my loosely positivist epistemology, the strong emphasis on agency, the neglect of recursive practices. Clearly, this middle way loses part of the constructivist train (Joergensen, 1997; Diez, 1999: 363–4). My micro-focus limits what can be said about collective identity formation in Europe (Marcussen et al., 1999), or about processes of state/international socialization (Adler and Barnett, 1998: chs 1, 2). Moreover, I am unable to capture fully the mutually constitutive dynamics between my persuading agents and broader social structures because of my epistemological stance. Thinking in terms of variables and causal process tracing requires something be held *constant* for the analysis to proceed.

My response to such concerns is two-fold. Theoretically, the approach should be viewed as supplying much-needed micro-foundational building blocks for more sweeping—and often heuristic—constructivist arguments about collective identity formation or state learning (also Checkel, 2001b).

Practically, my response is 'so what?' The concern here is to develop operationalizeable social science theory (built on positivist *or* more interpretative epistemologies), and not social theory. My strong sense is that constructivism still has too much of the latter and not enough of the former. So, indeed, I have lost something. But I have gained the beginnings of a testable constructivist research programme, which addresses an issue of central concern to Europeanists, and does so in a way that promotes dialogue with both rational choice and interpretative scholars (also Risse and Wiener, 1999: 775–7).

2 Bringing Constructivist Integration Theory Out of the Clouds: Has it Landed Yet?

Andrew Moravcsik

A couple of years ago, in a special issue of *Journal of European Public Policy* devoted to 'Constructivism and European Integration', I criticized constructivist research on European integration for its paucity of distinctive testable hypotheses and objective methods for testing those it has against the best alternative theories or a null hypothesis (random state behavior) (Moravcsik, 1999a). Empirical confirmation requires, most fundamentally, that constructivist hypotheses differ from those generated by the best alternative hypotheses, and then be shown to be more consistent with an objective empirical record of state behavior.

This, I pointed out, has been a weak point of constructivist studies of world politics, largely because constructivists have been focused on ontology rather than theory. They constantly seek to show that only constructivism can

explain this or that broad phenomenon in world politics, rather than arguing that constructivism offers distinctive predictions about the conditions under which that phenomenon occurs. Constructivists often speak as if existing rationalist IR theories could not in principle explain variation in national identities and interests, even though many straightforward interest-based theories of foreign policy, notably liberal theories, do just this (e.g. theories of the democratic peace, economic interdependence, embedded liberalism, two-level games theory). Empirical testing is further complicated by the fact that almost all theories, constructivist or rationalist, predict a correlation between collective ideas and policy outcomes. What distinguishes rationalist and constructivist analyses of this correlation is *not*, therefore, the simple fact that state and societal actors hold ideas consistent with their actions, but the causal independence of those ideas—their source, variation, and the nature of their link to policy. Hence, as I argued in the previous critique: 'the minimum we should expect of any effort to test constructivist claims is the derivation of fine-grained empirical predictions capable of distinguishing among the spurious and valid attributions of ideational causality.' By ignoring viable, even obvious, rationalist explanations of state or social preference change, constructivists are too easily tempted to use the mere fact of variation in underlying state preferences, alongside appropriate rhetoric, as decisive evidence for constructivist theory. The result is a generation of spurious confirmation.

Jeffrey Checkel, a leading constructivist whom I and others have singled out in the past for his rigour, responds to this sort of criticism. In recent years, he concedes, constructivists have spent inordinate time exploring meta-theoretical and ontological distinctions between 'rational' and 'constructivist' theories, and not enough time developing concrete mid-range theories, deriving hypotheses from them, and testing them rigorously. Rather than seeking to theorize the precise socialization processes that give rise to new actor preferences, and thereby to predict the conditions under which such processes will be influential in world politics, most constructivists engage in what Checkel calls 'as if' reasoning.[8] They take for granted the results of socialization on social preferences—'ideational' motivations—and focus almost exclusively on explaining the role of ideas in foreign policy-making. Constructivist theories of world politics, Checkel tells us, should focus more on the socialization of influential actors to new norms and beliefs, which in turn alter the underlying preferences of governments and thereby state behavior.

Only a post-modernist entirely uninterested in rigorous empirical testing of social scientific propositions would challenge Checkel's characterization of the recent constructivist literature. Checkel is quite correct that the results have been weak and inconclusive. Much of recent self-styled constructivist research simply seeks to demonstrate that the preferences of states vary in

theoretically interesting ways and that some of this variation reflects commitment to broad norms or ideas. Such arguments have little distinctively sociological (i.e. 'constructivist') content. Checkel seeks to overcome these weaknesses by refocusing constructivist studies of Europe on the process of socialization and proposes five concrete hypotheses to start us off, each of which is claimed to be distinctively constructivist.

Do Checkel's proposed hypotheses and methodology for testing them resolve the problems he identifies in existing constructivist research? There is much to praise here. Checkel seeks to return the study of ideas to the social scientific mainstream. The seriousness of his commitment to primary research alone justifies this work and singles Checkel out from legions of researchers hiding behind meta-theoretical barricades. Unfortunately there remains reason for considerable skepticism. A theory can be evaluated only if it generates *distinctive* observable implications (hypotheses) different from those generated by the best alternative theories. A viable constructivist research programme of the kind Checkel recommends must therefore be judged, above all, by its ability to derive and test such hypotheses about socialization. Yet by his own admission, Checkel's five hypotheses are not distinctive to constructivism, but can also be derived from well-developed bodies of rationalist theory, such as Bayesian theories of learning or the theory of two-level games. In other words, he lacks a sufficiently strong and distinct constructivist theory on which to ground his study.

Checkel suggests that the lack of distinctiveness of his five hypotheses does not matter, because one can nonetheless distinguish constructivist and rationalist theories reliably through 'process-tracing'. Constructivist theories, he asserts, predict 'sincere' persuasion, whereas rationalist theories predict 'manipulation'. Yet one cannot offset theoretical imprecision with methodological sophistication. This dichotomy between 'manipulative' and 'argumentative' persuasion fails to save the day. It leaves a host of methodological questions unanswered, drives us back to the sort of unstructured rationalist versus a constructivist research from which Checkel's carefully structured hypotheses had promised to deliver us, and misstates rationalist theory as a virtual 'straw man'. Only the most 'vulgar' rationalist theories depend on overt manipulation; many are consistent with 'sincere' changes of policy preferences among many actors, as I demonstrate in more detail below. In the end, Checkel is to be applauded for seeking to bring constructivist theories down from the meta-theoretical clouds, but he leaves us stranded far from a distinctive testable theory. More theoretical elaboration is required before constructivists advance distinctive theories of European integration.

What is Checkel's critique of constructivism?

Checkel is correct that without explicit theories of socialization, it is difficult for constructivists to develop, empirically confirm, or generalize any distinctive concrete claims about world politics. It is worth taking a moment to consider why this is so, since it bears on an evaluation of Checkel's proposal. As he observes, existing empirical tests of constructivist claims do little more than select a particular action in world politics, then seek to demonstrate that ideas or norms—often 'altruistic' ideas or norms—lie somewhere behind it.

This is an exceptionally low standard of empirical confirmation—so low, indeed, that empirical analyses based on it tell us little about underlying forces in world politics. There are a number of reasons why searching for 'ideas' behind scattered events is methodologically inadequate. One reason is that ideas are ubiquitous. Rationalist theories of IR (realism, liberalism and institutionalism, etc.) or European integration do not deny that actors in international affairs have ideas in their heads. As I have argued elsewhere, collective ideas are like oxygen or language; it is essentially impossible for humans to function without them. They are ubiquitous and necessary tools to coordinate social life. No one doubts or denies that almost any complex organization, up to and beyond a national polity, is held together by myriad linguistic conventions, norms, ideas, standard operating procedures, and such. In this sense there is little point in espousing or rebutting the proposition that 'ideas matter', because it is trivial.

Certainly existing rationalist theories of world politics do not dispute the existence or the essential role of collective ideas. They claim something far more modest, namely that autonomous shifts in ideas are causally epiphenomenal to more fundamental underlying influences on state behavior.[9] Consider, for example, liberal intergovernmentalist (LI) theory, which is perhaps the leading synthesis of rationalist theories used to explain decisions for and against deeper European integration. LI explains major integration decisions by invoking variables that alter the instrumental calculations of social actors and states: economic interests, relative power and the need for credible commitments (Moravcisk, 1998). Such explanations do not deny that we observe individuals and governments sincerely espousing ideas consistent with their rational interests and strategies. Rationalists deny *only* that *exogenous* variation in other sources of those ideas decisively affects ideas and therefore policy. In sum, in the LI account of integration, ideas are present but not causally central. They may be irrelevant and random, or, more likely, they are 'transmission belts' for interests.[10] In the latter case, they are endogenous to other underlying factors.[11]

Any constructivist theory must overcome methodological problems

created by the fact that at a superficial level, both rationalist (LI) and constructivist theories predict a correlation between collective ideas and policy outcomes.[12] What distinguishes rationalist and constructivist analyses is not, therefore, the simple fact that state and societal actors hold ideas consistent with their actions, but the causal independence of those ideas—their source, variation, and the nature of their link to policy. Only at this more fine-grained level do distinctive rationalist and constructivist claims become clear. Hence the minimum we should expect of any test of constructivist theory is the derivation of fine-grained empirical predictions capable of distinguishing among the spurious and valid attributions of ideational causality. The distinctive empirical question raised by constructivism is not 'does variation in ideas impose a binding constraint on state behavior?' It is instead: when does variation in ideas *created through autonomous dynamics of socialization* impose a binding constraint on state behavior?

To illustrate this point, consider liberalization and deregulation in the EU—perhaps the most important issue in EU politics since 1980. No scholar or commentator who has addressed this phenomenon denies either that this political process has been linked to the spread of neo-liberal ideology, or that many involved in it were sincerely converted to neo-liberal beliefs. Hence the claim that 'neo-liberal ideas' 'matter' in this context is theoretically and empirically uninteresting. The central theoretical question concerns instead the precise causal relationship between ideas and policy change. There are many intriguing pathways. Did *autonomous* changes in ideas alter economic policy goals, as constructivists argue? Or were changes in ideas themselves a response to deeper technological and market trends, as many economists and businesspeople maintain? Perhaps technological and market trends, or some other third factor, drove both ideological and policy change, creating a spurious correlation? Or did politicians themselves, having put policy changes in place, encourage the dissemination of neo-liberal justifications as an ideological cover? Perhaps market changes led to the selection of national leaders who held such ideologies? Might the emergence of neo-liberal ideology and of market liberalization be a random conjuncture of two independent trends? And so on. Only at this level of specificity, in which a number of subtly different causal pathways exist, can a theoretical debate with empirical implications be conducted.

If we are to understand which of these causal chains are most important, studies that simply document the consistency of ideas and policy are unhelpful. Checkel's analysis implies that such analyses are not simply incomplete or *ad hoc*. They are inherently inconclusive, because they lack the basic theoretical tool required to demonstrate that the ideas in question are truly autonomous binding constraints on state behavior, namely an independent and

more fine-grained theory of socialization—one clearly distinct from competing rationalist approaches.[13] To support any serious claim about the autonomous role of ideas in European integration, therefore, projects that aim at mid-range theory development are essential. Only such analysis can help us distinguish constructivist claims about the causal importance of autonomous variation in ideas from a causally epiphenomenal or 'transmission belt' role for ideas and other sources of spurious correlation. In sum, the future of constructivist theory rests, in large part, on the development and testing of fine-grained theories linking socialization to policy outcomes. Elsewhere I have provided detailed evidence that constructivist studies of the EU have done a poor job of drawing such distinctions (Moravcsik, 1999a).[14]

What is Checkel's proposed research programme?

Checkel aims to end this theoretical and methodological ambiguity. He proceeds in three stages. First, he sets aside rationalist theories of persuasion, which (in his view) stress the strategic manipulation of actors with exogenously given preferences in order to alter their behaviour. (I shall return to this rather narrow understanding of the role of ideas in rationalist theory in a moment). He suggests that we should focus instead on fundamental theories of social psychology, which suggest that sincere persuasion can socialize actors to accept new identities and preferences.

Second, Checkel operationalizes this general claim by drawing again on the social psychological literature. He concludes that actors are most likely to be persuaded under five conditions:

1 When they have few opposing beliefs.
2 When they face novel and uncertain situations.
3 When they receive appeals from authoritative members of in-groups.
4 When they receive appeals in a legitimate deliberative context.
5 When they interact with others in private.

According to Checkel, constructivists should begin—or, more properly, begin again—by developing this sort of mid-range hypothesis about socialization.

Third, he seeks to test these claims. Ultimately, of course, Checkel's emphasis on explicit theories of socialization promises to lend greater rigor to constructivist studies by specifying the precise circumstances under which socialization takes place. Constructivists would thereby be able to predict particular 'if-then' relationships between underlying structural conditions and state behavior. In other words, we should see a cross-case correlation

between persuasive efforts and appropriate state behavior in the target states *under specific circumstances predicted by social psychological theories*, i.e. where few opposing beliefs exists, circumstances are novel, etc. For the moment, however, Checkel's concerns appear to be more modest. He seeks only to demonstrate that individuals are sincerely persuaded of new policy positions. His immediate claim appears to be that as the five factors vary (specifically, as the pre-existing beliefs become more consistent, the novelty of the circumstances increases, the in-group authority of the persuader, the legitimacy of the deliberative context, and the privacy of the interaction) the effectiveness of persuasion increases. To find out whether changes in preferences reflect sincere persuasion, Checkel proposes to conduct multiple interviews, and consult public records, and uncover private documents.

Does Checkel succeed?

Does Checkel succeed in remedying the weaknesses in constructivist theory? There is reason to be skeptical. Checkel's five hypotheses are testable, yet none are distinctive to constructivism. He all but concedes this. 'Several of the propositions', he writes, 'supplement those offered by rationalists or more interpretative constructivists' (such as Brody et al., 1996: chs 1, 5–6; Lupia and McCubbins, 1998: ch. 3). He notes: 'Can one really disentangle preference change driven by persuasion and socialization from strategic adaptation in the face of changed incentives, or from passive, cognitively simplifying imitation?' In fact, the ambiguity is deeper than Checkel acknowledges. At the level of specificity Checkel presents them, each hypothesis is entirely consistent with one or more prominent rationalist, as well as constructivist, account.[15] This is illustrated in Table 1, where each of Checkel's hypotheses is paired with an equivalent prediction drawn from a rationalist theory.

Lest the reader get the impression that these rationalist equivalents were developed *ad hoc*, we should note that each is drawn from a fundamental branch of rationalist analysis.

- *Rationalist Hypothesis 1* is based on basic insights from theories of transaction cost economics and bounded rationality. The willingness of governments to engage in the costly generation and analysis of information fluctuates with the perceived marginal utility of that information, which will be higher in novel situations.
- *Rationalist Hypothesis 2* is based on theories of Bayesian learning and 'path dependence'. It looks to the prior experience of actors as a measure of the extent to which they will accept disconfirming evidence. Such processes are often seen, *ex post*, as a psychological misperception, but they

Table 1 Equivalent 'constructivist' and 'rationalist' hypotheses

	Checkel's 'constructivist' hypotheses	*Prominent 'rationalist' hypotheses that generate equivalent observations*
1	Argumentative persuasion is more likely to be effective when the persuadee is in a novel and uncertain environment and thereby cognitively motivated to analyze new information.	Persuasion is more likely to be effective when the persuadee is in a novel or uncertain environment and therefore has an instrumental motivation to gather and analyze new information and arguments.
2	Argumentative persuasion is more likely to be effective when the persuadee has few prior, ingrained beliefs that are inconsistent with the persuader's message.	Actors are more likely to update beliefs and policies in response to persuasion when prior evidence and experience point in the same direction.
3	Persuasion is more likely to be effective when the persuader is an authoritative member of the in-group to which the persuadee belongs or wants to belong.	Actors are more likely to update beliefs and policies when the persuader has similar preferences or a long record of reciprocal exchanges, and can therefore rationally be trusted; or when the demand is a formal or informal qualification for access to a group to which the persuadee wants to belong.
4	Argumentative persuasion is more likely to be effective when the persuader does not lecture or demand, but, instead, acts out principles of serious deliberative argument.	Argumentative persuasion is more likely when the persuader offers side payments, demonstrates the existence of general incentives to comply (including coercion), or sends costly signals backing the accuracy and credibility of her claims.
5	Argumentative persuasion is more likely to be effective when the persuader-persuadee interaction occurs in less politicized and more insulated, in-camera settings.	Argumentative persuasion is more likely to be effective when persuasion takes place in settings that enhance political incentives for greater agreement by mobilizing and empowering favourable groups.

could also be seen as predictable mistakes of boundedly rational actors acting under uncertainty.

- *Rationalist Hypothesis 3* is based on theories of signalling. Persuasion is most likely to work when the persuadee knows that the persuader shares the same goals, and therefore has little incentive to misrepresent the

circumstances; or when the persuader has power at its disposal (for example, control over access to or action within an institution) to back its' claims.

- *Rationalist Hypothesis 4*, like Hypothesis 3, is based on rationalist theories of signalling and commitment.[18] In this view, it is not the *form* of deliberative argument that matters, as Checkel's constructivist conjecture suggests, but the extent to which those arguments signal the truth of substantive claims. Governments will believe one another when the persuader has made a credible commitment to the policy—i.e. one that is costly to make or reverse—thereby signalling the truth of the underlying claims. These can either demonstrate the proven investment of the persuader in the veracity of arguments about consequences, or the willingness of the persuader to strategically coerce or induce compliance. Does Checkel really mean to imply that lecturing or dictating is, *as a general matter*, less effective than cajoling? A more carefully constrained and controlled 'if-then' proposition would surely be more appropriate here.
- *Rationalist Hypothesis 5* is based on theories of two-level games and agenda-setting. It maintains that the optimal scope of discourse to promote persuasion depends on the power and preferences of the groups that might be involved (e.g. Schattschneider, 1935, 1960).

The existence of prominent, observationally equivalent rationalist hypotheses does not demonstrate that Checkel is incorrect, but it does call into question the *raison d'être* of his project—namely to strengthen constructivist theory by developing rigorous mid-range theory. Differences between any social scientific theories become visible only when the theories are more precisely specified, such that their observable implications clearly diverge. If the essential differences between rationalist and constructivist accounts of preference change are not encapsulated in these five propositions, why have they been presented as critical hypotheses? And what, then, is the purpose of Checkel's study?

Can theoretical indeterminacy be countered through process-tracing?

Checkel does not seem bothered by the lack of distinctiveness of his five hypotheses. Both rationalist and constructivist theories predict persuasion in the same cases. The most useful social scientific response, one would think, would be to refine the competing hypotheses until they reveal fine-grained divergence. (I hint at this in my formulation of rationalist alternatives, and I think there is reason to believe that rationalist hypotheses would do well.)

This is not Checkel's approach, however. Instead, he believes that process-tracing can save the day. As we have just seen, this calls into question the entire structure of Checkel's project, but let us, for the moment, evaluate this claim on its face.

Constructivist theories, Checkel asserts, predict the existence of 'sincere' persuasion, whereas rationalist theories predict 'manipulation' or 'coercion'. This provides a methodological solution to apparent theoretical indeterminacy.

> My answer . . . is methodological. The use of multiple, process-oriented techniques allows for a reconstruction of actual agent motivations. . .A strategically dissimulating interviewee who was just feeding me a line about being persuaded would likely offer different motivations and justifications in other, more private or public settings. Put differently, consistency across contexts is a strong indicator that an agent sees him / herself in a genuinely persuasive interaction. Likewise, [an] emulating agent should, across various settings, offer little substantive argumentation or reasoning in response to questioning, for emulation was simply an economic way of reducing uncertainty in the environment.

Checkel's argument here is based on the theoretical premise that rationalist theories highlight only what he terms 'manipulative persuasion', whereas constructivist theories highlight 'argumentative persuasion'. Checkel defines neither term explicitly, but we can piece together a notion of the distinction. We learn that manipulative persuasion is 'devoid of social interaction', involves 'coercion', and emphasizes 'individualism' and 'strategic agency'. Examples appear to be 'often concerned with political elites *manipulating* mass publics'. (Somewhat to my surprise, I find myself cited as an exponent of this view.) 'Argumentative persuasion', by contrast, involves a 'social process of interaction', 'changing attitudes about cause and effect', 'the absence of overt coercion', and can generate 'preference change'. More specifically—this is the closest thing to a definition Checkel employs—it is a process in which a 'communicator attempts to induce a change in the belief, attitude or behaviour of another person . . . through the transmission of a message in a context in which the persuadee has some degree of free choice. Here, persuasion is not manipulation, but a process of *convincing* someone through argument and principled debate.' Checkel links constructivism unambiguously with argumentative persuasion.

With the five hypotheses having disappeared, this simple dichotomy becomes the core of Checkel's argument. It is the sole theoretical instrument to distinguish constructivist and rationalist predictions. I have to admit to being baffled by this distinction. It is at best unclear, and at worst misleading. There are two major reasons for this.

First, *the observable implications of Checkel's dichotomy remain unclear*. Distinguishing preference changes from tactical and strategic adjustments, or rational updating in light of new information, is a complex and subtle task. Checkel seems to think that political actions are either 'principled' or 'coerced', and we can quickly ascertain through interviews which it is, because the sincere people are more consistent and 'deeper' in their self-understanding, whereas those who have shifted for more opportunistic reasons will offer shallower and less consistent justifications.

There is little scholarly analysis to support this view of human psychology. My own experience suggests that it is often the opportunists who are most skilled at concocting a plausible ideological cover. Rigorous cross-national studies reveal, moreover, that the mode of justification, and its relation to reality, itself varies across cultures and countries. Certainly political scientists have known for decades—certainly since Robert Putnam's (1973) classic study, *The Beliefs of Politicians*—that the ability to provide a coherent principled justification is not correlated with actual political behaviour in keeping with those principles; politicians who express themselves in a more consistent 'ideology' do not necessarily act in a more consistently principled manner.

An instructive example is French policy toward the EC under President Charles de Gaulle (Moravcsik, 2000). It is clear that de Gaulle's rhetoric had a profound socializing effect on his associates and on foreign leaders, which led them to believe that his policy toward Europe was aimed at realizing a distinctive personal geopolitical vision. Whether or not this was the result of conscious manipulation, we cannot know, but there is little evidence of it and I rather doubt it. It seems rather that de Gaulle himself believed that he was acting out of high principle. Nonetheless, he was decisively constrained by his political and economic circumstances. The large preponderance of published primary and secondary sources unambiguously confirm that de Gaulle's European policy was dictated by, above all, French commercial interests—the same interests pursued by his predecessors and successors. This was possible because Gaullist ideology proved malleable, much more so than the structure of the French economy, and de Gaulle was able to trim ideological pronouncements and policy actions to fit those imperatives without ever actually provoking internal contradictions. This revisionist interpretation of de Gaulle's policy was reached by process-tracing, backed by explicitly stated hypotheses, but it does not rest on an assessment of 'sincerity'.

Such ambiguities are the stuff of politics, yet Checkel's analysis offers little help in sorting them out. Though Checkel's laudable commitment to examine documents and public rhetoric does not exclude a nuanced conclusion such as that concerning de Gaulle, his explicit methodology (which

lacks explicit competing hypotheses) offers little guidance in how to get there, while his focus on 'principled' versus 'manipulative' behavior is misleading. In discussing the manipulation-argument dichotomy (as opposed to the—now rejected—five hypotheses), it is hard to see how the claims are testable. The issue of coercion, for example, raises deep, long-standing social scientific issues, which Checkel resolves in a paragraph without reference to any distinct body of theory. What precise distinction between coercion and 'voluntary' persuasion does Checkel propose to employ, for example, and how do we measure it objectively? What exactly does it mean, observationally, that an actor has 'free choice', that an actor is 'sincere', that an actor is acting 'individualistically'? How do we know what constitutes a change in preference and what a change in strategy? How do we deal with mixed motives or complex systemic effects? Aren't most social actors constrained by structures and systems, rather than the direct manipulation and coercion of another social actor? One searches in vain for answers to these critical questions.

If, to take one of Checkel's examples, military generals in eastern Europe come to be persuaded that NATO membership is legitimate and desirable, does this occur due to socialization or rational understanding of changed circumstances? Are these really individual or group preference changes or changes in information or strategy? Might it be an act of personal opportunism or the result of new information, a recognition of political reality, social and political selection, sincere deference to authority, a culturally appropriate action, or the response to education by the new elite? How would we distinguish these subtle and complex forms of external influence on an individual, any of which are consistent with entirely sincere persuasion? Finally, moving beyond Checkel's analysis, how do we know whether they impose a binding constraint on policy? These are not at heart, as Checkel seems to imply at the end of his essay, methodological issues. They are, as he correctly asserted at the head of his essay, theoretical issues. We cannot answer them until we know precisely what *theory* of socialization is being tested, and precisely what theory is it being tested against. Checkel's analysis offers little assistance. Again, methodological sophistication cannot offset theoretical imprecision.

Second, *Checkel's dichotomy turns alternative rationalist explanations into straw men*. The category of manipulation or coercion seems, as with so many other constructivist research designs, almost wilfully constructed to narrow the scope of rational action to interaction between atomistic actors with conflicting preferences and varying resource endowments—i.e. to something approaching a neo-realist view of world politics. Does Checkel really mean to imply, as he does if we take him at his (verbatim) word, that all rationalists believe persuasion is entirely 'manipulative' and 'coercive', whereas any

interaction in which 'the persuadee retains some free choice' can only be explained by a non-rationalist theory? Does any freedom, any ambiguity in motives, confirm constructivist theory? Similarly, does Checkel really maintain that manipulative rhetoric is 'individualistic' and 'devoid of social interaction', whereas convincing someone through argument is a 'social interaction'? What does this mean? Are not strategic interactions social? And are not education and efforts at persuasion, even by the most high-minded of actors—Amnesty International or Greenpeace, for example—often blatantly manipulative, at the same time as they are sincere? How do we separate the strands of mixed motives?

For Checkel, it seems to come down to this: In the constructivist world, individuals seek sincerely to persuade one another; in the rationalist world, they are duplicitous. This distinction is not only manifestly inadequate as a methodological guide to the complex cases in the real world, but it is a caricature of contemporary rationalist theory as applied to the EU or any other international organization. Most theories of European integration have little to do with realism or coercion and everything to do with the politics of preference change and evolutionary learning. Why should anything short of outright coercion be seen as socialization? Most rationalist theories of European integration, including my own, stress the role of positive-sum negotiation, with distributional bargaining occurring only on the margin. This is a constant process of negotiation in which actors learn about new options and construct new norms. Surely knowledge and normative expectations are often internalized through socialization, and such internalization is entirely sincere, yet the pattern is nonetheless dictated—LI theorists assert—by functional imperatives. It seems to me that Checkel's study excludes this possibility *a priori*. Such a study is sure to 'confirm' constructivism, but have we learned anything about the real world?

Very few social interactions are truly coercive, and it is misleading to view rationalist theory as committed to a coercive view of politics. Instead, most rationalists view social interactions as structured around voluntary exchanges and reciprocity within subtly shifting systemic constraints. One can imagine many circumstances, as the examples of neo-liberal ideology and NATO enlargement above demonstrate, in which sincere changes in preference may occur in circumstances where the binding constraint on the policy we seek to explain lies elsewhere. If one actor is successful at persuading another under such circumstances, it is usually, in the rationalist view, because that effort at persuasion fits within a broader structure of incentives imposed by, for example, a market, a political institution, or an information set. This may be true whether or not that structure is fully visible to the two actors in question, and therefore Checkel's process-tracing is unlikely to uncover it.

Conclusion: a hope for the future

There is much to admire in Checkel's research program. It is unflinchingly honest about the weaknesses of existing constructivist research. It sets forth hypotheses that can in principle be disconfirmed—a step that advances constructivist analysis of Europe. This raises the possibility that constructivist theory might generate 'if-then' propositions strong enough to support predictions about variation in the importance of socialization across cases and nations. Checkel acknowledges, moreover, the existence of sophisticated rationalist arguments about persuasion and about changes in individual and state preferences, and suggests they should be treated even-handedly. This promises to free us from the solipsistic claims some constructivists have advanced that in principle *only* constructivism can explain non-realist politics, hostility between democracies and non-democracies, societal or state preference changes, changing norms of state behavior, the importance of ideas, and so on. In sum, Checkel promises to free constructivist research from yet another round of process-tracing studies without explicitly testable propositions, sophisticated rationalist alternatives, or objective methodological standards.

Unfortunately, in the end—and, in large part, precisely because he imposes higher theoretical and methodological standards on himself than his fellow constructivists accept—Checkel is unable to keep his promises. When his five hypotheses prove unable to distinguish or test constructivist claims, he reverts to a method more or less identical to that employed in existing studies. We are counseled to engage in process-tracing to determine whether this or that political actor was 'sincere', 'altruistic', 'idealistic', or 'socialized'. Alternative rationalist explanations appear as caricatures. The entire process seems to proceed without the assistance of mid-range theories or explicit hypotheses. I do not doubt Checkel's integrity, yet I also do not doubt how such a study will conclude. Loosely specified claims have a great advantage over crisply specified hypotheses. The more observable implications are consistent with the claim, the greater the possibility that distinctive evidence confirming or disconfirming a given theory will be found. Checkel's promise of rigor and precision is left unfulfilled.

Yet all is not lost. The first half of Checkel's essay points us in the right direction. Were he to return to his five explicit hypotheses and their rationalist counterparts and refine each theoretically so that it generates a clearly divergent prediction, he would be in a splendid position to generate reliable empirical results. This is worth the effort, because the underlying claims about the power of ideas in international relations are so important. The result would be a more nuanced and qualified, but for that reason stronger, theory

of socialization in world politics. It would bring constructivist theory out of the meta-theoretical clouds and land it, finally, on theoretical *terra firma*.

3 Constructivism and Integration Theory: Crash Landing or Safe Arrival?

Jeffrey T. Checkel[17]

In responding, Professor Moravcsik has noted theoretical *lacunae* and methodological gaps in my proposal; for this, I thank him. Critical commentary is always needed and, indeed, is one of the reasons I welcome this debate. On a fundamental point, Moravcsik and I agree. For constructivist analyses of integration to advance, there must be sustained attention to the development of substantive theory; the challenge is to bring them down from the meta- and social-theoretic 'clouds'. We disagree on how far my efforts go in this direction. Moravcsik portrays the attempt largely as a crash landing; I see it as a controlled descent, with some course corrections needed, but headed for a safe arrival.

Clarifications

Two points need to be addressed. First, Moravcsik sees little connection between the first part of my essay (the five hypotheses) and the second (discussion of research methodology). Yet, as I made clear, the two are intimately connected. The hypotheses establish scope conditions telling one where to look for argumentative persuasion, that is, preference change driven through principled debate; the methods help me assess the degree to which such persuasive processes actually occur. Admittedly, this full integration of theory and method only appears in my empirical work; however, this research was cited and is available on ARENA's home page (www.arena.uio.no).

Second, Moravcsik would have me engaging in the standard academic (mal-)practice of building straw men and caricaturing theoretical opponents—rational choice, in this case. In particular, he claims that I link rationalist conceptions of persuasion with realist notions of coercion, when I in fact connect them to *manipulation* and the strategic use of language/information. While the initial essay does imply constructivism is all about good convincing and rationalism is all about duplicitous manipulation, elsewhere I have made clear that convincing someone through principled debate need not lead to a beneficial outcome. Moreover, in small group settings, there is a danger that debate of this sort can generate sub-optimal 'group-think' dynamics (Checkel, 2001b).

1999a, c) provide some important coordinates as we navigate out of the metaphorical 'clouds' – even if we disagree about how to reach the ultimate destination.

Notes

1 Put differently, lacking theories of process, many constructivists offer suggestive correlational arguments.
2 The attribute soft denotes scholars driven more by empirical puzzles than by the ontological purity of their arguments.
3 On NATO as a social institution, see also Wallander (2000a, b). Adler has made similar arguments regarding the OSCE (Adler and Barnett, 1998: ch.4).
4 The constructivist value added thus comes in how the last three hypotheses add social context and interaction to the first two.
5 This is an enterprise in which I am currently engaged, both in my own research (Checkel, 2000a, b, 2001b) and a through larger international collaboration.
6 More formally, a process-based ontology is a 'meta-theoretical commitment to human interaction as the sole component to social reality'. It allows for the possibility that changes in the nature of interaction can change identities and interests (Sterling-Folker, 2000: 110–11).
7 On the legitimacy and feasibility of these three techniques, see also Zuern (1997: 298–302), and Moravcsik (1998: 77–85).
8 As Checkel puts it: 'They typically argue that fundamental agent properties have been reshaped by prevailing norms, but fail to theorize or empirically document the process of social interaction through which this occurs; agents act if their behaviour becomes rule-governed.'
9 For liberals, the distribution of ideas and information is a function of underlying social preferences and interests, structures of political representative, and fundamental commitments to public goods provision. For constitutionalists it is a function of international institutional commitments contracted by national governments.
10 It is often relatively easy to develop new ideas, justifications and norms regarding foreign policy, as compared to the difficulty of altering basic industrial, constitutional or social structures. This means that the threat of spurious correlation because of alternative causal pathways—notably the possibility that ideas develop in response to material, institutional or social changes—is omnipresent.
11 There is, of course, at least one important exception. Liberal theories examine the exogenous impact of collective ideas concerning public goods provision, which help define national preferences. These 'ideational liberal' (or 'liberal constructivist') factors include collective preferences concerning national, political and socioeconomic identity. These ideas can be thought of as reflective of underlying societal demands and values—collectively determined, perhaps, but intelligible as individual political preferences. In Checkel's terms, this is a rationalist claim.
12 Consider, by analogy, the telephone. Telephones have many characteristics

generally applied to deep ideas and discourses. Telephones constitute a ubiquitous, absolutely essential networks for collective decision-making in the EU. Their existence is a necessary condition for—indeed, it is constitutive of—social interaction as practiced in this particular historical context. The network of telephones collectively empowers individuals to speak and act; without them, social interaction would grind to a halt. Yet it would be absurd to argue that telephones 'caused' European integration.

13 There is always a strong temptation to employ an underspecified theory. Such theories enjoy a considerable, but spurious advantage in any empirical analysis, since almost by definition they are consistent with a wider range of observations than more rigorous and specific theories.

14 This is true of general IR theory as well. Alexander Wendt, for example, famously observes that the United States government is more concerned about non-deliverable (perhaps non-existent) nuclear weapons held by totalitarian North Korea than more numerous and deliverable ones held by an advanced industrial democracy like the UK. Yet Wendt neither proposes nor confirms the existence of a distinctive mode of socialization that gives rise to this sort of antipathy between totalitarian and democratic states, nor distinguishes the predictions from those of a dozen rationalist explanations that might easily be derived out of the liberal theoretical literature on the 'democratic peace'. Similarly, the edited volume by Peter Katzenstein on 'The Culture of National Security' (Katzenstein, 1996) presents the debate as one between neo-realists and constructivists, thereby all but ignoring the most vibrant area of recent security scholarship—namely liberal theories of the 'democratic peace', economic interdependence, bureaucratic politics and distinctive national norms. If tested only against vulgar realism, no wonder constructivism looks so strong!

15 Though in some cases the rationalist explanation is more nuanced and, I submit, more plausible.

16 For general examples of signaling models and rationalist analyses of trust, see Farrell and Rabin (1996), Calvert (1985) and Kydd (2000).

17 Thanks to Johan P. Olsen and Martha Snodgrass for helpful comments.

18 This is still a central challenge for rational choice as well. See Elster (2000).

19 Such implementation gaps are not unique to constructivist studies. Moravcsik's *The Choice for Europe*, whose design is a model of methodological rigor, has been criticized on precisely these grounds. See Anderson (2000).

20 As before, the attribute 'soft' denotes scholars driven more by empirical puzzles than by the ontological purity of their arguments.

21 I say 'underspecified' because the fine-grained, empirically testable causal mechanism linking 'a broader structure of incentives' to a change in preferences is not clear.

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