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 Introduction by Mark Raymond, University of Oklahoma

David M. McCourt's book, *The New Constructivism in International Relations Theory*, is an important reflection on the place of constructivism within International Relations, as well as a provocative and productive statement of a way forward for this intellectually diverse research community. McCourt's reflection is two-sided. He addresses what can sometimes seem like deep divides between 'traditional' or 'mainstream' constructivists on the one hand and a broad family of more-or-less like-minded approaches including practice theory, relationalism, and actor-network theory. At the same time, he also deftly addresses the reluctance of some realist and rational institutionalist scholars to engage with constructivist scholarship, showing how it has contributed to the divides among the big tent version of the constructivist community he identifies (25-52)

McCourt argues, building on a 2016 theory note published in *International Studies Quarterly*,¹ that practice and relational approaches should be seen as representing "the New Constructivism." These approaches are distinct from traditional or mainstream constructivism, especially as it is practiced in North America, and yet are still considered part of the developments within a broader constructivist tradition in the study of world politics. That case ultimately rests on a thoughtful reading of the sociology of constructivism itself as a community of academic practice. In this respect, McCourt argues that North American constructivism "narrowed" as a result of efforts by its proponents to make their work legible to professional gatekeepers drawn from existing rationalist research communities, and from the way that constructivism's interlocutors positioned it in order to differentiate themselves from (a socially constructed version of) it.

The book's ambition is "to get constructivists of every stripe on the same page, to get down to the real work of telling good stories about world politics. (p. viii). The book's lively conversational tone and style make clear that this is a genuine and heartfelt ambition on McCourt's part, one which is born of a desire to avoid further unnecessary fractionalization. But it is also in my view a tactically sound response to McCourt's astute observation that "hostility in discussions about the nature of Constructivism reflects precisely the weakness of Constructivism and constructivists within the various social worlds they inhabit—academies and policy-making circles, at both the state and international levels" (viii). Evocatively casting constructivists' position in class terms, McCourt writes that "constructivists attacking one another, in simple terms, is the academic working class attacking itself" (viii).

In service of his ambition to bring together traditional or mainstream constructivists with those he casts as New Constructivists, McCourt lays out what he calls the eight features of the New Constructivism. He argues that it is anti-foundationalist, anti-essentialist, methodologically omnivorous, conceptually pluralist, reflexive, historical, politically agnostic, and attuned to the importance of emotions and affect. It is fair to say, I think, that this is an extraordinarily broad description. As such, it is easy to quibble with the extent to which any particular exemplar of the New Constructivism satisfies each of the elements McCourt identifies, and also to quibble with the extent to which these are exclusively features of the New Constructivism, as opposed to features shared with traditional or mainstream constructivism (or even entirely different kinds of theoretical approaches). For example, while McCourt identifies and discusses my own book as an example of the New Constructivism, I would say myself that it is actually an attempt to bridge the two.² It draws on both rule and norm-oriented constructivist work and on practice turn approaches, to point out that rule-making and interpretation are themselves core international practices and also that all practices are ultimately rule-governed. More broadly, the IR literature on norms remains vibrant today and contains important

¹ David M. McCourt, "Practice Theory and Relationalism as the New Constructivism," *International Studies Quarterly* 60:3 (2020): 475-485.

² Mark Raymond, *Social Practices of Rule-Making in World Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

contributions by scholars employing more typical North American constructivist approaches as well as those working with some of the tools and approaches McCourt discusses.³

But perhaps that is the point—that there truly is more substantial common ground with mainstream constructivism than proponents of practice and relational approaches in IR theory have sometimes recognized. To the extent that scholars in these communities rightly perceive professional incentives in distinguishing their work from earlier constructivist scholarship, it should be unsurprising that they have sought to demonstrate value added in their preferred approaches. Equally, to the extent that mainstream constructivists rightly perceive professional incentives in further developing well-worn and relatively accepted pathways within IR more broadly, it is also unsurprising that they have engaged less than they might have with practice and relational approaches. But McCourt’s book is a reminder that these incentives should not cause scholars to overstate their differences or to disagree in disagreeable ways. Or, at least, they should be aware that doing so rather than making common cause could have the undesirable result of marginalizing both mainstream and more critically inflected constructivist approaches.

McCourt makes clear that his ambition with the argument in this book is not to erase prior constructivist approaches, and nor is it to discipline proponents of the various component communities he associates with the New Constructivism. Rather, he seeks to defend “a view of Constructivism less as an essence than a particular kind of *space* within the professionalized study of international political life” (1). This approach is intellectually consistent with the anti-foundational and anti-essential characteristics of New Constructivism, but also reflects a generous and open-minded spirit in McCourt’s scholarship that is worth flagging for the reader. It is, ultimately, an effort to lower the temperature around any potential contestation of the theoretical playing field in favor of telling those good stories about world politics.

There is a great deal that could, and should, be said about McCourt’s provocative and important contribution to thinking about constructivism within and beyond IR theory. The remainder of this roundtable consists of three such interventions by some of the scholars who participated in an in-person roundtable on the book at the 2022 International Studies Association meetings in Nashville, along with the customary right of reply for the author.

Stefanie Neumeier expresses appreciation for McCourt’s methodologically omnivorous understanding of the New Constructivism, and briefly discusses several additional computational social science methods which are consistent with the approach. However, she also raises a number of important practical questions about the positioning of the New Constructivism in the IR canon and about the practicality and opportunity costs especially for graduate students of investing in both complex theories and cutting-edge research methods. She also raises the tradeoffs between expanding the theoretical horizon of the New Constructivism on the one hand, and concomitant difficulties in maintaining the internal coherence of the approach as well as its relationship with alternate approaches to social science on the other hand.

Elif Kalaycioglu criticizes McCourt’s neglect of the role of power both in his account of the sociology of constructivism in IR, and as a core tenet of his New Constructivism. On the former point, she insightfully argues for recasting constructivism not as the academic “working class” as McCourt does, but rather as its semi-periphery. In noting the early existence of a more critically inspired variant of constructivism in IR, she

³ Miles M. Evers, “Just the Facts: Why Norms Remain Relevant in an Age of Practice,” *International Theory* 13:2 (2020): 220-230; Michelle Jurkovich, “What Isn’t a Norm? Redefining the Conceptual Boundaries of ‘Norms’ in the Human Rights Literature” *International Studies Review* 22:3 (2020): 693-711; Sarah V. Percy and Wayne Sandholtz, “Why Norms Rarely Die,” *European Journal of International Relations* (2022); <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/13540661221126018>; Simon Frankel Pratt, “From Norms to Normative Configurations: A Pragmatist and Relational Approach to Theorizing Normativity in IR,” *International Theory* 12:1 (2019): 59-82; Carla Winston, “Norm Structure, Diffusion, and Evolution: A Conceptual Approach,” *European Journal of International Relations* 24:3 (2018): 638-661.

raises important questions about what was purchased in gaining a modicum of mainstream acceptance in American Political Science and at what cost (and to whom) that purchase came. Kalaycioglu suggests that this preference for what became conventional or mainstream constructivism owed much to its early proponents' liberal convictions. To the extent that we accept McCourt's New Constructivism, Kalaycioglu argues for the importance of reinserting power as an explicit tenet of that approach, and also for the importance of making space for postcolonial, poststructural, and feminist approaches to function as "thorns in constructivism's side that disallow it from becoming complacent about the choices it 'had' to make, about the normativity it draws from the 'is', and the other 'oughts' that it leaves beyond its horizons."

Jason Ralph draws on his prior work on Pragmatic Constructivism to question whether it is possible for the New Constructivism to remain politically agnostic in the way that McCourt suggests in enumerating the approach's eight core features. Ralph makes the case that constructivists' epistemological commitments entail a corresponding commitment to deliberative democracy as a mode of collective social inquiry. This may allow a great deal of space for disagreement on particular policy issues, but Ralph argues that it rules out certain kinds of essentialist positions unless those views are advanced in very particular ways as mere hypotheses that are incompatible with the kinds of populist and authoritarian impulses evident in many societies today.

McCourt concludes the roundtable by doubling down on his commitment to constructivism as a space within the field rather than a definable thing with a fixable essence. Eschewing any claim to speak on behalf of the New Constructivism, he responds personally rather than definitively to his interlocutors' reflections on the book. To Neumeier's questions about the pedagogy of the New Constructivism and its place in the IR canon, he responds by suggesting that the approach is best left only to certain advanced graduate students with directly relevant projects. My own experience is that core elements of constructivism—whether old, new or otherwise—can be effectively communicated to students at all levels, especially if the pedagogical approach focuses on experience-near versions of the concepts from daily life before demonstrating less familiar analogues from the empirical world of international relations.

McCourt replies to Kalaycioglu by accepting her amendment of his story about the sociology of the field, and by accepting her point about the centrality of power. It should be unsurprising to see consensus about the centrality of power in social life, and the contributions that constructivists can make in improving the political science toolkit for addressing it. The co-authored work by Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall represents, after all, a rare co-authorship between leading figures associated with mainstream and critical constructivisms.⁴ Kalaycioglu's emphasis on ways to ensure the inclusion of postcolonial, poststructural and feminist voices in this particular professional space within the field is an important and valuable addition to the discussion. The Historical IR, Global IR, and feminist IR literatures have substantially enriched the field in ways that are still underappreciated. Here, though, I wonder about the risk of overlooking the possibility that in some corners of our professional field those more critically oriented voices may already be functioning in ways that exclude more mainstream or conventional constructivist analyses from visibility and consideration in ways that McCourt himself has experienced and has discussed in the book. This is itself, after all, an exercise of disciplinary power, and one that McCourt's central move in the book has the potential to illuminate and question. Treating practice, relational and other similar approaches as part of the New Constructivism not only ensures that mainstream constructivists take better account of critical voices; it also ensures that critical communities of scholarship leave space for other kinds of constructivism as well.

In response to Ralph's critique of the claim that the New Constructivism can be politically agnostic, McCourt is skeptical both of whether deliberative democracy is more than an ideal and of whether deliberative democracy is able to deliver on what Ralph thinks that it promises. McCourt asks whether it might at least be logically possible that an authoritarian leader might both deploy essentialized notions of "the people" that are

⁴ Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall, "Power in International Politics," *International Organization* 59:1 (2005): 39-75.

inconsistent with the ethics of deliberative democracy and yet also prove more effective than at least some democratically elected leaders in solving social problems such as climate change. However, McCourt ultimately concedes that even if the New Constructivism does not require deliberative democracy, it does require “deliberative *scholarship*,” which is “hard to imagine” in an authoritarian context.

Ultimately, the contributions to the roundtable and McCourt’s reply collectively demonstrate the importance of McCourt’s book in maintaining a shared space for scholarship and intellectual debate about the social nature of world politics. They also demonstrate that such discussions can remain friendly and collegial even while probing and pushing on difficult intellectual terrain and drawing on the sometimes difficult personal experiences that we have as scholars in what continue to be challenging personal, economic and political times. It is this impulse of bringing IR scholars together around our common ground and shared experiences that I think make McCourt’s book and the discussion it has generated especially timely and helpful.

Participants:

David M. McCourt is Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of California, Davis. He is the author of *Britain and World Power Since 1945: Constructing a Nation’s Role in International Politics* (2014) and the editor of *American Power and International Theory at the Council on Foreign Relations, 1953-54* (2020), both published by the University of Michigan Press. He is currently working on a comparative sociology of the China- and Russia-watching communities in the United States and US policy toward Beijing and Moscow since the Cold War.

Mark Raymond is the Wick Cary Associate Professor of International Relations and the Director of the Cyber Governance and Policy Center at the University of Oklahoma. He is the author of *Social Practices of Rule-Making in World Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019). His work appears in *International Theory*, the *Journal of Global Security Studies*, *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, and the *UC Davis Law Review*.

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Jason Ralph is a Professor of International Relations at the University of Leeds and Co-Editor of the *European Journal of International Security*. His fourth book *On Global Learning, Pragmatic Constructivism, International Practices and the Challenge of Global Governance* (Cambridge University Press, forthcoming) is to be published in the British International Studies Association series Cambridge Studies in International Relations.

 Review by Elif Kalaycioglu, University of Alabama

In *The New Constructivism in International Relations Theory*, David McCourt makes a strong call to keep the space of constructivism open as International Relations' (IR) sociological imagination (18). Having entered the field of IR and American academia through a critical institutional space kept open via constructivism, I am strongly supportive of McCourt's call.¹ And yet, in my engagement with his book and his call, I would like to raise the question of *how* we keep that space open. I am concerned primarily with the place of power in the theories, practices and relations of the proposed new constructivism. To that end, I will offer a slightly different narrative of constructivism's relation to American IR and its narrowing and a reworked proposition on how new constructivism might relate to scholarship on the further margins of the discipline, such as postcolonial, poststructuralist and feminist theories. Since I am going to be talking about relations of constructivism, I should emphasize at the outset that my concern is with scholarly and patterned relations that emerge in the context of the discipline's field structure—a structure that is an excellent point of emphasis in McCourt's work.

Before all that, however, I would like to amplify the great insights of McCourt's book, which I hope will be further taken up in debates on IR paradigms and their possible futures. The first is the reorientation of the description of constructivism from “what it *is*” to “what it *does*.” Described as such, constructivism is a space of analysis for processes of how international political life is constructed (1-2). This is a description that is in line with constructivist orientations to analysis, and it allows for constructivism's possibilities to be more fully evident. The second is McCourt's field-theoretical approach to IR and the concept of fractal divisions, which are integral to his analysis of the drivers and stakes of the dissociation of practice theory and relational approaches from the label of constructivism (11). I do not discuss whether these approaches are constructivist or not—by McCourt's definition or other ones. However, I will note the value of complementing these paradigm-boundary debates, which are often understandably driven by concerns of philosophy of science, epistemology and ontology, with the insights of field structures and incentives. Such a supplement is valuable, precisely as McCourt recognizes, because field structures and incentives are important drivers of the conditions of knowledge production. My sense is that these supplements would not replace but rather re-reflect existing debates in ways that can open up new conversations on shared desirable spaces within IR.

Working class or the semi-periphery?

Moving further into the book's substance, the field-theoretical framework, attention to fractal divisions, and a concern with generational ebbs and flows of new theories provide the analytical scaffolding for McCourt's history of constructivism's position in American IR. Fields, of course, position participants differently, based on their “symbolic capital,” that is, the field's criteria of evaluation.² The search for authority within a field, therefore, requires legibility within the terms of that symbolic capital, and consequently contributes to the perpetuation of its hegemonic status.³ McCourt's history of constructivism is reflective of these dynamics. As constructivism was born into and sought to intervene in the field of American IR, with positivism as its symbolic capital, it adopted a “via media” position. This position did not refute the positivist or scientist episteme of the field. Instead, it sought to show empirically that social factors are integral to a better understanding of global politics (10-11). Such showing required the operationalization of culture, norms and ideas in ways that are amenable to empirical inquiry pursued through hypothesis testing. The symbolic capital

¹ I received my Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota in 2019, and within the so-called tradition of Minnesota IR, which provided me with the space to pursue research projects that fit the description of being rooted in IR's sociological imagination.

² Ole Jacob Sending, *The Politics of Expertise: Competing for Authority in Global Governance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015), 11-33.

³ Sending, *Politics of Expertise*, 20.

of American IR thus structured constructivism's narrowing from its initial, broader premises and promises of a social theory and sociological imagination of IR to a series of empirical demonstrations that culture, ideas, and norms matter in their stabilized and operationalized form (11).⁴ Subsequently, McCourt maintains, this narrowing of constructivism has been sustained by fractal divisions. As a result of this fractalization, what could be understood as new constructivism instead emphasizes its differences from this narrowly construed constructivism.

Where things begin to get trickier is the language with which McCourt narrates this narrowing, as a “necessary move to gain a disciplinary audience” (74). To this assertion, one can pose the question of when that audience sufficiently gained. How much audience would be enough to be content with the disciplinary position of constructivism? And would these moves stop being necessary at that point? These questions might trouble the easy assertion of a “necessity,” without much consideration of its limit conditions and boundaries. Or we might, at the end of the day, still find these moves to have been necessary framings and positionings; certainly for an even narrower IR of the past and perhaps still in its uneven present. But if so, we might want to use caution in describing intra-constructivist debates as the “academic working class attacking one another” (viii). In urging for such caution, I would like to propose that if we take seriously McCourt's history of a *via-media* positioning and narrowing to gain a disciplinary audience, constructivism might resemble less the academic working class, and more Immanuel Wallerstein's semi-periphery.⁵ Crucial to Wallerstein's description of the semi-periphery is the desire to be part of the broader system in ways that contribute to the continuation of its existing dynamics, including its hierarchies. Importantly, this continuation of hierarchies implicates the margins and the semi-periphery's relations to the margins. At stake in this proposition to rethink constructivism's position within American IR, then, is to consider how constructivism positions itself in relation to the center as well as the margins of the discipline, and the role of power in those multiple yet intertwined relations, and not attend only to how the core of the discipline relates to constructivism.

What happened to power?

The place of power in the theories and practices of constructivism is a productive avenue through which to gain traction on these questions. In fact, it is an avenue with which McCourt himself is concerned. The book compliments Chris Reus-Smit's recent work on norms, identity and culture for its focus on power (22).⁶ Similarly, it praises relational approaches for their focus on the distribution of power, knowledge and recognition (48). Conversely, McCourt criticizes the practice turn for giving too little room to the recognition and analysis of struggle (72). One of the strongest articulations of the need for new constructivism to attend to power comes when McCourt makes his call for a re-engagement with language as a re-engagement with power and rule (70). Constructivism should not leave power to the materialists, McCourt argues, and I would fully agree with all that.

But, how exactly did constructivism come to leave the analysis of power to materialists? We can hang the answer on the story of constructivism's narrowing to norms, ideas and culture. But there is no reason for the analysis of these facets of global politics, even in their narrowly operationalized form, to be devoid of questions and concerns of power, domination and representation. One part of the story appears in a passing mention that early constructivism was a “distinctly liberal international research agenda” (122). In effect, this

⁴ This orientation to the field's core is further evidenced in a focus on the facets of global politics that the field already cared about—for example, the role of culture in understanding national interest and foreign policy. In other words, this “*via media*” approach adopted not only the positivist episteme, but also key facets of the existing definition and parameters of what constitutes global politics.

⁵ Immanuel Wallerstein, “Semi-Peripheral Countries and the Contemporary World Crisis.” *Theory and Society* 3.4 (1976): 461-483.

⁶ Christian Reus-Smit. *On Cultural Diversity: International Theory in a World of Difference*. (Cambridge University Press, 2018).

research agenda resulted in a focus on good norms, matched good norms with good actors and at least implicitly operated with the assumption that good norms can do no bad—including constitute an exercise of power.

Another part of the story, I would suggest, remains located in the “via media” narrowing when differently inflected. Adopting via media as the definition of what constructivism is and does, excises from its scope and from its historical narrative the more critical approaches that have inhabited the same sociological space. To illustrate, McCourt offers an excellent comparison of the rationalist and constructivist takes on key IR concerns such as “security, the state, and national interests,” with constructivism bringing culture to bear on these concepts towards their “less neutral or universal” iterations (27). In this illustration, the famous *The Culture of National Security*, edited by Peter Katzenstein, represents the constructivist take on culture.⁷ As quoted by McCourt, the operative description of culture in the volume was as “a broad label that denotes collective models of nation-state authority or identity carried by custom or law” (27). Contemporaneous with that volume, and in fact emerging as a response to the narrowing of constructivism, was another: *Cultures of Insecurity: States, Communities and the Production of Danger*, edited by Jutta Weldes, Mark Laffey, Hugh Gusterson and Raymond Duvall. In this volume, culture appears precisely as a field of meanings rife with struggles for domination, representation and recognition.⁸

I offer this juxtaposition in part to put a wrinkle in what the book calls “questions unasked during first decade and a half of constructivism” (113). These might rather be questions that emerge as unasked through the particular delineation of constructivism and the subsequent historical tracing of it that the book undertakes. These more critical approaches, some of which subsequently dissociated themselves from constructivism but which never fit comfortably within its via media, positive science definition, were locations of inquiry on questions of power, domination and representation in matters of world-making and unmaking—that is, processes of how international politics come into being. And yet, in reflecting this history, my concern is less with the recovery of other old constructivisms and more with how a new constructivism with a continued commitment to a via media position and a pragmatic ethics, as McCourt outlines it, will stand in relation to these more critical peripheries.

Pragmatic Ethics and Thorough Reflexivity

McCourt’s proposed new constructivism maintains a via media position and a pragmatic ethics, the succinct statements of which open and conclude his book. The preface positions constructivism as “not trying to unmask hidden power structures with the aim of helping overthrow them” (v). The conclusion states that new constructivism is “world disclosing rather than problem solving” (131). Consequently, analyses of power is not one of the seven principles McCourt lists as critical for new constructivism, nor is it an integral part of the reflexivity that is one of those principles.⁹ And yet, are power structures not integral to the construction of the world and thus to its disclosing? This positioning in relation to power structures is further manifested in a pragmatic ethics. As McCourt explains, pragmatic ethics are grounded in practical knowledge based on existing historical context. To the extent that they constitute an opening for “ought” in new constructivism, such “ought” is to be grounded on the “is” (118-119). In other words, the normativity that is possible within a constructivism, which continues to be a via media between scientist and “explicitly normative” theories of

⁷ Peter J. Katzenstein, ed. *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (Columbia University Press, 1996).

⁸ Jutta Weldes, Mark Laffey, Hugh Gusterson, and Raymond Duvall, eds. *Cultures of Insecurity: States, Communities, and the Production of Danger* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 2.

⁹ According to these principles, new constructivism is rigorously anti-essentialist, anti-foundationalist, methodological promiscuous, conceptually plural, reflexive, necessarily historical, politically agnostic, and attuned to emotions and affect (13).

IR, is bound by the existing historical-political horizons. In contrast to McCourt's labeling, this is precisely what Robert Cox would call problem solving theory.¹⁰

What, if anything, is the problem with such positioning? Surely, not all IR theories have to be in the business of unmasking and aiming to overthrow hidden power structures? I propose that the issue with this positioning and its particular articulation is two-fold. First, it sells short some of the key insights of new constructivism as defined by McCourt. To take an example, which has also informed my above-engagement with field theory, Ole Jacob Sending's *Politics of Expertise* presents a Bourdieusian genealogy of the making of global governance fields.¹¹ It is an incisive demonstration of the processes that render some ideas and knowledges marginal and place other epistemes and experts in positions of institutional authority. It is an excellent demonstration, in other words, of "processes by which international political reality is made." (viii) And yet, such genealogical demonstration is at the same time a recovery of archives or repertoires of other constructions of global governance that could have been and that might still be. It is, therefore, an analysis of the "is" that can nevertheless reveal "oughts" that lie beyond that horizon.

In terms of the specific articulation of this position, then, the issue becomes one of greater reflexivity in terms of the trade-offs that arise from this pragmatic, via media ethical positioning. For example, what if it leaves new constructivism in a place with a real question of whether its future will be different from its past? How does one avoid the kind of narrowing and reification that the book identifies very aptly when the "is"—of the global political world or the disciplinary field that one inhabits—becomes the normative horizon? What delicate, if not fraught, balances of world accepting and disclosing would need to be maintained as part of this positioning? And if not overturning, what would be the relation(s) of our disclosures to the process of constructing international political life?

To conclude, let me bring these threads to bear on intra and inter-constructivist relations, a key axis of concern in McCourt's book. What might supplementing a pragmatic ethics with a thorough reflexivity look like? If the constructivist desire is to be part of the IR tent and if we are also equipped with enough social theory to know that fields are hierarchically constituted and that desires for inclusion can maintain those hierarchies, what do we do with what we know? Do we say, 'we are entering the tent, and these are the inevitable terms of doing so?' If so, what do we do once there? Do we shut the door after ourselves to maintain the tent's integrity and perhaps to make sure we are not mistaken for the more unruly crowd on the edges? Do we make a case for its openness beyond ourselves?

In a similar engagement, McCourt proposes contingent connections that highlight synergies with postcolonial and feminist theory (122). In the broader spirit of my engagement with McCourt's book, I will propose a different relation. If new constructivism is going to be via media with pragmatic ethics, where historical and practical knowledge is oriented through and towards a prudence, which emerges from and remains within existing historico-political horizons, then the relation with these theories should not be limited to productive syntheses. I would propose instead that new constructivism make power central to its reflexivity, including its scholarly relations, in ways that allow for these other approaches to be thorns in constructivism's side that prevent it from becoming complacent about the choices it "had" to make, about the normativity it draws from the "is," and the other "oughts" it leaves beyond its horizons. To return to McCourt's opening call, *this* would be the space of sociological imagination(s) that is truly critical to keep open in IR.

¹⁰ Robert W. Cox, "Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations: An Essay in Method." *Millennium* 12, no. 2 (1983): 162–75.

¹¹ Sending, *Politics of Expertise*.

 Review by Stefanie Neumeier, University of Southern California

In *The New Constructivism in International Relations Theory*, David McCourt offers a refreshing take on Constructivism by reviewing old, present, and new concepts in Constructivism and connects them pragmatically with methodological examples. Moreover, this book functions as a handbook on ‘how to constructivist’ in an era defined and dominated by new advances in computational social science. Instead of continuing to focus on norms, identity and culture, McCourt pushes beyond these boundaries and encourages the reader to take advantage of these novel methodological developments. In chapter 2, the author sets the theoretical foundation for New Constructivism by drawing upon practice theory, relationalism, network analysis, and actor network theory. Chapters 3 to 5 offer an in-depth discussion on the different facets of New Constructivism. Specifically, the author illuminates how Old and New Constructivism are connected, how New Constructivism is necessarily reflexivist and treats social actors not as the mere outcome of, but as central in the process of social constructions, and how New Constructivism is not limited to interpretivist and/or subjective analyses (22).¹

Given the richness of this book, this review will focus on two aspects: 1) the role of underutilized or new computational method and 2) the potential ‘dangers’ and pushback of widening/reinventing constructivism. This contribution concludes by raising the pedagogical question of how to best integrate New Constructivism in curricula.

First, McCourt’s advocacy for computational methods, and how they can enhance a new constructivist approach, cannot be celebrated enough. The author notes that constructivists have often put themselves or one other in the purely qualitative or interpretivist box. This may have been a function of concepts constructivists tend to study and the centrality of language in constructivist analyses. However, with the rise of computational methods, scholars are able to diversify their methodological palette. This is essential for both graduate students and junior scholars as well as for more senior scholars who are in the process of learning new methods and figuring out how to best answer prevailing or arising questions from a new angle. Utilizing computational methods allows graduate students as well as other scholars to truly set themselves apart from past constructivist analyses. Through these new methods, researchers are able to process and interpret large corpora faster and discover both specific yet broad patterns in texts and relationships that otherwise would have remained unseen.

McCourt mentions social-network analysis as a prominent example. Reinforcing the author’s point, social network analysis represents an excellent tool for discovering relations amongst any type of entities (rules, law, organizations, people, states).² Social-network analysis allows researchers to explore granular and actor-specific features, position and relational features, as well as broad, structural network features such as centralization and density. It is a comprehensive methodological approach to investigating social relations and interactions. Further, social-network analysis is a dynamic approach that lets scholars study and compare networks and their evolution over time.³ Social-network analysis goes beyond visualization and descriptive

¹ Nicholas Greenwood Onuf, *World of Our Making: Rules and Rule in Social Theory and International Relations* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989); Christian Reus-Smit, “The Constitutional Structure of International Society and the Nature of Fundamental Institutions,” *International Organization* 51:4 (1997): 555–89.

² Emilie M. Hafner-Burton, Miles Kahler, and Alexander H. Montgomery, “Network Analysis for International Relations,” *International Organization* 63:3 (2009): 559–92.

³ Nicholas A. Christakis and James H. Fowler, “The Spread of Obesity in a Large Social Network over 32 Years,” *New England Journal of Medicine* 357:4 (July 26, 2007): 370–79, <https://doi.org/10.1056/NEJMsa066082>; Brandon J. Kinne, “Network Dynamics and the Evolution of International Cooperation,” *American Political Science Review* 107:4 (November 2013): 766–85, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055413000440>; Brandon J. Kinne, “Defense Cooperation Agreements and the Emergence of a Global Security Network,” *International Organization* 72:4 (ed 2018): 799–837, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818318000218>.

measures. There are specific statistical models to estimate relationships in networks.⁴ Such network modeling approaches are revolutionary as traditional statistical models rely on the assumption of observations being independent from another. In networks this independence assumption is violated by default, making traditional models an ill-fit for analysis. Scholars should therefore rely on network statistical models such as such as exponential random graph models that account for the interdependencies in networks without violating core statistical assumptions.

While McCourt touches upon some important computational methods such as Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) or social network analysis, there are many more that go unmentioned. To complement the author's efforts, the following paragraphs briefly describe some methodological tools that are relevant for the New Constructivism. For example, topic modeling is a Machine Learning approach that helps to organize and make sense of large amounts of text by dividing the text into topic categories.⁵ The author points out the importance of language, but the challenge with text is that it is big, unstructured, messy, and noisy. This often complicates identifying relevant evidence and interpreting it. Using a topic model helps scholars to process text and group similar topics together, thus making interpretation and analysis easier.⁶

Another helpful tool is sentiment analysis. With sentiment analysis, scholars are able to detect positive and negative attitudes or even emotions in text.⁷ This can be extremely helpful for scholars who are interested in tone and emotions expressed in text.⁸ It is especially useful when working with large amounts of text data for which an in-depth qualitative investigation is too time-consuming and/or unfeasible. Dictionaries are often used as a pre-processing step for text data because dictionaries allow researchers to filter for relevant topics/concepts. This saves time and reduces noise in data and data analyses.

Finally, word embeddings are an amazing Natural Language Processing (NLP) technique that groups words with similar meaning together.⁹ Word embeddings can be very useful for scholars who are interested in

⁴ Douglas Luke, *A User's Guide to Network Analysis in R, Use R!* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-23883-8>.

⁵ David M. Blei, "Probabilistic Topic Models," *Communications of the ACM* 55:4 (April 1, 2012): 77–84, <https://doi.org/10.1145/2133806.2133826>.

⁶ Pablo Barberá et al., "Who Leads? Who Follows? Measuring Issue Attention and Agenda Setting by Legislators and the Mass Public Using Social Media Data," *American Political Science Review* 113:4 (November 2019): 883–901, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055419000352>; Kevin M. Quinn et al., "How to Analyze Political Attention with Minimal Assumptions and Costs," *American Journal of Political Science* 54:1 (2010): 209–28, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2009.00427.x>; Margaret E. Roberts et al., "Structural Topic Models for Open-Ended Survey Responses," *American Journal of Political Science* 58:4 (October 2014): 1064–82, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12103>.

⁷ Pablo Barberá et al., "Automated Text Classification of News Articles: A Practical Guide," *Political Analysis* 29:1 (January 2021): 19–42, <https://doi.org/10.1017/pan.2020.8>; Sandra González-Bailón and Georgios Paltoglou, "Signals of Public Opinion in Online Communication: A Comparison of Methods and Data Sources," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 659:1 (May 1, 2015): 95–107, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716215569192>; Yla R. Tausczik and James W. Pennebaker, "The Psychological Meaning of Words: LIWC and Computerized Text Analysis Methods," *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 29:1 (March 1, 2010): 24–54, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X09351676>.

⁸ Steve Rathje, Jay J. Van Bavel, and Sander van der Linden, "Out-Group Animosity Drives Engagement on Social Media," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 118:26 (June 29, 2021): e2024292118, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2024292118>.

⁹ Emma Rodman, "A Timely Intervention: Tracking the Changing Meanings of Political Concepts with Word Vectors," *Political Analysis* 28:1 (January 2020): 87–111, <https://doi.org/10.1017/pan.2019.23>; Pedro L. Rodriguez and Arthur Spirling, "Word Embeddings: What Works, What Doesn't, and How to Tell the Difference for Applied Research," *The Journal of Politics* 84:1 (January 2022): 101–15, <https://doi.org/10.1086/715162>.

tracing how the meaning of concepts/terms has changed over time, how language has evolved around a specific topic, or even how and when emotions are used in language.¹⁰

While McCourt does an outstanding job of introducing computational methods such as social-network analysis and MCA and illuminating how they benefit answering constructivist questions, he foregoes a discussion of their challenges and disadvantages. Applying computational methods is not necessarily a straight-forward or effortless endeavor. In particular, constructivists who mainly have a qualitative background may have to devote time and resources to learn and train in these methods and become comfortable enough to use them confidently and reliably in research.

What further complicates matters is the fact that not all academic departments will have faculty to teach computational methods. Students and faculty may have to venture outside their immediate departments or attend potentially expensive methods seminars, camps, and/or schools. This in turn raises the following questions: 1) how accessible are these methods to students, junior scholars, and more established scholars, 2) what is the opportunity cost of learning them, and 3) how feasible is the pursuit and integration of new computational methods into the new constructivist approach given the aforementioned hurdles?

The second point of this review speaks to the author's argument for widening the space and expanding concepts and vocabulary in Constructivism. McCourt mentions drawing upon and bringing in actor-network theory or affect and emotions. This is an intriguing point in the light of ongoing debates on what happened to the "isms"?¹¹ It adds to the debate on whether and to what extent any of the isms should be kept pure with a narrow focus and stylized set of assumptions versus whether and to what extent we should embrace eclecticism and inter-paradigmatic exchange.

Although expansion and adaptation undoubtedly offer opportunities for New Constructivism, there are potential consequences or, at a minimum, pushback from scholars. Broadening the scope of constructivism to invite new concepts holds the danger of exposing New Constructivism to being too wide-ranging and incoherent. Given that stylized assumptions and theories are often favored amongst scholars, a theory, paradigm, or approach that is free to include everything may end up explaining nothing. This then raises the question: When new things are included, do scholars have to redefine the boundaries of constructivism? Moreover, how would we distinguish New Constructivism from other approaches? Even more importantly, what reluctance would scholars of New Constructivism have to face in academia? A great example serves the story that the author offers in the book's preface where he describes "politics of Constructivism" as "frequently downright hostile" and recounts how journal reviewers criticized his submission as not being constructivist enough (v-vi).

There is another important consideration when it comes to including new concepts and vocabulary and borrowing from other paradigms or even theories outside of political science: the necessity of New Constructivism when scholars could simply use and acknowledge an interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary approach. In other words, when researchers draw heavily on concepts and research from political psychology or social psychology, they could simply adopt an interdisciplinary/transdisciplinary approach in their literature or theory section that combines elements from social psychology and constructivism. It is important to acknowledge that some of these concepts (i.e. emotions) have a long history in other disciplines and have

¹⁰ Moritz Osnaabrigge, Sara B. Hobolt, and Toni Rodon, "Playing to the Gallery: Emotive Rhetoric in Parliaments," *American Political Science Review* 115:3 (August 2021): 885–99, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055421000356>.

¹¹ David A. Lake, "Why 'Isms' Are Evil: Theory, Epistemology, and Academic Sects as Impediments to Understanding and Progress," *International Studies Quarterly* 55:2 (2011): 465–80; Benjamin Miller and Ilai Z. Saltzman, "Beyond the Three 'Isms': Rethinking IR and the Post-Cold War Order," *International Politics* 53:3 (May 1, 2016): 385–414, <https://doi.org/10.1057/ip.2016.3>; Henry R. Nau, "No Alternative to 'Isms,'" *International Studies Quarterly* 55:2 (2011): 487–91.

been developed, explored, and studied in and by other disciplines. Thus, scholars should use caution when borrowing from other fields and disciplines and absorbing concepts into New Constructivism as this may undermine the contributions of the massive research agenda of other fields and disciplines.

This leads into my final point and question on broadening constructivism and the introduction of new constructivism: where to go from here? In particular, from a pedagogical standpoint, how can and should scholars integrate New Constructivism into curricula and classrooms? How should it be taught, and where does it sit and position itself vis-à-vis traditional constructivism and other 'isms'? In this review, I have addressed and underlined the importance of computational methods and combining theoretical with methodological training. Nevertheless, there remains a clear separation of theory and methods courses. Such a dichotomy can be counter-productive for scholars who are in the process of learning how constructivist research questions and concepts such as identity, rhetoric, and social interactions can be tackled through computational methods. For graduate students and junior scholars, it would be beneficial to learn paradigms and schools of thought alongside methodological innovations and approaches. If one is interested in the role of rhetoric, a fruitful exercise could be a literature review of past and current approaches to studying the concept followed by the construction of a research design that details methods such as text analysis, content analysis, sentiment analysis, their advantages and disadvantages, and when and how they can be used. Such an integrated approach could be fruitful for teaching New Constructivism.

In sum, it will be important to consider what the introduction and pursuit of New Constructivism means for scholars in theory and practice. This includes thinking about how graduate students and junior scholars, who may have a more difficult time situating and establishing themselves within New Constructivism, can navigate theoretical and methodological challenges as well as mitigating pushback for 'deviating' from 'traditional' Constructivism. Similarly, it is important to reflect on where New Constructivism sits vis-à-vis an interdisciplinary/transdisciplinary approach, and how it differs from using an interdisciplinary/transdisciplinary approach. To push forward with New Constructivism, it will be essential to have a discussion on how to teach it, and how to integrate theoretical and methods training. *The New Constructivism in International Relations Theory* has paved the way for these questions to be asked and answered.

 Review by Jason Ralph, University of Leeds

David McCourt's *The New Constructivism in International Relations Theory* is a significant book. The scholarship behind it is rigorous and it achieves its purpose. It gathers together various and proliferating research agendas under the label 'New Constructivism' and offers critiques where necessary. It identifies eight key features of New Constructivist research: it is (1) anti-foundationalist; (2) rigorously anti-essentialist; (3) methodologically omnivorous; (4) conceptually pluralist; (5) reflexive; (6) necessarily historical; (7) politically agnostic; (8) attuned to emotions and affect in human action (ix). With this list, McCourt helps bring coherence to what might otherwise seem a bewildering array of approaches. For that reason researchers, teachers, and students will all find the book extremely valuable. It will be essential reading for IR theory courses.

There will of course be debate within the IR discipline about the value of the 'New Constructivist' label. That is fair enough, but I do not think it is worth spending too much time on this kind of inward-looking, and ultimately inconsequential, exercise since we are confronted by more pressing real world challenges (e.g. conflict, genocide, climate change, pandemics). As my opening remarks imply, I am on board with the general idea of gathering together research on norms, practices, and relations in the same tent. I can see its pedagogic value and 'New Constructivism' seems to be a useful label for teaching purposes.

I also welcome McCourt's eight-point description of New Constructivism because there is much that overlaps with my reading of Pragmatic Constructivism.¹ In fact, I would say both are (to use McCourt's list) anti-essentialist; anti-foundationalist; methodologically omnivorous; conceptually pluralist; reflexive; necessarily historical, and attuned to emotions and affect.

There is, however, one area where I suggest Pragmatic Constructivism potentially falls outside the New Constructivist tent. By drawing on the classical Pragmatist tradition of Jane Addams, John Dewey, W.E.B. Du Bois and others, Pragmatic Constructivism is neither normatively nor politically agnostic.² It is committed to an approach that democratises knowledge production by properly expanding communities of inquiry and practice. This is necessary for any claim to epistemic authority, including any claim to know what is in *the* public interest.

In the context of those real-world challenges, this means focusing on the epistemic claims (i.e. the 'background knowledge') of relevant communities of practice, making a normative argument that references the lived experience of practitioners and the affected, and offering a political judgment on the appropriateness of existing practices when set against credible alternatives.

In fact, I would argue that this normative and political commitment to deliberative democracy as a form of social inquiry follows on from the seven key features of New Constructivism that I have no problem with. I would argue therefore that there is an inconsistency in this aspect of McCourt's New Constructivism. The New Constructivist cannot be committed to its key features and simultaneously be normatively and politically agnostic. Based on my reading of how Classical Pragmatism developed a normative and political theory from what was essentially a constructivist social theory, I would at least amend McCourt's 7th point. Rather than arguing that New Constructivism is politically agnostic I would argue it is ethically pluralist but politically committed to deliberative democracy as a form of social inquiry.

¹ Jason Ralph, *On Global Learning. Pragmatic Constructivism, International Practices and the Challenge of Global Governance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

² Jane Addams, *Democracy and Social Ethics*, (New York: Macmillan, 1902); John Dewey, *The Public and its Problems*, (London: George Allen and Unwin 1927); W. E. B. Du Bois, *The souls of Black folk* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1903 [2007]).

Let me explain why.

McCourt convincingly demonstrates that New Constructivism is rigorously anti-essentialist and anti-foundationalist. But what happens when a New Constructivist is confronted by a political project that is based on essentialist understandings of ‘the other’? Take the politically popular idea of the early 1980s that the Soviet Union was inherently evil.

The anti-essentialist New Constructivist might say that such a claim is wrong. The Soviet Union of the early 1980s was from this perspective constructed by social practices and relations inside and outside that community.

But to say that in the early 1980s was of course a political intervention. It opened up the epistemic ground for political possibilities that some politicians were trying to close down.

The politically agnostic New Constructivist might say that this is the politician’s prerogative and that it is not the academic’s role to decide policy. That is an important and significant point that should not be dismissed lightly. Democratically elected politicians can claim a form of authority that academics cannot. But I am not entirely sure that New Constructivists are politically agnostic about the choices democratically elected politicians make.

What if the politicians who ignore the knowledge produced by New Constructivism and offer a vision based on essentialist and foundationalist reasoning is not only wrong but is wilfully wrong? In other words, what if they are pursuing a particular interest at the expense of a process that has a better chance of constructing a more authoritative definition of the public interest? My sense is that the New Constructivist would find it difficult to remain agnostic when the knowledge they produce is ignored in this way.

Now, I accept that with this argument, I am probably occupying a position that New Constructivists and the IR discipline more generally would allocate to (European) Critical Theory. But this argument is very much inspired by the (American) Pragmatism of Addams and Dewey, and their commitment to a politics that constructs a public interest through democratic social inquiry. It is perhaps relevant in that respect that McCourt (38) approvingly cites Abbott’s description of Dewey as being among the first wave of Constructivists. My point is that engaging in a normative critique and backing that up with political activism is not foreign to American Constructivism.

It is of course possible to respond to this criticism of the claim that New Constructivism is politically agnostic by citing the existence of ‘conservative constructivism’ and ‘liberal constructivism’. New Constructivism, in other words, does not rule out the adoption of normative and political commitments, it just does not dictate their substance. New Constructivism is ethically and politically pluralistic. It follows from this view that our values are independent of our social theory. If we accept this, then there continues to exist a disciplinary ‘division of labour’ between normative and social theorists.³ To help explain why the political practices they study are right (and worth our support) or wrong (and worth opposing) the otherwise agnostic New Constructivist has to occasionally invite normative and political theorists into their tent.

There may be nothing wrong with this, but I am still not entirely comfortable with it. On my reading, which is inspired by Toni Erskine’s critique of Richard Price’s Constructivist ethic, the New Constructivist tent *cannot* accommodate conservative or liberal values that are based on essentialist reasoning about, for instance,

³ Toni Erskine, “Whose Progress, Which Morals? Constructivism, Normative IR Theory and the Limits and Possibilities of Studying Ethics in World Politics,” *International Theory* 4:3 (2012): 449-468; Jason Ralph, “What Should be Done? Pragmatic Constructivist Ethics and the Responsibility to Protect,” *International Organization* 72:1 (2018): 173-203.

human nature.⁴ That would again be inconsistent with the anti-essentialism and anti-foundationalism of card-carrying New Constructivists.

That said New Constructivism *could* accommodate conservative and liberal ideas about the best way to solve social problems as they emerge from practice rather than as transcendental values. Conservative constructivists might emphasise the wisdom of the past, for instance, whereas liberal constructivists might emphasise the wisdom of greater inclusion.

But—and this is crucial—the implication of New Constructivism’s anti-essentialism, anti-foundationalism and reflexivity is that these positions have to be advanced *as hypotheses* rather than absolute values; hypotheses on how we should act in a given situation. This is what Classical Pragmatism tells us. Anti-essentialism and anti-foundationalism does not mean we cannot have faith in an idea, but that we must test that idea for how well it ameliorates the lived experience by solving or at least mitigating social problems.

Now again, New Constructivism might accept this. McCourt argues, for instance, that New Constructivism accommodates a ‘plurality of ethical commitments.’ But the question any society has to face is how does it deal with that plurality and with the inevitability of political contestation?

And my answer to that is because New Constructivism’s anti-essentialism and anti-foundationalism demands treating values as hypotheses (rather than absolutes) it leans heavily toward the Pragmatist’s ethical commitment to deliberation and learning. It is not far from that, moreover, toward a political commitment to deliberative democracy both as a means of coping with pluralism and as a form of social inquiry into the constitution of the public interest. The normative and political implication of the anti-essentialism and anti-foundationalism, in other words, is not agnosticism it is deliberative democracy.

This is important because it goes beyond the ‘academic’ need for conceptual clarity. In moments when democratic institutions are threatened it is important that Constructivists who understand the social processes that construct knowledge, norms and interests do not—as Dewey would put it—remain spectators or commentators of political action.⁵ Pragmatic Constructivists may disagree on the best ways of solving emergent problems but they remain normatively and politically committed to democracy as a means coping with that pluralism and discovering the public interest.

What then of the conceptual difference between New (or as I prefer Pragmatic) Constructivism and Critical Theory? I am not sure this matters too much either. It is interesting to recall in this respect that while McCourt (via Abbott) sees Dewey as among the first Constructivists, Dewey (and another American Pragmatist, Charles Sanders Peirce) are cited by Habermas as having an influence on his brand of Critical Theory.⁶ There are differences, but the similarities are significant.

Still, if the IR discipline does want to keep the separation between New/Pragmatic Constructivism on the one hand and Critical Theory on the other then I think what I am saying has more of a Constructivist than a Critical sensibility.

⁴ Erskine, ‘Whose Progress, Which Morals?’; Richard Price, ed., *Moral Limit and Possibility in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

⁵ John Dewey, “Intelligence and Morals,” In John Dewey, *The Influence of Darwin on philosophy, and other essays in contemporary thought*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1908 [1965]).

⁶ Andrew Abbott, *Chaos of Disciplines* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001) 17; John Dewey, *The Public and its Problems* (London: George Allen and Unwin 1927); Charles Sanders Peirce, *Collected Papers* 6 Vol. eds. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1931-5); Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms. Contributions of Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996).

For instance, McCourt (119-21) cites Martin Weber on the links between Constructivism and the Frankfurt School with its critique of domination and emancipation.⁷ My sense is that critique is just one part of the Pragmatic Constructivist project. The other is a practical problem-solving approach that emphasises the co-constitution of a shared or public interest as a means of ameliorating the lived experience.

This last point is particularly important as we are faced today by global challenges that demand cooperative action. But again, my main point is a more limited one. It is that these (de)constructive processes involve a political commitment to deliberative democracy both as a means of coping with ethical and political pluralism and as a form of inquiry that improves social practice.

I conclude then with a question to McCourt and those convinced by his description of New Constructivism. Does New Constructivism at least imply a political commitment to democracy as a means of deliberative social inquiry and social learning? If not, what are the political consequences of saying constructivist inquiry is politically agnostic?

⁷ Martin Weber, "Between 'isses' and 'oughts': IR Constructivism, Critical Theory, and the Challenge of Political Philosophy," *European Journal of International Relations*, 20:2 (2014), 516–43.

 Response by David M. McCourt, University of California, Davis

Why *New Constructivism*? If constructivists draw heavily on cognate fields like psychology, why not just call their work inter- or trans-disciplinary? Why a new label? How should we teach the New Constructivism? Are constructivists the “working class” of (mainly US) IR, or its semi-periphery? Why is power not a core tenet of the new approach? Finally, can the New Constructivism really espouse political agnosticism, or does it imply a political commitment to deliberative democracy?

The thank-yous that typically open responses such as this do little to convey how heartening it is to see colleagues, new and old, thinking with something one has written. I am delighted if *The New Constructivism* had some hand in stimulating thinking more insightful than the book itself, and of course I am thankful to the reviewers for taking the time to write up their thoughts. So I’ll get right to responding to these tough questions posed by Stefanie Neumeier, Elif Kalaycioglu and Jason Ralph, after a brief thank-you to Mark Raymond for writing the introduction to this roundtable. I say ‘responding to’ rather than ‘answering’ since the New Constructivism is not mine to speak on behalf of. I hope readers will make up their own minds on the issues on the table.

Teaching the New Constructivism is not likely to be an easy task, and I would not recommend doing so to those below fairly advanced graduate students. The social and political thought underpinning it—from thinkers well plumbed at this point like Pierre Bourdieu,¹ to thinkers yet-to-come—is often developed in other arenas than IR itself, and can be difficult to master. From my experience teaching social theory at a well-ranked University of California campus, grasping the Old Constructivism is likely to be challenging enough for advanced undergraduates and masters and Ph.D.-level students. The few who choose to specialize might then appreciate the New Constructivism as the research forefront, as they recognize its strengths vis-à-vis alternative approaches and methodologies.

This may seem an unsatisfying response, but it follows from another response to the question Neumeier poses about inter- or trans-disciplinarity. As Max Weber one said—allegedly, per *Twitter*—“I am not a donkey, I don’t have a field.”² Neumeier is correct that Constructivism, as a space in IR, is essentially inter-disciplinary—a matter of, in the mode of the donkey, grazing wherever the food is plentiful and satisfying. But the New Constructivism is not a stock of specific concepts that can be easily lumped together and then ‘tested’ alongside others from, for example, rationalism or realism, whether via experiments, etc. The New Constructivism is not a theory but a sensibility, one that foregrounds the social processes of how we got to where we are, and where we might be going. Indeed, the New Constructivism—at least in my view—pushes back against the IR field’s obsession with ‘theory’ which is understood as abstract generalizable concepts. (Who hasn’t fallen prey to the temptation to write a paper titled “the role of X [insert social, cultural, or psychological process] in international relations?” I have.)³ But as Friedrich Kratochwil elaborates, our knowledge of the social world—including that part of it we might call “international relations”—does not present itself to us in such a way.⁴ Ph.D. advisors are therefore not wrong when they say a ‘testing of alternatives’ framing for dissertation research is how the field *expects* one’s findings to be communicated, but

¹ See, for a good overview of Bourdieu’s sociology, Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc J. D. Wacquant, *Introduction to Reflexive Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). For insightful applications in IR, see among others, Trine Villumsen Berling, *The International Political Sociology of Security: Rethinking Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2015); Catherine Goetze, *The Distinction of Peace: A Social Analysis of Peacebuilding* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017).

² <https://twitter.com/florianederer/status/1567531000195850242?lang=en>

³ See, for example, David M. McCourt, “Role Playing and Identity Affirmation in International Politics: Britain’s Reinvasion of the Falklands, 1982,” *Review of International Studies* 37:4 (2011): 1,599-1,621.

⁴ See, most recently, Friedrich Kratochwil, *After Theory, Before Big Data: Thinking About Praxis, Politics and International Affairs* (New York: Routledge, 2021).

New Constructivists should be in the business of telling important stories about how the world is and got that way, not forging and testing theories—whether rooted in a discipline or transgressing disciplinary boundaries.

My flippant remark that constructivists criticizing one another is “the academic working class attacking the academic working class” (ix) elides what Kalaycioglu rightly notes might be a better imagery of core-periphery relations rather than class relations. As Neumeier too points out, situating Constructivism—Old and hence New—as a product of core-periphery relations might well be a better wager when it comes to grasping the relations and practices that gave rise to it. The Old Constructivism was certainly an intervention in the discipline’s North American core—the field’s top presses and journals like *International Organization* in particular—but the semi-periphery of Europe and elsewhere was also important, as constructivists unable (and lacking the desire to) stay in North America found willing outlets in the then-new *European Journal of International Relations*, and—as I have recently become aware—EU-studies journals like the *Journal of European Public Policy*.⁵

In sum, Kalaycioglu is absolutely right to note that the story I tell in *The New Constructivism* could be profitably re-told through a more global core-periphery conceptual imagery. Kalaycioglu is also correct in her related questioning of why the analysis of power is not one of the core tenets of the New Constructivism, especially since the power to silence more critical potential versions of Constructivism—namely the Minnesota School of Jutta Weldes, Mark Laffey, Hugh Gusterson and Raymond Duvall,⁶ of which Kalaycioglu is another stellar product—is an important part of the story of Constructivism’s narrowing in the US IR imagination. Power could indeed be positioned as another core tenet. As I think Kalaycioglu would appreciate, I would prefer to recover how power should always have been central to the Old Constructivism, had the Minnesota School’s interventions been more fully appreciated.

In this line of critique, Kalaycioglu’s comments merge serendipitously for me with those of Jason Ralph, whose attempts to forge a distinct “pragmatic Constructivism” have made rare inroads into the top level of North American IR.⁷ Like Kalaycioglu, Ralph sees Constructivism as *necessarily* having a particular political ethic. Whereas for Kalaycioglu this is of the critical variety, Ralph makes the case that Constructivism has an ethics that is grounded, ultimately, in deliberative democracy. The New Constructivism cannot, therefore, be *really* politically agnostic, as I claim.

Ralph’s reasoning is clear and powerful, and I want to do it justice here. Ralph argues that there is a discrepancy between my claim that the New Constructivism is essentially anti-essentialist and anti-foundationalist, on the one hand, and that it can be politically agnostic at the same time, on the other. For Ralph, Pragmatic Constructivism,

is neither normatively nor politically agnostic. It is committed to an approach that democratizes knowledge production by properly expanding communities of inquiry and practice. This is necessary for any claim to epistemic authority, including any claim to know what is in *the* public interest. In the context of those real world challenges, this means focusing on the epistemic claims (i.e. the ‘background knowledge’) of relevant communities of practice, making a normative argument that references the lived experience of

⁵ See the contributions to Volume 6, Issue 4, 1999, “The Social Construction of Europe,” <https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/rjpp20/6/4>

⁶ See Jutta Weldes, Mark Laffey, Hugh Gusterson and Raymond Duvall, *Cultures of Insecurity: States, Communities, and the Production of Danger* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

⁷ Jason Ralph, “What Is To Be Done? Pragmatic Constructivist Ethics and the Responsibility to Protect,” *International Organization* 72:1 (2018): 173-203.

practitioners and the affected, and offering a political judgment on the appropriateness of existing practices when set against credible alternatives.

Put differently, although I argue that it is possible to be a conservative or liberal *in politics* and still a constructivist in the academy, Ralph is not so sure. If the claims people make—whether inside the academy or outside it—are always just that, *claims*, not reality, and those people form a plurality of viewpoints, Constructivism must support a political mode able to deal with such competing claims to truth. Thus, the “normative and political implication of the anti-essentialism and anti-foundationalism, in other words, is not agnosticism it is deliberative democracy.”

Ralph suggests this may be where his Pragmatic Constructivism and the New Constructivism part ways. But by invoking thinkers like John Dewey and Jane Addams as progenitors of the sort of practice-relational New Constructivism I advocate, and showing also how scholarship and engaged political action went naturally hand in hand, Ralph suggests that the New Constructivism *should*, indeed, *must* include the commitment to deliberative democracy. I need to change the core tenets of New Constructivism, Ralph believes.

Again, Ralph’s challenge is a strong one, and I am tempted to agree. But I am not quite convinced of his case. Let me begin with simply expounding on my skepticism toward the notion of real “deliberative democracy” and its capacity for “ameliorating” the lived conditions of people’s “lived experiences.” Even the most democratic and deliberative of states around the world fall far short of such an ideal, as we well know. Here I am likely closer to the critical position of Martin Weber,⁸ as well as other Marxists, feminists, and post-colonialists, who have chronicled the role of capital and the market, as well as gendered and racialized hierarchies, in limiting democratic deliberation.⁹

Once could of course counter that logically the New Constructivism implies the ability to channel a plurality of voices into truly decision-making, even world constructing—hence deliberative democracy. However, I am always skeptical of purely logical arguments like these, unsure of the ontological status of the logical imperative—the “must imply” in Ralph’s case. Why must the New Constructivism imply deliberative democracy, if deliberative democracy is only ever a goal, a hypothesis as Ralph argues, one about which I have doubts. Non-democratic leaders might deploy essentialized notions like “the people” to justify autocratic methods of governance, but they may also go further in solving real social problems—like climate change.

I certainly agree that Constructivism—New like Old—requires deliberative scholarship, the space to question the taken-for-granted or naturalized notions, like the national or public interest. So I would agree with Ralph, with some changes to his words, that the New Constructivism “implies a...commitment to...deliberative social inquiry and social learning.” As I already note, such free inquiry is hard to imagine in a context, say of a totalitarian dictatorship, where the activities of scholarly communities are tightly controlled.

Again, I find it hard to see how, in the long run, autocracy can address collective problems as well as democracies. Similarly, I find it difficult to see how committed constructivists could also be committed authoritarians. But I am not ready, despite the power of Ralph’s case, to agree that the New Constructivism necessarily implies a grounding in deliberative democracy. The ethical boundary between Pragmatic

⁸ See, for example, Martin Weber, “Between ‘Is’ and ‘Oughts’: IR Constructivism, Critical Theory, and the Challenge of Political Philosophy,” *European Journal of International Relations* 20, 2 (2013): 516-43.

⁹ For a good overview, see Cynthia Weber, *International Relations Theory: A Critical Introduction* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2004).

Constructivism and the New Constructivism will, I hope, remain a blurry one, as scholars continue to push forward the reflections of Ralph, Weber, Laura Sjoberg and Samuel Barkin, and others.¹⁰

Once again, I do not offer these reflections to the engagements of Neumeier, Kalaycioglu and Ralph as any sort of final word. I do not aim to speak for, much less as, the New Constructivism. Much as some might want the nature of Constructivism to be, finally, fixed, that is not how spaces of inquiry work. The hard work of thinking about, with, and against, Constructivism continues—especially in what remains the hostile terrain of US political science.¹¹

¹⁰ See Ralph, “What Is To Be Done?;” Weber, “Between “Is” and “Oughts;” and J. Samuel Barkin and Laura Sjoberg, *International Relations’ Last Synthesis: Decoupling Constructivist and Critical Approaches* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

¹¹ Justin Rosenberg, “International Relations in the Prison of Political Science,” *International Relations* 30:2 (2016): 127-53.