the only source of state behavior. Identity does not replace material kinds and causal relations, or vice versa. Therefore, it is not social kinds versus material kinds. Schimmelfennig's synthetic view resembles that of Banchoff, who writes "[...] a shared conception of state identity, publicly articulated within state institutions, can channel the pursuit of wealth and power in a particular direction" (Banchoff 1999:278). This concession to rationalism is criticized by reflectivists. They question the middle ground position of social constructivism by arguing that constructivists become more and more tacit rationalists (Steve Smith 1999:683).

Schimmelfennig demonstrated how inconsistencies between identity and behavior could have a tremendous impact on politics. This mechanism only works, as Banchoff stresses, if someone picks up the issue and others feel compromised. Moreover, there is no automaticity between inconsistencies in identity and behavior that forces actors immediately into norm compliance. In 1999 NATO launched a war against Yugoslavia in the name of human rights to prevent further war crimes. The strategic importance of the Kosova region is neglectible just as economic factors are. Massive human rights abuses before the intervention provided an outcry among Western states. What is striking with regard to the Kosova War is not only the fact that international held norms were crucial for the intervention. Put differently, those events, which provoked an outcry in 1999, did not provoke intervention in the years before although war crimes were committed and well documented in Bosnia and elsewhere in former Yugoslavia. It is not sufficient to note that international norms and values matter somehow. Constructivism, and so Schimmelfennig, is not precise when it comes to specifying time and space for norm compliance.

Schimmelfennig's shaming-process assumes and presupposes "[...] an on-going process of states taking identities in relations to Others, casting them into corresponding counter-identities, and playing out the results" (Wendt 1999:21). Unfortunately, Schimmelfennig, like Wendt, presents states as nearly fully socialized actors. Both put too little emphasis on the construction of social actors (for a critical review of Wendt's notion of identity, see Zehfuss 2001:335) and their identities. The point, however, is that identity as a whole is not prior to international politics. At least some parts of actors' identities depend on the other and how others perceive the me. The mutual constitutiveness of norms and actors encompasses not only a simple adjustment of action in relationship to identity. Identity itself is shaped through interaction. Schimmelfennig is right when he expects EU enlargement is driven by shaming of the ap-

plicant states. My argument here is that the collective EU identity is likely to be changed because of shaming and long lasting accession talks. As Wiener has recently pointed out one of the constructivist challenges is to conceptualize patterns of mutual constitutiveness (Wiener 2001).

### **Conclusion**

Steve Smith criticizes the heterogeneity of constructivist approaches. Indeed, there are many different approaches, which call themselves constructivist. The paper discussed three of them. Smith rightly mentions that "there is little agreement over what constructivism entails" and that the "current literature is more united on what is being rejected than on what is being proposed" (Smith 1999: 690).

Nevertheless, this apparent weakness may also appear as a particular strength. Due to the middle ground position, constructivism sets a frame for scientific debates (Wiener, 2001). On the one hand, it brings into play rationalism and reflectivism, on the other hand, it fills the broad middle ground and initiates a huge array of research activity. As a result, the constructivist family encompasses diverse approaches. This diversity is also the outcome of the fact that constructivism is not a theory as such. It is not a substantive theory like rationalism that gives a stringent alternative and clear testable hypothesis (Risse and Wiener, 1999:778). The middle ground position produces variants of constructivism like social learning, argumentative action, or rhetorical action. These approaches do not directly compete with one another. The paper showed how Checkel, Risse, and Schimmelfennig developed their constructivism in a particular direction. The strength and weaknesses of each were discussed in detail. In sum, all three approaches rely on a constructivism that undervalues the mutual constitutiveness of social kinds.

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