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The false promise of constructivist optimism

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Abstract

A survey of 'mainstream' constructivist literature conveys the impression that international relations are positively linked to progress. But while constructivism convincingly shows that international relations are not tragically condemned to conform to Realist notions, it has overshot the mark. Change has largely been confused with progress. This paper first traces how the constructivist bias towards an optimistic outlook on the future came about and then goes on to discuss some of the major problems associated with case selection, the neglect of discursive power inequalities and the ability of actors to bring about intended change purposefully. It argues that constructivism is compatible with different world-views and that the nexus of liberal-humanitarian values and constructivist theory is historically contingent, although not arbitrary. The final section argues that ideational structures are always the condition of possibility for inappropriateness. This renders the notion of progress, driven by contemporary liberal-humanitarian norms, problematic. To illustrate this argument the paper compares the conceptions of 'rogue states' today with the prevailing notion during the time of the 'Holy Alliance'.

Introduction

A growing body of literature takes an explicitly optimistic view on international relations (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998, Wendt 2003). Norm development is assumed to be directing international relations towards a brighter future. International relations are in these views, at a minimum, implicitly progressive.¹ And although most constructivist scholars acknowledge problems associated with norm development, these have not yet been explicitly theorized. I argue that a constructivist approach to international relations neither points to, nor sustains an optimistic outlook on the development of international relations. This 'positive' development is usually understood as a decrease in conflict or an improvement of human life (Adler and Crawford, 1991). Change cannot be equated with progress.

Starting out, I argue that the development of constructivism in opposition to neorealism and neoliberalism has, from the start, biased 'mainstream' constructivism towards an optimistic outlook on international relations. The tension between 'analytical neutrality' on the one hand and an underlying understanding of international relations as progress on the other hand is most often 'resolved' in favor of the latter.

Since judgments concerning the development of international relations depend on 'where one looks' I will focus on the way constructivism has selected its cases in the second and third section of the paper. This inquiry shows that most commonly, the cases selected are considered to be instances of success in norm development. Additionally, and more troublesome, the norms selected are usually valued by the respective scholars themselves.

¹ Progress in this paper is understood in terms of its most common use in constructivist research. Although not often made explicit, progress is associated with "change toward better security, economic and social welfare, and human rights" (Adler and Crawford, 1991: 4).

The preferred conception of progress is minimalist rather than maximalist. The minimalist notions of progress employed assess progress when human rights are authoritative and "less war, less misery, and less injustice" (Adler and Crawford, 1991: 5) can be observed and more cooperation is achieved. These values that serve as a benchmark to measure progress are largely taken from authoritative and consensual documents with high standing in contemporary international relations, such as the United Nations Charter.

Maximalist conceptions in contrast would only speak of progress when "the pursuit of 'human interests' come to replace [the pursuit] of the 'national interest' in international politics" (Adler and Crawford, 1991: 5).

Pessimism on the other hand can be understood in Hobbesian and Realist terms. It is associated with the view that international relations is predominantly shaped by anarchy, which is understood as unchanging. This notion is closely tied to the belief that international relations cannot be decisively altered by contriving better institutions and mechanisms to overcome the effects of anarchy. Optimism would especially object to the latter belief. Here it is quite possible to overcome the effects of anarchy. This outlook on the possibility of a brighter future is commonly based on the capacity of human 'Reason' understood in Enlightenment terms. The capacity to shape and influence international relations towards certain goals is emphasized.

Success combined with the spread of 'norms of preference' then misleadingly points toward progress.

The fourth part of the paper deals with 'mainstream' constructivism's disregard of power inequalities. I will briefly sketch out how this neglect is rendered unproblematic by prevailing scholarly practice. This criticism leads to section five which deals with the compatibility of constructivist scholarship with different world-views, thereby reasoning that the linkage between contemporary constructivist research and liberal-humanitarian values is historically contingent and in no way logically necessary. Constructivism in this view should take the notion seriously that the role of human agency in interpreting, delineating, applying, and reasoning cannot be substituted for by referring to the internal logic supposedly driving system of norms.

Section six goes on to argue that our ability to purposefully act upon ideational structures is overemphasized in contemporary constructivist research. Focusing on the interwovenness of norms and the fracturedness of ideational structures draws into doubt that it is possible to speak of the development of ideational structures with a 'reasonable' amount of certainty. The optimism that contemporary constructivism displays therefore seems to be off the mark.

Before closing I present an argument sceptical of contemporary norms leading to progress. Norms not only define what is appropriate (March and Olsen, 1989), but necessarily also what is inappropriate. Norms are therefore the basis on which it is possible to conceptualize and identify the 'Other'. Although questions of how the 'Other' is identified, and how one is to act towards the 'Other', have to be analytically separated, constructivist approaches should not disregard that norms are the condition of possibility for inappropriateness. If this argument holds, then it also applies to 'norms of preference'. To illustrate this rather abstract idea, I will examine the development of the 'rogue state' concept by comparing modern conceptions with the dominant idea of 'rogue state' around 1815. This short case study shows how policies, although embedded in strong notions of 'the good', nevertheless provide the grounds upon which inappropriateness is conceptualized.

1. The development of constructivism in opposition to neorealism and neoliberalism

The notion that change in international relations² is possible is one of the most central constructivist conceptions. Although I agree with this possibility, or to be more precise, with the inevitability of change, I nonetheless criticize the way the notion of change has been used in constructivist research. Most commonly change has been confused with progress. Change has been interpreted as change for the better, especially by many empirically inclined constructivist scholars. Although some doubt about a brighter future is usually not missing in the accounts of scholars such as Martha Finnemore, Kathrin Sikkink and Alexander Wendt, the central but implicit role of optimism in their work can hardly be missed. This one-sided interpretation of the possibility of change has lead scholars to associate tacitly the central qualities of the constructivist agenda with the possibility of shaping and improving international relations over time.

This is not surprising since constructivism in International Relations has developed in opposition to neorealist and to a lesser degree neoliberal thought. The material and overly parsimonious conception of structure in Waltz's account, for example, forecloses the possibility of change in the structure of international relations short of world government or overarching authority relationships. Being able to disregard functional differentiation under conditions of anarchy, Waltz is left with the distribution of capabilities to do almost all of the explaining. Not surprisingly Waltz's version of a theory of international relations suggests a perpetual struggle for survival driven by anarchy, resulting in balance of power at the international level. Although a world characterized by balance of power is not the most attractive one imaginable, it is still a world in which there is order and in which survival can be secured, at least most of the time, by behaving according to systemic imperatives. This static account of structure and the associated logic of anarchy were forcefully challenged by scholars such as Richard Ashley, David Dessler and Alexander Wendt. The latter, by arguing, that structure has no independent existence apart from practice, and later that the logics of anarchy are dependent on the role structures that dominate international relations, opened space in which change became tangible. This then helped to pave the road for a growing body of constructivist research to turn to the question of how change will come about, and by which mechanisms it is driven.

² International Relations will refer to the discipline, while international relations refers to the empirical subject matter.

In his discussion of the three cultures of anarchy Wendt initially insists that "there is no historical necessity, no guarantee, that the incentives for progressive change will overcome human weaknesses³ and the countervailing incentives to maintain the status quo"(Wendt 1999: 311). Progress, which has been achieved in the 'last couple hundreds of years' and which Wendt considers to be quite obvious, is then contingent and not necessary (Wendt 1999: 312). On a theoretical level Wendt was initially in great pain to make clear that shared "knowledge and its various manifestations - norms, rules, ect. - are analytically neutral with respect to cooperation and conflict" (Wendt 1999: 253). Therefore change could not be equated with progress. But reading on, one finds Wendt making a surprising but theoretically unfounded statement about the development of international relations and ultimately progress. Although progress is not guaranteed, he argued that the danger of regression is low. Indeed regression seems to depend on a "big exogenous shock" (Wendt 1999: 312). The "endogenous dynamic" of the international system is itself expected to lead to a unidirectional history of international politics, which is saying that "structural changes will be progressive" (Wendt 1999: 312) through the back-door. Indeed Wendt followed up on this notion in his 2003 article "Why a World State is Inevitable". Here he based micro-level dynamics on the assumption that individuals and groups struggle for their recognition of subjectivity⁴ and channeled this through the ever more destructive nature of warfare at the macro-level. Resulting and recurring instabilities would then be accounted for by the elaboration of structure or boundary conditions in an upward spiral of progress - setbacks of course being possible. At the point at which the system's dynamics then become self-enforcing something like the *telos* of the international system will have been reached.⁵ Progress is then not only clearly possible, but will come about through identifiable mechanisms in a more or less deterministic way.

This short discussion of Wendt intends to demonstrate in an exemplary way that there is a tension in much constructivist thinking.⁶ This tension can be characterized by analytic neutrality and agnosticism on the one hand, and optimism about progress on the other. This is

³ The view that human weakness is something to overcome is not theorized in this context. It has the appearance, that some ideal of 'human' is assumed and measured up against. This move might me problematic. Likewise the notion that this human weakness might need to be overcome is in need of explanation.

⁴ Luckily he did not opt for the desire for power instead of the desire for recognition. The results of choosing option one are well documented and thoroughly criticized by constructivist research.

⁵ Although it would be a worthwhile activity to systematically analyse the problems in Wendt's text here, I will refrain from doing so in length. I would just like to raise the question of how the elements of Aristotelian thought apparent throughout the article fit with his constructivist approach.

in itself not more or less problematic than combining analytic neutrality with pessimism. The argument here is that the optimism apparent in constructivist research is not inherent to the theoretical enterprise more generally. The relationship between constructivism and optimism, or pessimism for that matter, are contingent, not necessary. Neorealist frameworks, for example, are pessimistic about future progress for reasons intrinsic to their assumptions and metatheoretical approach. But the same is not true for constructivist thinking and optimism. In the attempt to demonstrate that the static and pessimistic outlook on international relations which neorealism offers is ill-founded, constructivism has neglected that shared norms and rules are also constitutive of conflict. Although this has been acknowledged on a theoretical level it has not been taken seriously enough, especially when turning to empirical research. The implicit and thin optimism in constructivist theorizing is reflected and magnified in empirical research. It seems the theoretical warnings, where they had been given, did not resonate well with the broader empirically inclined community. This resulted in studies that usually convey the impression of progress in international relations. Contrary to most constructivist research so far, I will take the notion seriously that constructivist inquiries, conducted on the grounds that knowledge and reality are socially constructed (Guzzini, 2000), do not have to be wed to an optimistic outlook on international relations. As Emmanuel Adler reminds us, the "social world being made of intersubjective understandings, subjective knowledge and material objects" (Adler and Crawford 1991), seen through the eyes of constructivists, is "neither better nor worse than the world seen by neorealists or neoliberals. But it is a world that is broader, more contingent, more unexpected, more surprising and endowed with more possibilities" (Adler and Crawford 1991). If the social world constructivist encounter is indeed broader, more contingent, more unexpected and surprising than the world neorealist inhabit, then this alone cannot be a reason for optimism. As to whether the prospects of 'more possibilities' is a reason to cheer depends at first glance on the answer to the question of: 'possibilities for what?'

If we concentrate on our possibilities of shaping and acting upon international relations through scholarly research, then more possibilities might be welcomed. If we instead focus on the complexity of ideational structures that is the interwovenness of norms, rules, identities and the material dimension of international relations, we may not be enthusiastic at all (Finnemore, 2003). The point is simply, that the merits of being confronted with 'more

⁶ As a result, some work which is criticized in this paper is also used as a reference for good practice. This further demonstrates the deep tension at the heart of contemporary constructivist research.

possibilities' cannot for itself be a sufficient reason for optimism⁷. Nevertheless, the focus of empirical research has helped the impression that 'more possibilities' is to be understood in terms of possibilities for progress. It is well understood that our evaluation of the possibilities for 'positive change' are not independent from the cases we choose to inquire into. In the following section I will therefore deal with questions of how case selection has biased constructivist research.

2. Case selection in constructivist research

The problems associated with case selection have been repeatedly discussed by several constructivist scholars (Checkel, 1999 / Payne, 2001 / Klotz and Lynch, 2007). Apparently most constructivist empirical research has dealt with successful cases such as the development of human-rights policies, the role of trans-national advocacy networks (TANS), the movement for woman's suffrage, the prohibition against certain kinds of weapons, and the like. Usually fields of inquiry are chosen in which some 'progress' has been made in the eyes of the scholar inquiring. Slavery and women's rights are further prominent examples, although the case of female genital mutilation is a well documented exception. The conclusions drawn from these cases are not overtly enthusiastic in the sense of anticipating major improvements in international relations over night. But it also seems clear that the accumulation of these studies point to a road that leads away from a world that is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short" (Hobbes, 1962: 100). The finding that the "norm building literature has primarily studied successful instances (...) creates an important source of bias" (Payne, 2001: 48) is indeed troubling. Again, this bias does not seem to have come about in an arbitrary way. The focus on certain kinds of norms and rules emerged, similar to constructivist research more generally, in opposition to neorealist and to a lesser degree neoliberal thought. Finnemore and Sikkink are certainly correct in arguing that "norm researchers have made inroads precisely because they have been able to provide explanations substantiated by evidence for puzzles in

⁷ Considering that constructivism is usually not thought to be compatible with grounding one's claims in foundational knowledge and transcendental certainties, it would be surprising if 'more possibilities' would be a good reason for optimism. It seems that many thinkers who have contributed to constructivism have associated the impossibility of fundamentally grounding one's knowledge and truth claims with - at least - unease. One of the central questions for philosophers such as Nietzsche, Heidegger and Sartre was how we as humans can arrange ourselves in a world that lacks the above mentioned possibility. The freedom this understanding of the world heralds is not in itself a freedom to cheer about. Anxiety, fear, concern, but also responsibility is central to this worldview. Freedom or possibilities therefore come in a bitter-sweet package.

international politics that other approaches had been unable to explain satisfactorily” (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998: 890). But at the same time the attempt to answer neorealist and neoliberalist puzzles by showing how norms and identity, how rules and a logic of appropriateness explain real-world phenomenon in a way the above mentioned paradigms cannot, have biased the constructivist agenda.

By focusing on successful cases, constructivism has incorporated a strong bias towards an optimistic and progressive outlook on international relations. The way of case selection, resulting from the debate with neorealism and the attempts to ‘solve its puzzles’, has therefore left many possible cases unexplored. Constructivism should subsequently focus on its own puzzles after now having demonstrated its potential by having successfully challenged neorealist and neoliberal theories. The uneven balance of case study selection discussed above is, in my opinion, an important but resolvable problem, in practice to be remedied by focussing more on failed cases such as the fight for core labor standards (Payne, 2001: 49), or attempts to create anti-alcohol norms (Florini, 1996: 386) as well as focusing more on non-events (Checkel 1999: 86).

3. Constructivism and ‘worlds of our liking’

The more sophisticated problem lies with the selection of norms and rules addressed in empirical constructivist research. The constructivist selection of cases is not mainly lacking in virtue of choosing mostly successful cases. The more troubling problem lies with the focus on norms and rules which are considered to be preferable to competing alternatives. In a similar vein, Klotz and Lynch argue that "thus far constructivists have tended to focus on actors with whom analysts themselves sympathize" (Klotz and Lynch, 2007: 62).

Not only does it matter whether we choose successful or unsuccessful cases, but the kinds of norms we focus on has an impact on our evaluation of progress in international relations. The bias toward ‘valued’ norms has in combination with the selection of successful cases reinforced the optimistic outlook of empirical constructivist research.

The cases selected, whether success stories or disappointing accounts, usually deal with norms assumed to be preferable to rival conceptions. This becomes problematic when this emphasis is not corrected by countervailing empirical constructivist research. Success of the norms examined then points to an improvement of international relations, while success stories of norms coming to bear on international relations that do not rank high on our preference lists drop out. The apparent transformative power of highly valued ideas then

generates a picture of international relations moving towards a 'world of our liking'. This bias is unintentionally acknowledged when some leading constructivist scholars argue that

"... contemporary empirical research on norms is aimed precisely at showing how the 'ought' becomes the 'is'. Empirical research documents again and again how people's ideas about what is good and what 'should be' in the world become translated into political reality." (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998: 916)

But when talking of the power of norms, students of International Relations should not forget that some of the most horrifying political acts / crimes in history were carried out on the basis of strong beliefs about what is good, on the basis of norms and rules as well as a strong sense of community and identity.⁸ Especially the construction of identity that in large parts depends on a strong difference to 'the Other', has been problematic. Even killing 'the Other' in such cases can become praiseworthy and a means of upholding the identity and solidarity of a group. The meanings we attribute to actions and our evaluations of them are never independent from norms, rules, and identities. Constructivists should not forget that constructivist theorizing is not confined to norms, rules and identities as well as the developments that scholars so far have inquired into. Empirical research should not limit itself to these norms of preference.

Turning to history we find that basic conceptions of social institutions change. We can for example clearly see that the evaluation of war and peace are alterable. It seems plausible to suggest that today war is considered to be morally despicable with only few exceptions. Likewise today's vision of a lasting peace is welcomed largely without question and the 'goodness' of peace is beyond reasonable doubt in 'western discourse'. This view was not as widely shared in the 19th century. In contrast to prevailing intuitions Count Helmuth von Moltke the Elder⁹ emphatically stated that:

"Perpetual peace is a dream, although not a pleasant one. War is an element of God's divine order. In war the noblest virtues of Man unfold: Courage, self-abandonment, loyal attendance to duty and the spirit of sacrifice. The soldier lays down his life. Without war the world would decay and loose itself in materialism."¹⁰ (Förster, 1992: 633) (my translation)

⁸ Finnemore and Sikkink are aware of the problem that "principled commitments and notions of what 'should be' have fueled xenophobic nationalism, fascism, and ethnic cleansing" (1998). Nonetheless, they hold to the notion that there has been something like progress when they state, that: "...though war continues to be a horrible human practice, there is no doubt that it is less horrible as a result of efforts by humanitarians to curb the most awful weapons and practices" (1998). Here again we see the tension at the heart of some constructivist research.

⁹ Von Moltke was chief of staff of the Prussian army.

¹⁰ Taken from the letter that von Moltke wrote to Professor Bluntschli on 11.12 1880.

The way Moltke attributes value to war was not uncommon in the 19th century, although I would not claim that this view was uncontested. In this case the values and identity of 19th century conservatives lead to an appraisal of war which is indeed largely out of the question in scholarship today. My argument here is not that we should think more thoroughly about the value of war, or that we should in any way obscure its horrors. The point is simply that how we evaluate war, whether it is living hell, the locus of unfolding virtue or maybe a necessary evil, is dependent on norms, rules and identities.¹¹ These are inseparable from how war is constructed independent of the specific content of these constructions.

Although this is common-sense in contemporary constructivism, it is worthwhile to remind oneself of this without quickly coming to the conclusion that war has now been tamed and progress has been made. If constructivism rejects material explanations of war, it should not be too enthusiastic about the argument that war has become so terrible or costly due to technological developments that it is rather unthinkable by now. If the understanding of what war is and how we evaluate the concept of war can change, then we should be alert to the possibility of war being valued more again.

It seems clear that there exists a consensual basis that would condemn such a development. If war indeed would be considered to be more valuable in times to come, this would most certainly not be considered progress from most perspectives prominent today. But this evaluation is clearly not possible without drawing on specific contemporary identities. It is therefore plausible that although constructivist theorizing can be applied to all sorts of ideational structures within which norms, rules and identities are fruitful categories of inquiry, whether or not one can observe progress in international relations is dependent on the norms actually used for 'measurement'. If identities and norms change in a non-deterministic way, then we should be sceptical about predicting progress unless we are inclined to simply understand progress as change intertwined with emerging identities. Change in any case would then be progress, rendering the notion meaningless.

Quoted from Stig Förster (Hg.), Moltke. Vom Kabinettskrieg zum Volkskrieg. Eine Werkauswahl, Bonn 1992: 633. Original Quote: "Der ewige Friede ist ein Traum und zwar nicht einmal ein schöner Traum. Der Krieg ist ein Element der von Gott eingesetzten Ordnung. Die edelsten Tugenden des Menschen entfalten sich daselbst: der Mut und die Entsagung, die treue Pflichterfüllung und der Geist der Aufopferung. Der Soldat gibt sein Leben hin. Ohne den Krieg würde die Welt in Fäulnis geraten und sich im Materialismus verlieren."

¹¹ Michael Walzer for instance hints to a similar point when stating that: "The stories of chivalric knights are for the most part stories, but there can be no doubt that a military code was widely shared in the later Middle Ages and sometimes honored. The code was designed for the convenience of the aristocratic warriors, but it also reflected their sense of themselves as persons of a certain sort, engaged in activities that were freely chosen" (Walzer, 1977: 34).

A survey of constructivist empirical research shows that the topics selected are closely related to the norms held by the authors which could be characterized as liberal-humanitarian. Of course I am not arguing that constructivist scholars should abandon these norms and that different one's should be adopted. The upshot of the argument developed in this section is that by focusing our inquiries of 'norms of our liking' we reduce what we can 'know' about the role of norms, rules and identity in international relations. Ultimately the result of contemporary constructivist research is a one sided view of the role of norms and an overly optimistic outlook on the development of international relations. To counterbalance the present developments constructivist scholarship should additionally focus on the development of norms and ideational structures which are not welcomed *per se* and in which cases of success would not automatically point towards progress in international relations.

Constructivist research could for instance inquire into the practices and processes leading to the establishment of authoritarian governments. Popular movements arguing for the appropriateness of 'non-liberal' values might be analyzed by employing the categories of norms, identity and appropriateness. When studying the development of human rights policies for example, constructivist research should not only focus on those actors articulating norms of humanitarian rights in foreign policy, but also focus on those actors opposed to human rights standards as guidelines for foreign policy. Both 'groups' should be dealt with in terms of norms and identity. Generally constructivist research should focus more on the role of norms and identity in conflict and violence in order to counterbalance research so far. Not to analyse cases of the above mentioned type in constructivist terms would be to underexploit the potential constructivism offers students of International Relations.

The choice of inquiring into normative developments that are considered positive has generated a further problem for constructivist research. The specific normative entanglement¹² in case selection leads to a 'naturalization' of the norms and associated practices studied. This subsequently renders the question of power unproblematic. In the next section I will very briefly touch on the problems associated with this tacit move before returning to the problem of optimism in constructivist research.

¹² The interconnectedness of subject and object in the social sciences is not criticized here. If this was the case, it would draw into question one of the basic constructivist premisses. What is being criticized were is not the ontological relationship between subject and object problematized in constructivist thinking, but the uncritical adoption of specific norms in contemporary constructivist research.

4. The disregard of power in 'mainstream' constructivism

When inquiring into the power of norms and analyzing norm diffusion, the question of prevailing power relationships¹³ can easily be pushed aside when the norms under examination are deemed to be valuable in themselves as is the case in most contemporary constructivist research. Power relationships then do not seem to be of major concern.

It is indeed striking that in this context many constructivists have chosen the term 'diffusion' when referring to the process of how certain norms come to prevail over others. Diffusion is a passive and mechanistic process found in inorganic liquids and gases.¹⁴ It is a process that takes place in systems that display an uneven concentration of particles and is caused by the movements of the particles themselves. Diffusion occurs 'naturally' so to say. But norms do not spread by themselves, in the absence of human agency. It seems awkward to make an analogy between a mechanistic process taken from the natural sciences and an agency driven phenomenon in international relations. Valued norms do not spread like gases leading to a balanced concentration. Norms spread through practice, and this involves power. Treating highly preferred norms as if they diffused 'naturally' obscures how power relationships impact on the likelihood of norm adoption.

Assuming that norms mostly examined are indeed the ones that could reasonably be expected to spread, we would still be left wondering why this should be the case. Since an essentialist approach that assumes the inherent qualities of norms to be driving the development does not fit well with constructivist ontological and epistemological premises, we should alternatively ask how power relationships come to bear on the question of norm prevalence and adoption¹⁵.

¹³ It should be clear from my general approach, that power is not conceptualized in terms of material capabilities.

¹⁴ Although Jefferey Checkel argues that the term diffusion captures the central dynamic of concern to constructivists studying the spread/influence of norms (Checkel 1999: 85), I argue that the term is too passive and therefore inappropriate, especially in the field of International Relations.

¹⁵ Inherent quality of a ideational structure is not intended to mean that certain ideational structures could not be more coherent internally or appealing to persons. When saying that the inherent qualities of ideational structures should not be considered to be driving norm diffusion I refer to the "superior goodness" of a ideational structure. I will extend my explanation of this statement in the section, with reference to Max Weber. Surprisingly the view that the inherent quality of norms plays an important part in norm diffusion is wide spread. Finnemore (although sceptical) and Sikkink, for instance, raise the problem of intrinsic characteristics of norms. It is not surprising that norms with universalistic claims and liberal-democratic feel are considered to be most influential (for intrinsic reasons). The finding that "norm entrepreneurs must speak to aspects of belief systems or life worlds that transcend a specific political context" (Finnemore, Sikkink 98: 907), fits uneasily with the ongoing construction of life worlds. When arguing on the basis of transcendental qualities of norms, one must be careful not to allude to a foundational theory of knowledge, lest one suppose a new constructivist research agenda built on privileged knowledge.

Rodger Payne points to this when he convincingly argues that “norm entrepreneurs overtly exploit material levers all the time (...) [and that research done for example by Keck and Sikkink shows] quite clearly how norm-builders interested in preserving the environment and securing human rights readily use material levers to gain support for favored normative ideas.” (Payne, 2001: 41) Barnett and Finnemore indeed describe officials in international organizations as today’s ‘missionaries’.

"Armed with a notion of progress, an idea of how to create the better life, and some understanding of the conversion process, many IO elites have as their stated purpose a desire to shape state practices by establishing, articulating, and transmitting norms that define what constitutes acceptable and legitimate state behavior. To be sure, their success depends on more than their persuasive capacities, for their rhetoric must be supported by power..." (Barnett and Finnemore, 1999: 713).

As soon as norms, rules and identities are denaturalized, the question of power imposes itself, becomes salient. One could of course argue that the term diffusion is overanalysed in this discussion since the mechanisms suggested to bring about norm diffusion such as persuasion, arguing, teaching and learning are dependent on the activity of norms entrepreneurs or other social agents, and are therefore not passive. But although these are important dimensions of communication in international relations, the predominant focus on these mechanisms still "downplays power. Socialization inherently involves discursive inequalities" (Klotz and Lynch, 2007: 92).

As Nicholas Onuf reminds us, power is not to be separated from rules: "...some agents exercise greater control over the content of (...) rules, and over their success in being followed, than other agents do. In other words, rules yield rule" (Kubáľková, Onuf and Kowert 1998: 75). Power should not be neglected not least because a failure to do so furthers the impression that the inherent appeal of the norms themselves is driving change. This is far from clear and largely incompatible with constructivist premises. The elements of human agency in interpreting, delineating, applying and reasoning cannot be substituted for by referring to the internal logic supposedly driving system of norms. Since norms and identities are tied to power, the issues discussed above are important and should not simply be ignored by responsible scholarship.

5. Constructivism in International Relations and its compatibility with different world-views

The important role and the high standing of norms, rule and identity in constructivist research should then not only enthuse us, it should alarm us as to the power of norms. From the perspective presented here, there is nothing in the role of norms *per se* that would make them point towards positive change. Therefore constructivists should disagree not only with the notion that international relations could not substantially improve, but also with the notion that it could not also substantially worsen from a specific perspective. Indeed worlds of our construction have more potential to worsen than structural realism would make us think. While international relations presented to us by Kenneth Waltz confront us with an ever unchanging anarchic environment, he can at least assume that we are dealing with rational actors who wish to survive. While constructivist research usually assumes this world-view to be too grim, it at the same time might be too optimistic. Jennifer Mitzen for instance recently argued in an insightful article that the need for ontological security might possibly be driving security dilemmas and therefore explains seemingly irrational behavior leading to conflict (Mitzen, 2006).

Although she employs concepts such as identity and ontological security – usually associated with more optimistic constructivist research - she strongly underscores the possibility of an “offensive realist world as articulated by John Mearsheimer, or the tension-filled post-structuralist world of David Campbell” (Mitzen, 2006: 362). Demonstrably, constructivism is compatible with world views close to realism and decisively also beyond. In a similar vein Samuel Barkin argues for the compatibility of constructivism and realist thought.¹⁶ Characterizing contemporary constructivist scholars as liberal-idealist¹⁷, he argues for realist constructivism which in contrast would be characterized by greater moral scepticism and the inquiry into “the way in which power structures affect patterns of normative change in international relations and conversely, the way in which a particular set of norms affect power structures” (Barkin, 2003: 337). Unlike hitherto existing constructivist research a realist constructivism would not be inhibited by an underlying universal political morality. Rather it would acknowledge “that no universal political morality exists and, therefore, if we want ours

¹⁶ Although I agree that constructivism is compatible with different world-views, I have reservations concerning the compatibility even of mainstream constructivism and realism on purely theoretical grounds when it comes to questions of ontology and epistemology respectively.

to triumph, we must arrange to have it do so through the application of power” (Barkin, 2003: 337). To my mind there is no need for constructivists to become realists. But theoretical divides in our discipline should not foreclose the possibility of learning from each other.¹⁸ The insights of classical realism should not simply be discarded. Power matters, especially in 'world(s) of our making'.

That constructivist research should rethink case selection and focus more on questions of power does not mean that we should dismiss the role of norms and identities in international relations. Indeed, I agree with the demand to take social construction even more seriously. We should "study *everything* in international relations as social constructs - from morality, ideals, and [...] security communities to self-interest, fear, and [...] the balance of power" (Mattern, 2004: 345, emphasis in original). It also cannot follow from the above mentioned discussion that we should take a thoroughly relativist position concerning norms and ideational structures, or attempt to eliminate metaphysics.

Loosely drawing on Derrida, one could say that metaphysics cannot be eliminated because of language and of course that scientific work too is perspectivist. It is well understood that constructivism cannot share the positivist notion of value-free science. Indeed Friedrich Kratochwil forcefully argued that even “the characterization of action (...) is not a description at all, but rather an *appraisal*; it is an evaluation of ‘facts’ in terms of some normative considerations.” (Kratochwil, 1989: 229, emphasis in original) This reminds us of Max Weber's thought on objectivity in the social sciences. He emphasizes that all knowledge of cultural ‘reality’ is perspectivist. It is the direction of the scholar's "personal belief, the refraction of values in the prism of his mind [that] gives direction to his work" (Weber, 1994: 257). But this much said we should also recall Max Weber’s argument that the axioms of ideational systems or ‘Weltanschauungen’¹⁹ on which our identities are based cannot be themselves evaluated by science. There is simply no neutral ground from which to judge between the ‘value’ of norms or ideational structures. The ‘value’ of norms can only be judged from within a dominant discourse, only on the basis of a specific world-view. Naturalizing and universalizing certain values is deemed to oust pluralism and lead to forms of paternalism.

¹⁷ I fear the needed debate between mainstream constructivism and a possibly emerging realist constructivism is not aided by this move. The framing of the relationship of constructivism and realism in analogy to what is referred to as the first great debate is overtly problematic as well.

¹⁸ For an interesting discussion concerning realist constructivism see: Jackson, Patrick Thaddeus (2004) ‘Bridging the Gap: Toward A Realist-Constructivist Dialogue’, *International Studies Review* 6 (2): 337-352.

¹⁹ Commonly translated with ‘world-view(s)’.

6. Change is not progress

The arguments presented so far all support the notion that change is not progress. Looking at international relations through constructivist eyes leads to the notion that international relations will change, that it indeed is never fixed. Flux and change are inseparable from social systems. But the direction in which these complex systems will develop is beyond the scope of contemporary constructivist research and further research has to be done to reach a clearer understanding of the limits of what can be known about change over time.²⁰ The implicit assumption prominent in constructivist research that policies based on 'good' identities and norms should also produce desirable outcomes and therefore can be understood as progress does not suffice. The notion of the possibility of actively shaping discourse and large scale processes is overemphasised dramatically in these positions. It is indeed one thing to say that certain policies are appropriate. It is quite another to assume that acting in and upon discourse can achieve intended results. But this is what empirical research seems to imply. Although Hedley Bull makes the statement that the world is more complicated than our arguments (Bull, 1961) in a different context, the notion seems helpful here.

The possibility of managing or governing discursive developments is of course also connected to the question of power. It seems plausible that actors with "discursive power" (not to be mistaken to mean the Realist's material capabilities even though these should not be neglected in international relations) have better chances of taking influence in a purposeful / goal-oriented way. But power to manage the utter complexities of the international system as a social system should not be overestimated. At the domestic level it takes but a brief look at repressive regimes throughout history to appreciate the challenges aspiring 'fixer[s] of signs and meanings' (Kratochwil, 1994: 481) have faced. The admittedly simplifying notion that basing policy on 'good' identities will lead to progress is confronted with another major problem when we turn to take a closer look at the concept of identity. Like norms which have been largely studied in isolation rather than embedded in a complex array of norms, identities have been taken to be quite monolithic (Finnemore, 2003). In contrast to this one could also posit that identities are not homogeneous at all. There not necessarily exists a clear hierarchy of principles and norms constituting an identity. Different constitutive elements might be or plausibly are in conflict with one another within what is usually referred to as 'an identity'.

²⁰ For an assessment from an evolutionary standpoint see Florini 1996.

Maja Zehfuss points to this in *Constructivism in International Relations*. By closely examining the debates of German military involvement after unification, she demonstrates how expressions of identity are characterized by “contingency and [and display an] inherently contradictory character” (Zehfuss, 2002: 87). This leads her to conclude that “identities as they are defined in discourse fail to be logically bounded entities” (Zehfuss, 2002: 92).

If we take this to point to the notion that identities are already fragmented, then it is plausible to expect something similar of discourses and ultimately of ideational structures. Understanding norms as being interwoven, and not clearly bounded, we can more clearly appreciate the complexity of ideational structures. But being confronted with fractured ideational structures makes it extremely difficult to then have a clear understanding of what consequences strategic manipulation of structures will bring about. Simply isolating norms and treating them as more or less independent entities might have to be reconsidered.

How structures emerge through interaction, practice, and feedback-loops while identities and the ideational structure are themselves fractured, is a great challenge for constructivist research. This of course raises the question, why it should be reasonable to be optimistic about future developments. Especially in the largely decentralized international arena it is difficult to understand how the promotion of specific values upheld in contemporary constructivist research can be assumed to impact on international discourse in an unfractured and progressive way. In a related vein²¹ Rodger Payne, analysing persuasion, frames, and norm construction concludes, that “the potential resonance of a contested frame can be virtually impossible to calculate in advance to norm emergence” (Payne, 2001: 51). The results of persuasion, framing, and norm construction unsurprisingly lead to undesirable effects which have not been considered thoroughly enough. Unintended consequences are a major part of structures. Reflecting upon Onuf’s constructivism Maja Zehfuss states that

“agents act within an institutional context, that is, within the context of stable patterns of rules and related practices, but at the same time they act *on* this context. Thereby, they collectively change it but not according to their own choosing. Actions often have unintended consequences. Rules, institutions and unintended consequences form stable patterns called structures” (Zehfuss, 2002: 20).

The fracturedness of identities and ideational structures as well as unintended consequences make clear that there is little linearity in the development of ideational structures. Optimism about the development of international relations is therefore not warranted.

²¹ I would argue for a comparable incalculability for the development of ideational structures.

7. Appropriateness as the condition of possibility for inappropriateness

In what follows, I will present a simple argument that posits a problem for optimistic thought about progress in international relations and which does not seem to be amendable in principle. My argument here does not deny that international relations at times can favor "change toward better security, economic and social welfare, and human rights" (Adler and Crawford, 1991: 4) defined in a specific way. As ideational structures change, it is plausible to expect, that the 'performance' of international relations, measured against some standard, will change as well. Then again this kind of 'measurement' fits uneasily with the notion of ideational change, since it seems awkward that our standards of measurement should remain constant. Of course this seems to be a problem for assessing progress in general unless we assume some trans-historically valid concept of progress, a 'solid' foundation of knowledge, or some other fixed point of reference to which we may turn for guidance. The argument I will present here does not imply that international relations may not at times 'bring forth' less warfare, less human suffering and misery. The argument does suggest that international relations and ideational structures, more generally, display inside/outside distinctions which are problematic for notions that certain norms are inherently pushing towards progress.

Within ideational structures certain norms and identities are appropriate or legitimate. One could say that ideational structures support certain norms and identities. But this also means that other norms and identities can be classified as inappropriate or illegitimate. If the intersubjective understandings that constitute an ideational structure²² sketch out the realm of the appropriate, then they also constitute the realm of the inappropriate, at least in an indirect sense. The boundaries here between the appropriate and the inappropriate do not have to be clear-cut or uncontested.²³ The way ideational structures have been dealt with in this paper suggests that boundaries are not clear-cut or obvious. Especially the fracturedness of ideational structures renders the notion of easily identifiable borders problematic. But putting the problem of fuzziness²⁴ aside for now, the notion here is simply that what is considered to

²² My argument will, for the sake of clarity treats norms and identities as somewhat isolated and make the 'as if assumption' that ideational structures can be reasonably bounded, although this was somewhat criticized above. In this case it does not diminish the argument, for it would apply under conditions of normative interwovenness as well.

²³ But it seems plausible, that certain actions and identities can be understood as being clearly appropriate. In other cases actions and identities can be clearly seen as inappropriate and illegitimate. In a third category of cases (especially if we take the notion of the interwovenness of norms seriously) borders will be fuzzy.

²⁴ For an in depth study of fuzzy logic see: Davis, James W. (2005) *Terms of Inquiry: On the Theory and Practice of Political Science*. Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press.

be inappropriate is dependent on the specific norms and identities that sketch out the realm of appropriateness.

Ideational structures not only define what is appropriate or acceptable then, but also necessarily point to what is inappropriate and unacceptable. This is inherent to the drawing of boundaries, to the construction of identity and ideational structures in general. When a normative space is constructed, it becomes possible to identify what lies outside this space. The 'outside' is therefore 'logically' or 'systematically' connected to the construction of the 'inside'.²⁵ The two realms are in a sense reliant on one another. Not only is 'the outside' important for the construction of identity, 'the outside' is made possible through the construction of a specific ideational structure in the first place. Put differently, one could say that ideational structures that become dominant provide the conditions of possibility to identify the inappropriate. The identifiability of the inappropriate on the basis of the appropriate is a potential source of conflict inherent to any ideational structure. But this does not mean that international relations are tragically "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short" (Hobbes, 1962: 100). I do not argue for the transhistorical validity of ever unchanging international relations on the basis of the appropriateness/inappropriateness distinction. The notion of ideational structures as the condition of possibility for inappropriateness is compatible with the possibility of change in international relations.²⁶

Although ideational structures have the potentiality to 'generate' inappropriateness, I am not arguing that the proposed logic necessarily generates conflict.²⁷ The presented logic does, however, suggest that ideational structures have the potential for conflict, as the conditions of possibility for conflict are given not only in a material sense but at the deep level of norms, rules and identities. While the actual relationship between the 'inside' and the 'outside' of a realm of appropriateness cannot be assessed by referring to the argument that ideational structures are the condition of possibility for inappropriateness alone, we nevertheless have at the level of language a privileging of the realm of the appropriate even before we have a notion of the specific content of the ideational structure.²⁸ Note that the privileging is not a conscious act, but logically inherent to ideational structures as structures embedded in

²⁵ This argument should not be understood in sequentialist terms. I do not argue that ideational structures first construct an inside and subsequently have at their availability backdrops for 'the outside'.

²⁶ It is important to clarify that I am not attempting to make a transhistorical truth-claim with this argument. The content, the form and meaning of ideational structures are changeable. What can be observed in international relations is not fixed or determined *a priori*.

²⁷ Conflict for that matter does not have to be considered to be something inherently negativ at all.

language. This privileging plays an important role when it comes to the potential for conflict. The 'outside' is not only different, it is qualitatively distinct. This distinctness does not mean that the 'outside' is necessarily threatening, but it is in a sense less praiseworthy or valuable. This distinctness opens space for potential conflict even in highly inclusive ideational structures. This is so because the rules governing the 'inside' do not expand to the 'outside'.

If the inappropriate is dependent on conceptions of appropriateness, then we should not be too enthusiastic about the development of ideational structures and the possibility of progress.²⁹ This is so because ideational structures provide the conditions of possibility for the inappropriate, regardless of their content. This shifts the focus from the specific content of the norms, rules and identities that come to dominate an ideational structure at a certain point in time towards a focus on the logical implications that ideational structures have, more generally. The notion that the specific 'goodness' of norms, rules and identities of an ideational structure will lead to progress in international relations is then difficult to uphold. And although different ideational structures can be expected to conceptualize the 'other' in starkly different ways, and the behavior towards the 'outside' may vary considerably, the problem remains. Some ideational structures will 'opt' for pluralism and aim for the integration of 'the other'. But not 'all possible others' are acceptable in the sense that its existence would not pose a threat³⁰ to the identity of the 'inside'. Even very inclusive ideational structures inherently provide the conditions of possibility for inappropriateness. I suggest that it is impossible for an identity to conceptualize all other possible identities as acceptable. It would indeed be quite unconvincing to actually speak of an identity in the case of all-inclusiveness. When everything becomes acceptable, then the notion of appropriateness itself will become empty and sterile. The point is then that although some ideational structures are more inclusive in the sense of allowing for more pluralism, the logical relatedness of appropriateness and inappropriateness remains. And it is not at all clear why ideational structures with a high degree of inclusiveness should display greater restraint to those norms, rules and identities on the 'outside'. The actual relationship is one of historical contingency not logical necessity and should therefore not be confused with historical progress.

²⁸ For the role of language and binary oppositions which are related to this line of reasoning see: Derrida (1976 and 1983) as well as Derrida and Engelmann (2004).

²⁹ The notion that ideational structures by constructing an 'inside' are conditions of possibility of 'the outside' or 'the Other' has not been, to my knowledge, emphasized in constructivist research in relation to the possibility of change and progress.

Whether the conditions of possibility for conflict actually lead to conflict is a different question and constructivist research has to theorize which ideational structures under which conditions are more likely to generate conflict. But the specific relationship between conflict and inappropriateness remains historically contingent. If the notion holds, then it should apply to ideational structures in general and therefore also to the ideational structure(s) that contemporary constructivist research seems to favor. On this note then, there is no reason to assume that even highly valued norms, rules and identities not also be conditions of possibility for inappropriateness and possibly conflict.

To illustrate the argument that ideational structures provide the conditions of possibility for the inappropriate and that the argument is compatible with the notion of change in international relations, I will comment on the development of what we might call 'rogue states'.³¹ The international system³² understood as an ideational structure has at different times been dominated by quite different answers to the question(s) of what 'forms of political organization' are appropriate and can therefore be considered legitimate. Following the argument just introduced, the dominant discourse of legitimate statehood forms the condition of possibility to conceptualize 'rogue states'.³³ The grounds on which 'rogue states' therefore become identifiable are dependent on the notions of legitimate statehood. As the dominant discourses of legitimate statehood have changed, so have the notions of what (sort of) states are outside of the realm of the appropriate. Although I am not able to present an in-depth case study here, I would like to make a short comparison.

I start with the reasonable assumption that actors with full legitimate standing in contemporary international relations resemble western-type states. Although some variation in the organization of government is clearly possible, states have to meet minimum criteria in order to claim legitimate standing. These minimum standards revolve around categories such as constitutionalism, democracy, the rule of law, checks-and-balances, respect for human rights and especially minorities as well as the respect of property, to name just a few. 'Rogue states' in contrast are commonly considered to be states that do not meet a minimum threshold

³⁰ Threat here does not indicate a material threat.

³¹ The term 'rogue state' here is meant to refer to a state outside of the bounds of the appropriate / legitimate.

³² In this view the international system is older of course than the nation state. The term 'international' should therefore not be taken literally.

of human rights, democratic institutionalization and liberal- enlightenment values more generally.³⁴

Unlike 'rogue states' that do not meet the minimum criteria set out in the dominant discourse of state legitimacy, legitimate states are considered by many to be a source of stability and peace. Democratic peace theory has even claimed that the "absence of war between democracies comes as close as anything we have to an empirical law in international relations" (Levy, 1988: 662). States which lack in respect to the dominant discourse on legitimacy are usually considered to be threatening, do not contribute to peace and can be dealt with in a manner legitimate only for this 'sort of state.'

When turning to early 19th century European history, we find astonishing similarities and striking differences compared with today. Although the situation following the Napoleonic Wars was similar in the sense that states outside the dominant discourse of legitimacy were considered to be a problem for the group of states dominating the discourse of legitimacy, the situation was strikingly different in regard to the types of states considered to be outside of the realm of the appropriate. Indeed it was the newly emerging republics that were thought to be threatening.

In sharp contrast to today's concept of 'rogue states', the 'Holy Alliance' between Austria, Prussia, and Russia³⁵ considered republics to be a threat to the international system. In the eyes of contemporary continental decision-makers after 1815 democratic and liberal values were clearly a source of danger for the European state system. Republicanism was associated with revolution. The identification of an emerging republicanism as a clear threat was possible in relation to the dominant conceptualization of legitimate statehood understood in terms of 'divine right' and monarchical rule. The significance of 'divine right' and especially the form of monarchical rule was impressively underscored by the Congress of Vienna and the inclusion of France amongst the great powers.

Napoleon's bid for domination had been overturned by coalition forces in a struggle that lasted more than fifteen years. But rather than diminishing France, it was accepted as a great power in the European international system.³⁶ This became possible on the premise that traditional forms of rule were reintroduced in France. Talleyrand played a decisive part in

³⁴ For a recent article theorizing rogue states see: Capriole, Mary and Peter F. Trumbore (2003) 'Identifying 'Rogue' States and Testing their Interstate Conflict Behavior', *European Journal of International Relations* 9(3) 377-406.

³⁵ The Alliance was later joined by most European states. Great Britain and the Holy See were prominent exceptions.

this. He strategically emphasised the norms of monarchical legitimacy. "By [...] invoking the 'sacred principle of Legitimacy,' Talleyrand (as is well known) was able to coax and cajole the Allies into accepting Bourbon France as a partner, rather than as a vanquished enemy, in the treaty of peace" (Holmes, 1982: 177).

With the Congress at Vienna generally putting a strong emphasize on monarchical authority it aimed to restore traditional forms of rule. It was at the same time opposed to liberal and national ideas. Legitimate rule in early 19th century Europe was based on monarchical organization on the one hand and the consensus or approval of the great powers on the other. While returning to the traditional form of rule secured France a place among the great powers, those who did not trim their internal mode of government to resemble the dominant notion of legitimate statehood soon became the target of 'legitimate intervention'. Old dynasties were consequently reinstated in France, Spain and, Portugal for example. The 'Holy Alliance' acted against national and liberal movements in Greece and Italy in accordance with the European Concert.

The 'Holy Alliance' was founded on strong Christian values that were considered to unite the monarchs of Europe and were understood to be the foundation to monarchical rule. In today's terminology the 'Holy Alliance' can reasonably be considered to have been strongly grounded in the prevailing notions of identity and appropriateness of the day. The foreign policy of the 'Holy Alliance' was by international treaty based on the principles of justice, charity, and peace understood through the perspective of the universal 'goodness' of the Christian faith. "It bound [the signatories] to deal with each other and with their people on the basis of the Christian Gospel, so that the European alliance would become a fraternal union between rulers and peoples banishing war and conflict from the earth" (Schroeder, 1994: 558). Accordingly, the appropriate form of the state was considered to be traditional Monarchy. The liberal and nationalist movements of the time therefore qualified as what we would now call 'rogue states', because of incompatible notions of statehood and identity.

The norms that made cooperation possible for the members of the 'Holy Alliance' also made it possible that states outside the realm of the appropriate could be defined. Their distinctiveness was logically connected to the politics of identity of the 'Holy Alliance.' But the rules that governed the relationship between the 'Holy Alliance' and the emerging republics were distinct from the rules governing the relations of alliance members.

³⁶ Of course it has to be mentioned, that the other great powers did take precautionary measures against a

Intervention became possible through a drawing of boundaries which will have to be closely examined in order to further elaborate on the appropriateness/inappropriateness distinction. But this generally shifts the focus from the inherent 'goodness' of specific norms, such as Christian or Liberal values, towards the discursive construction of the rules governing 'inside-outside' relationships.

How it became possible, in the case of the 'Holy Alliance', to intervene in the emerging republics in ways that would not have been considered legitimate amongst members with full standing and how the contemporary 'rogue state' discourse makes certain actions possible, while rendering other actions unlikely, is a question of further study.

This short example illustrates that ideational structures logically generate the conditions of possibility for inappropriateness regardless of their specific content. The scepticism presented here turns against the notion of specific norms pushing progress. As the discourse of legitimacy in the case of the 'Holy Alliance' functioned as the condition of possibility for 'republican rogue states', so I argue, do contemporary norms of legitimacy make possible the emergence of 'anti-liberal rogue states'.

This then simply suggests that the notion of the specific content and the inherent 'goodness' of prevailing norms and identities will lead to progress in international relations may therefore be overemphasized in contemporary constructivist research.

Conclusion

Even a brief look at the history of our discipline reveals that constructivism mainly developed in opposition to neorealism and to a lesser degree neoliberalism. Constructivist scholarship has convincingly reasoned that change is indeed possible. But while change is ubiquitous, it cannot be equated with progress. I have argued that much constructivist work is characterized by a deep tension between 'analytical neutrality' on the one hand and optimism about progress on the other. The optimism displayed by many constructivists is neither necessarily wed to constructivist epistemological or ontological premises, nor is it presented in a theoretically convincing way. Following this introductory argument, I dealt with problems of case selection in sections two and three. Here I argued that the focus on mainly successful

cases combined with the emphasis on 'norms of preference' has led to a strong, but entirely unfounded, bias towards a positive development of international relations. Constructivism has therefore painted a picture of international relations moving towards 'worlds of our liking'.

The specific focus on 'widely accepted' norms, rules and identities has also rendered the problem of discursive inequalities largely unproblematic in much of the empirically inclined constructivist literature. I argued, in section four, that power should be taken more seriously, especially by constructivists. Naturalizing specific norms fits awkwardly with constructivist premises, which led to the argument, in section five, that constructivism is indeed compatible with different world-views, thus denaturalizing the historically contingent nexus between liberal-humanitarian values and constructivist research.

Section six went on to argue that the notion that 'good norms' are a progressive force in international relations is misleading. I focused on the interwovenness of norms, the fracturedness of ideational structures and the role of unintended consequences to show that the complexities of ideational structures make optimism about future developments a quite difficult position to uphold. This section also argued that constructivism should not further neglect the role of agency, not least in order to rebuff the implicit claim that inherent qualities of ideational structures are pushing international relations toward a brighter future.

I argued in the final section that notions of appropriateness are also the conditions of possibility for inappropriateness. If norms, rules and identities are the conditions of possibility to identify the 'Other', this should lead us to be sceptical about specific norms, rules and identities driving international relations towards a 'better tomorrow'. If this argument holds in general, then it should also hold for those norms, rules and identities which are championed in most empirical constructivist research. Whether or not the qualitative distinctness inherent to the appropriateness / inappropriateness distinction leads to conflict, and whether conflict has to be problematic for international relations, is a historically contingent issue. But by comparing the conceptions of 'rogue states' during the time of the 'Holy Alliance' and today, I attempted to illustrate how changing conceptions of the appropriate have historically led to different conceptualizations of the 'Other', while upholding the qualitative distinctness between the 'inside' and the 'outside.' In this case the 'Others' were conceptualized as threatening, although this must not necessarily be so generally. Far from claiming that the logic presented here renders international relations tragic, it does cast doubt on the notion that the inherent 'goodness' of norms can be referred to when taking an optimistic outlook on future developments. Consequently, constructivist research should put more emphasis on the

practice(s) of border construction, while considering the complexities of ideational structures discussed above. By focusing on the discursive practice(s), making the distinction between the appropriate and the inappropriate possible, constructivism could come to a better understanding of norms, rules and identities in international relations. At the same time, it will be of growing importance to (re)introduce a concept of agency that can theoretically shoulder the weight of being more than the footboy of developing systems.

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