Original Article

Rationality, norms and identity in international relations

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Abstract This article examines major debates between rationalism and constructivism. It presents that there are politically significant motives of social actions, including norms and identity, which cannot be completely subsumed by the concept of instrumental rationality. These ideational or social-psychological motivations are governed primarily by *thymos* or affect (the moral or emotional part of the human personality) and/or value-oriented rationality. We need more flexible assumptions about main actors and their motives than those of rationalism to explain appropriately the politics of anger, loyalty and a sense of justice at international levels. However, constructivism's emphasis on ideational motivations cannot totally replace rationalism in explaining international political life. Constructivism maintains that identity or norms are causally prior to actors' interests. Yet when there is conflict between pursuit of interests and maintenance of identity or norms, actors' strong and well-defined self-interests can overrule their contested or unstable identity or norms. In short, causal arrows can flow in either direction between identity or norms and interests. This implies that rationalism and constructivism are complementary rather than competitive in explaining international political life.
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Introduction

Since the 1990s, one of the major debates in International Relations (IR) scholarship has been between rationalism and constructivism (Katzenstein *et al*, 1998; Fearon and Wendt, 2002). How to define the relationship between rationality and norms or identity has been one of the main issues in this debate. Rationalists tend to subsume norms and identity under the concept of instrumental rationality. This article maintains that ideational or social-psychological motivations such as norms and identity cannot be fully explained by instrumental rationality. My argument is that

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the politically significant motives of social actions are broader and more diverse than most rationalists allow for. But I also argue that constructivism cannot totally replace rationalism in explaining international political life because solid and well-defined self-interests formed by cost–benefit analysis can lead actors to forsake their normative values and identities. The essay is composed of three sections. In the first section, I explore the major differences between rationalism and constructivism, and define instrumental rationality, identity and norms. In the second, concepts like *thymos*, affect and value-oriented rationality are introduced, and I discuss some limits or problems of rationalism, particularly the concept of instrumental rationality, in the study of IR. Finally, I try to classify social behavior into three ideal-type categories (self-interest-driven behavior, norm/identity-driven behavior and the combination or conflict between the two), and show that causal arrows can flow in either direction between identity or norms and self-interests. In the conclusion, I summarize the main arguments, stressing that we have to make a greater effort to strike a balance between theoretical 'parsimony' and the 'complexity' of social actions to improve the political relevance of IR theory.

Rationalism and Constructivism

Rationality has long been one of the main concepts in the study of IR. Major traditional theoretical approaches in IR such as realism and liberalism – approaches that fall within the rationalist tradition – assume that actors (whether they are states or non-state actors) are by and large rational in the sense that they seek to advance their preferences in such a way so as to maximize their interests (Keohane, 1988; Katzenstein *et al*, 1998). More specifically, rationality means that an actor orders one's interests or preferences and makes the choice that ranks in highest in the order in a given situation. In IR contexts, rationalism can be defined as 'formal and informal applications of rational choice theory to IR questions' or any work developed in 'the tradition of microeconomic theory' (Fearon and Wendt, 2002, p. 54). Indeed, the behavioral revolution in the 1960s and the incorporation of economic methods into IR theories in the late 1970s and 1980s were closely related to the increasing influence of rationality in the discipline of IR (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998, pp. 889–890).

However, the deeper root of rationalism lies in the onset of 'modernity' in the West. The seventeenth century French philosopher Descartes captured the idea of modernity very well. The central axis of his philosophy (and modernity) was a rational or thinking ego: *Cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am). Modernity was basically an 'individualist project' as the rational or thinking ego became the 'sole protagonist' of the world and its history (Guzzini, 2000, p. 151). It is therefore understandable that rationalism is predicated upon methodological individualism, according to which an individual actor is ontologically primitive and 'all social

phenomena (their structure and their change) are in principle explicable only in terms of individuals' (Elster, 1982, p. 453). Modernity has also developed in the West mainly due to the modern scientific revolution. According to the modern scientific world view, the universe is in essence physical or material, that is, 'the order of this universe is natural, accessible to reason and observation, and describable in impersonal, materialistic, mechanical, and mathematical terms' (Thiele, 1997, p. 68). Thus, modern scientific endeavors study observable repeated phenomena in nature and seek to establish governing laws that can be applied regardless of temporal and spatial differences. Since the eighteenth century, many social thinkers have tried to apply this outlook derived from the natural world to the study of the social (human) condition. For instance, Condorcet argued for the 'Law of Progress' and predicted an irreversible social progress to perfectibility through the application of mathematics and physics to the study of social phenomena (Thiele, 1997, p. 72). Rationalists like Condorcet were in general insensitive to cultural and historical difference in the study of social phenomena. It is also worth noting that modern thinkers – Hobbes and Locke in particular – saw rationality in instrumental terms. They were concerned about how to preserve the physical body and how to protect one's private property. In their view, (human) rationality or reason is an instrument of achieving one's ends, defined mainly in terms of material self-interests such as personal safety and security of possessions (Fukuyama, 1992, pp. 158–159; Lebow, 2008, p. 45).

Influenced by this tradition, major mainstream IR theories have emphasized the central role of instrumental rationality in international life. Kahler (1998, p. 920) sees that realism opposes 'the image of a unified and rational self' and depicts the relationship between realism and rationalism as mutually contradictory. This is, however, a misrepresentation of realism. It is true that realists reject the optimistic view of modernity that human history has progressed and will progress by the application of human reason and the natural sciences. However, this does not mean that realists deny the rationality of actors in their analysis of interstate relations. A classical realist, Morgenthau (1948 [1973], pp. 4–5, 8), for example, makes clear that realism seeks to develop a rational theory that reflects 'the rational elements of political reality'. Morgenthau even attempted to advance a rationalist theory of international politics by suggesting that there are universal laws in international politics, the most fundamental being that states will always seek to maximize their interests, which are defined as power. He sees that a rational foreign policy is what most political leaders do and should do.

Kenneth Waltz, a neo-realist, might be viewed as being less of rationalist than Morgenthau because of his structuralist bent (Kahler, 1998, pp. 924–925). However, Waltz's theory is a modified version of rationalism for two main reasons. First, the fundamental ontology of neo-realism is individualistic because it views the structure of an international system as varying according to changes in the distribution of (military and economic) capabilities of 'individual' actors (states) (Waltz, 1979, p. 91, 97;

see also Wendt, 1987; Dessler, 1989). Second, Waltz (1979, p. 91) likens the state to an individual or a firm in a market. In his words, '(i)nternational-political systems, like economic markets, are formed by the coaction of self-regarding units'. This means that within some structural constraints, which can be called the 'opportunity set', the state behaves by and large rationally because there are costs or penalties if it does not (Waltz, 1979, pp. 91–93). Other neo-realists such as Grieco (1988) and Mearsheimer (2001) also adopt the view that states are rational actors and behave according to their self-interests because states have a keen interest for their survival and relative (military/economic) gains in a self-help world.

Though liberals may disagree with realists in some respects, they too look at interstate relations within a rationalist framework. Neo-liberalism or neo-liberal institutionalism in particular adopts more utilitarian assumptions than traditional liberal theories, drawing on microeconomic theory to explain state behavior (Axelrod, 1984; Keohane, 1984). To this degree, both neo-realism and neo-liberalism share the view that the state, as the primary actor on the international scene, is a largely rational egoistic entity. Whereas neo-liberals see that interstate cooperation is possible because international institutions can mitigate the effects of anarchy considerably, neo-realists are skeptical about this view. Even though the two sides suggest different explanations of state behavior in an anarchical interstate system, their debate in the end led to 'a period of considerable unity in the discipline' (Smith, 1997, p. 170; see also Wendt, 1992, pp. 391–392). Although there were exceptions or modifications (for example, Walt, 1987), instrumental rationality based on utilitarian assumptions was the core concept of neo-realism and neo-liberalism.

All this changed in the late 1980s when the cataclysmic change in world politics associated with the end of the Cold War led to the rise of cultural or sociological approaches to IR, broadly labeled 'constructivism' (Katzenstein, 1996; Checkel, 1998; Hopf, 1998; Katzenstein *et al*, 1998).[1] During the Cold War era, many states' identities had been relatively stable. But after the breakdown of a stable bipolar order in the late 1980s, state or national identity became more complicated in many parts of the world (Katzenstein, 1996, pp. 18–19). In addition, the post-Cold War world witnessed a renewed emphasis on a complex array of international norms such as human rights, democracy and environmentalism. Taken together, these changes led a new generation of constructivists to stress the significance of socially constructed norms – norms that had not been not been addressed in depth by rationalists. As Finnemore (1996, p. 2) put it, 'interests are not just out there waiting to be discovered; they are constructed through social interaction'. Indeed, according to constructivism, material or raw facts are only given meaning through the process of social interactions and practices in an inter-subjective social context; actors' interests are thus not just a given but 'social cognitive products' (see also Checkel, 1998, p. 326; Guzzini, 2000, p. 160; Hopf, 2002, p. 17). Constructivism in this sense adopted an ideational or social-psychological approach to international phenomena rather than a materialistic or behavioral–individualistic one. Indeed, in the view of

constructivists, rationalism's actors are too atomistic and materialistic; rationalists, they believe, do not give enough attention to social and ideational relations in shaping or changing actors' interests.

This may of course be unfair to rationalists. After all, many rationalists do not exclude the role of ideational factors and the socialization of actors in their analysis of international affairs. For example, neo-liberal institutionalists accept that ideas and beliefs can play a crucial role in the political decision-making processes (Axelrod and Keohane, 1993; Keohane, 2000). Realists too admit that ideas, norms and perceptions play a certain role in the international system (Jervis, 1976; Walt, 1987). Waltz, no less, points to the fact that norms in the international system emerge spontaneously by repeated interactions among states through which they experience a form of socialization. In his view, in order to survive in the anarchical international system, states tend to emulate or copy other successful states. These (informal) norms about how to behave in this system make the functions and attributes of states similar in spite of their different capabilities (Waltz, 1979, pp. 74–76, 97–98). However, from the perspective of constructivists the rationalists' ideas or norms are too 'thin'; their actors remaining largely 'undersocialized'. Thus, even though rationalists might believe that ideas and norms can constrain or influence the states' behaviors, in the end their interests and identities are nearly fixed. Indeed, for them, ideational factors are intervening rather than independent variables; they are 'secondary' or 'derivative' factors in their analysis of interstate relations (Checkel, 1998, p. 327; Wendt, 1999, p. 23).

For constructivists, on the other hand, ideational or social-psychological factors are significant independent variables. In particular, identity and norm(s) are two central concepts for their critique of rationalism. Identity is defined as 'role-specific understandings … about self' in relation to others and is conceived of as forming the basis of actors' interests, as actors identify their interests in the process of defining their social roles and situations (Wendt, 1992, pp. 397–398; see also Hopf, 2002, pp. 16–18). National or state identity refers to a common understanding of a collective self and it has to do with rules about the membership of a nation or state and common political goals and purposes (Abdellal *et al*, 2009). Importantly, historical narratives based on 'collective memory' strengthen people's national identity because they provide meaning, purpose and self-worth (see also Hymans, 2006, pp. 27–28; Lebow, 2008, p. 16). Emotions like 'we-feelings' bind together members of a group, and a group identity is related to our psychological needs, which cannot be fully explained by material incentives or disincentives alone (Mercer, 2005, pp. 96–97; Sasley, 2011, pp. 455–459).[2] Identity is also related to how a nation defines 'threats' as well as 'interests', and such definitions of a national identity have considerable effects on national security policies (Katzenstein, 1996, p. 19). Thus, national or state identity normally develops in relation to the identification of its enemies or rivals and how to overcome the (perceived) threat that they pose.

Norms have long been an interest in the study of IR. However, along with the behavioral revolution and the incorporation of microeconomic methods into IR,

norms became marginalized in the study of world affairs. Norms are defined as 'collective expectations (or understandings) for the proper behavior of actors with a given identity' (Katzenstein, 1996, p. 5; see also Hurrell, 2002, p. 143). Like identities, norms emerge through social interactions and are related to shared expectations about how one should behave in a specific situation. Norms are also related to legitimacy, defined as the 'normative belief' that norms, rules and institutions should be obeyed. Hurd (1999) maintains that there are three ideal-type mechanisms of social control (coercion, self-interest and legitimacy) and points out that rationalist IR theories have tended to play down the role of legitimacy in international politics. Legro (1997) demonstrates that even in a very difficult period for international norms, the two decades leading to World War II, not all international norms were ineffective. Even in a total war, states did not use particular forms of military power, in part because of international prohibitions of certain kinds of warfare. Constructivists hold that norms constitute as well as regulate states (Katzenstein, 1996, pp. 5, 17). Norms not only constrain or influence actors' behaviors, but can also redefine their interests and identities as well. For example, before the mid-1980s, the United States prioritized strategic and economic interests in relation to apartheid South Africa. But transnational anti-apartheid activists were able to promote 'a global norm of racial equality'; this in turn 'reconstituted' US national interests and changed its policies toward South Africa (Klotz, 1995). Indeed, this particular case study shows that the changing normative structure of the international system – as much as the distribution of material capabilities – is required to explain patterns of international interactions.

The Limits of the Concept of Instrumental Rationality in IR

In response to the critique of constructivism, some rationalists have come to recognize the limits of their own approach. They admit that actors' rationality is 'bounded' because of imperfect information and that actors can miscalculate the costs and benefits of courses of action, especially when they have to make decisions with limited information under time pressure (Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 38; Glaser, 2010, pp. 2–3). Some writers have also striven to explicate ideational or social-psychological motives such as norms, ideas and identities by expanding their conceptual scope. For instance, norms are here viewed as one type of an actor's interests or preferences, which means that the utility (interests or preferences), which the actor seeks, can be ideational or normative as well as materialistic or self-regarding (Yee, 1997, pp. 1016–1017; Chong, 2000; see also Snidal, 2002, p. 75). In spite of these efforts, the basic logic of instrumental rationality – the conscious calculation to maximize one's preferences – remains the same.

However, it is somewhat empty to argue that any social action is driven by instrumental rationality, that is, the conscious means–ends or cost–benefit calculation

to maximize one's utility. A theory or theoretical paradigm focuses on certain important aspects of the reality and leaves out others. There are always certain areas that are not covered by the theory. Then, if it tries or pretends to explain everything, it accounts for nothing (Snidal, 2002, p. 87). Instrumental rationality is a very useful analytical concept for explaining certain important motivations of social actions, but it is legitimate to assume that there are certain motives of social actions that are not covered by the concept of instrumental rationality alone. In some cases, social behaviors are driven primarily by strong ideological, moral or emotional motivations that are not explained satisfactorily by the concept of the simple means–ends or cost–benefit calculation. That is why social actors do not behave in the same way in the same or similar situation and many unexpected (from the standpoint of instrumental rationality) social actions and outcomes are produced. Such behaviors might be non-rational in view of instrumental rationality, but they are not necessarily irrational from the standpoint of actors. This implies that rationalism's assumption about social actors' motives is too narrow and it has limits in explaining their behaviors appropriately in certain (potentially) important cases.

In fact, several influential Western philosophers and thinkers have addressed this non-rational aspect of human motivations and behaviors, although their thoughts have not been widely accepted and used by rationalists. According to Plato, for instance, a human being has three parts of the soul: reason, desire and *thymos*. *Thymos*, a Greek word, can be translated into 'spiritedness', 'self-esteem' or a 'sense of justice'. It is related to the moral or emotional aspect of the human personality and can arouse emotions of anger, shame or humiliation, and pride (Fukuyama, 1992, pp. xvi–xvii; Lebow, 2008, pp. 14–19). Weber also called to attention to social motivations like 'affect' and 'habit' that are not governed by conscious calculation or deliberation (Hopf, 2010, pp. 540–541). The Weberian concept of affect that emphasizes the role of emotions or feelings in social actions is very similar to Plato's *thymos*. As well, Hegel emphasizes that human beings differ fundamentally from animals because we desire to be recognized by other humans as a being with a certain dignity. In Hegel's view, a human is not merely an economic or material animal and human history is characterized by 'the struggle for recognition', that is, the struggle for prestige, status and dignity. Indeed, only humans are able to overcome their basic biological needs (for example, self-preservation) for some abstract principles such as ideology and religion (Fukuyama, 1992, pp. xix–xxi, 143–152). That is why sometimes they can sacrifice their self-interests for their ideologies, cultural or ethnic loyalties, or religious beliefs. Humans are also different from other animals because they have concerns about others' dignity or worth. They have compassion for others and feel anger when other humans' dignity is seriously damaged (Fukuyama, 1992, pp. 171–172). Modern (especially Anglo–Saxon) thinkers (and rationalists today), however, have focused on the instrumental aspect of reason along with desire and have neglected the *thymotic* part of motives in explaining social actions.

Thymos has both bright and dark sides. On the one hand, it can promote political behaviors based on bravery and justice. On the other, it can encourage intense (sometimes meaningless) competition and bloody conflicts for status and recognition (Fukuyama, 1992, p. 181). Thus, *thymos* can lead to pro-democracy uprisings, human rights movements and global justice movements in which many people sacrifice their material comfort and possession and risk even their lives for a certain cause. At the same time, however, it can lead to bloody battles among national, ethnic or religious groups because of their different loyalties, ideologies and faiths. For example, after the end of the Cold War, we have witnessed the proliferation of ethnic conflicts, the reemergence of religious fundamentalism, the spread of international terrorism, and the redefinition of national or local cultures as backlashes against globalization. We have also observed the increasingly important role of norms entrepreneurs and NGOs in world politics that have led various global social movements (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998; Keck and Sikkink, 1998).

Some rationalists admit that there are certain social phenomena that instrumental rationality cannot explain appropriately, but they believe that their explanations function as a 'rational baseline' against which actors' behaviors driven by non-rational (normative or psychological) motivations can be evaluated (Glaser, 2010, p. 3; Snidal, 2002, p. 75). This implies that actors' behaviors that do not follow this baseline are 'mistakes' in calculation or 'deviations' from the normal patterning of human actions (Mercer, 2005, pp. 87–89). However, as Weber pointed out, instrumental rationality (*Zweckrationalität*) is just one type of rationality. There is also value or value-oriented rationality (*Wertrationalität*) that leads to reasoned moral social behaviors (along with *thymos* or affect) and these cannot be classified as mere mistakes or deviations (Hopf, 2010, p. 540). Instrumental rationality concerns actors' capacity for means–ends calculations, whereas value-oriented rationality is related to our 'reasoned judgments about the value of ends themselves' (Lichbach, 1997, p. 268).

Indeed, some phenomena that instrumental rationality has difficulty explaining can have great political significance in the international arena. For example, 9/11, which is a watershed moment in contemporary world politics, cannot be explained properly by (neo-)realism and (neo-)liberalism, which assume that social actors are rational egoistic entities. Territorial conquest and material gains are not ends that terrorists who carried out 9/11 pursued, and it is far-fetched to argue that a utility-maximization strategy based on cost–benefit calculations played a central role in driving their behavior. Without considering their religious faith and identity (Islamic fundamentalism), and the emotions of resentment and frustration that are related to their faith and identity, there is no way to give an appropriate explanation of their motive and behavior (Zakaria, 2001). Interestingly enough, a violent American response to 9/11 (the War on Terror), which was not viewed (by at least some third-party observers) as very rational in instrumental terms, was also related to American people's experience of humiliation that degraded their collective self-respect

(Saurette, 2006). Global social movements (for example, international human rights movements including the anti-apartheid movement) have relevance as well. As Finnemore and Sikkink (1998, p. 888) put, successful norm entrepreneurs or NGOs' leaders are usually strategic thinkers, but they have a strong commitment to specific norms or values and their *thymotic* anger over injustice play a crucial role in spreading their norms and changing state policies. A more recent example is the Arab Spring that toppled authoritarian regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen. Widespread (*thymotic*) anger among citizens in those countries over economic and political injustice (for example, endemic poverty, lack of economic opportunities, corruption, political oppression and so on) was the root cause of the popular uprisings (Sassoon, 2012).

We can apply this discussion to the rise of China as well, a nation that is causing a sea change in world politics. Whether China has the intention as well as the capacity to become a global hegemon is a hotly debated issue today in the study of IR. To address this issue, it must be understood that China's national identity has been shaped by the 'Century of Humiliation'. A national identity is shaped by narratives about the past, particularly about historical interactions with other nations. Such narratives are also related to a nation's self-image or its perception about its position in the international system (Gries, 2004, p. 9). Sinocentrism has a long and deep tradition in China, according to which Chinese 5000 years' civilization is universal and superior. However, China's national pride (Chinese people's collective self-esteem) was seriously damaged by Western powers' encroachment and Japan's occupation of its territory between the mid-nineteenth and the mid-twentieth centuries, known by Chinese as their 'Century of Humiliation' (Gries, 2004, pp. 46–48). China's communist revolution was indeed the product of Chinese nationalism that had been reinforced by the 'Century of Humiliation' as much as of Marx–Leninism (Bajoria, 2008). Viewed from this prism, what China ultimately desires is to overcome its humiliation and recover its national pride and prestige as the Middle Kingdom and finally to be 'recognized' as superior to the West. Rationalists hold that the accumulation of wealth and power is the dominant goal of the state, particularly of a great power. The accumulation of wealth and military power is, however, just means, not the ultimate goal of China. What China ultimately pursues is to overcome its humiliation and to be recognized. In short, as Yee (1997) puts, there are 'brute' facts that instrument rationality alone cannot explain fully or satisfactorily, and behaviors governed by *thymos* and/or value-oriented rationality can engender crucial political consequences in the international arena.

Three Categories of Social Behavior and the Study of IR

In the previous section, we focused on the limits of the concept of instrumental rationality in explaining the diverse motives of actors in international politics, using

several illustrative examples. However, my argument is not that rationalism can be replaced by constructivism or by other approaches that emphasize the role of ideational or social-psychological motives in social actions. Rationalism has strength in explaining social behaviors driven mainly by cost–benefit calculations to maximize one's (materialistic) self-interests. My point is that rationalism gives insufficient attention to social behaviors that are driven by different types of motives and that such social behaviors can produce greatly significant (international) political outcomes. In other words, we do not need to set one specific approach as a baseline *a priori* nor assume that there is only one dominant motive in all social actions.

I would also like to emphasize that not all main actors are nation-states in IR contexts. As discussed above, international terrorist groups, NGOs, even individuals like norms entrepreneurs play a crucial role in shaping or changing the texture of world politics. We do not need fixed (and *a priori*) views on main actors in the international arena to explain important international political phenomena. Especially, (neo-)realism has maintained a state-centric view and has neglected the role of these non-state actors in world politics. As a result, it faces serious difficulty in explaining some crucial international or global political phenomena in which non-state actors are deeply involved. For example, (neo-)realists zero in on interstate military conflicts particularly among Great Powers, but today we witness the rise of asymmetrical wars between nation-states and non-state actors (for example, terrorist groups). This means that the main units of analysis are not necessarily nation-states. Depending on (international) political consequences, the main actors in a given situation should be determined rather than assumed *a priori*. Even when we assume that the state is the main actor in a specific situation, we do not need to view the state as a unitary actor. If necessary, we may need to open the black box of the state. To trace out what motives drive its behavior in a specific time frame, we may need to know who or what groups are key players or decision makers during the period and what factors influence their decisions for state policies.

The key point here is that we need more flexible assumptions on main actors and their motives than those of rationalists in order to explain properly many crucial international political phenomena today. Rationalism (especially neo-realism) tends to emphasize the importance of 'parsimony' in theory construction. But in my view, too much emphasis on parsimony can make a theory or paradigm lose its real-world or policy relevance. A parsimonious theory or (formal) model may look elegant, but if it does not have real-world or policy relevance then what is its purpose? In my view, rationalism, particularly a neo–neo approach, maintains too strict assumptions on main actors and their motives, thus leaving today's many significant international political issues unexplained or underexplained. In short, we have to make more efforts to strike a balance between theoretical parsimony and real-world or policy relevance.

I propose that we classify social behaviors into three ideal-type categories or models rather than to try to defend one specific view on social actions: (i) self-interest-driven

behavior governed principally by instrumental rationality; (ii) norms/identity-driven behavior governed mainly by *thymos* and/or value-oriented rationality; (iii) the combination or conflict between the two. To be sure, in many cases norms or ideational considerations are not totally separable from actors' self-interests, as they are closely interwoven with one another in their social actions. Nonetheless, this categorization can be helpful for analytical purposes and further research on different (international) conditions that give rise to different actions or outcomes. Like any generalized set of categories and concepts, the three considered below make certain assumptions.

First, in some situations (materialistic) self-interests governed by the logic of instrumental rationality are the predominant motive of actors and ideational factors like norms and identities do not play a significant role in their behaviors. For example, extremely selfish states or greedy political leaders may totally ignore international norms and pursue purely egoistic goals or interests. Second, some actions are driven chiefly by ideational, religious or moral motives such as ideologies, norms and identities. In this case, their strong commitment to a certain ideational cause dominates actors' motive. For instance, suicide bombers, religious fundamentalist groups and radical political activists who are deeply devoted to their faith or ideology may be willing to give up their material comfort and safety for it. Third, there are situations in which the above two categories of social actions are combined or directly conflict with each other. In fact, most situations can be classified into this category because most actors, consciously or not, take into account both their (material) self-interests and moral or ideational factors like norms and identity when they take any social or political action. In this third category, we can assume a situation in which there is no serious conflict between norms or identities and self-interests because they largely coincide with one another. For example, in IR contexts the promotion of democracy or human rights in enemy or non-ally countries by a country can coincide with the pursuit of its national (strategic) interests. Another example is that pursuing regional identity and norms (and joining a regional organization) can coincide with the pursuit of a country's national economic and security interests. In such situations, in which there is no serious conflict between norms or identities and self-interests, it is worth pursuing an eclectic mode of analysis or a bridge-building approach between rationalism and constructivism (Katzenstein and Sil, 2008). In other words, we have to look at both cost–benefit calculation and moral or ideational consideration and how they interact with one another in co-producing certain political behaviors and outcomes.

However, in the third category it is also reasonable to assume a situation in which norms or identities and self-interests directly conflict with each other. Constructivists in IR tend to view ideational factors such as norms, ideas, cultures and identities as causally prior to interests (Jepperson *et al*, 1996). Basically I agree that an actor's interests come from an understanding of the self and its interactions with its (ideational as well as physical) environments. But we may have to admit that in

some cases actors' strong and clear-cut self-interests can overturn their normative values or identities. In particular, it is not unusual to witness such cases in interstate relations. For example, although many Arab countries (and their leaders) supported 'Pan-Arabism' or 'Pan-Islamism' with Iraq in implementing their foreign policies, especially toward the United States, when the Gulf War broke out in 1991, most of them turned from 'Pan-Arabism' or 'Pan-Islamism' to their national interests (Telhami, 1993). Recently, several Eurozone countries are experiencing economic crises and we cannot rule out the possibility that some of them (for example, Greece) seek to give up on 'Pan-Europeanism' or 'European identity' and to exit from the Eurozone for their national economic interests. As Krasner (2000, p. 134) puts it, 'norms can be longstanding and widely recognized but also frequently violated' because they are not solid in the international arena as in a domestic society. Also, social actors' identities are not always robust. Moreover, a state usually has multiple identities and various social groups within it compete for definition or redefinition of national identities (Barnett, 1999). For instance, Ukraine has recently experienced a very serious national identity struggle between pro-European and pro-Russian groups. When the state's identity is not stabilized, and especially if the state is experiencing 'identity conflict', it makes sense to assume that interest can trump identity.

Risse *et al* (1999) explains this identity-interest problematique clearly in their study of the politics of the euro, the common currency of the Eurozone countries. In the case of Britain, its political leaders had strong beliefs about 'English identity' or 'trans-Atlantic identity' rather than 'European identity', whereas German political leaders had strong beliefs about 'Euro-patriotism', as they sought to overcome the German militarist and ultra-nationalist past. In both Britain and Germany, opinions on the expected economic benefits from joining the euro were highly divided among elites. Ultimately, Germany decided to join the euro, whereas Britain decided not to join it. On the other hand, France took the middle ground. French identity has been contested in elite discourses, whereas political leaders had strong beliefs about the economic benefits from joining the euro, especially after the failure of economic policies in the 1980s. The result is that France joined the euro after French elites had adjusted French identity, Europeanizing their perceptions of 'French distinctiveness'. This study suggests that when identities (or norms) are firmly established and interests are ambiguous, causal arrows tend to go from identities (or norms) to interests. On the other hand, when identities (or norms) are unstable or fluid and interests are clear-cut, causal arrows tend to go from interests to identities (or norms).

Regionalism in East Asia also supports the view that interest can trump identity, especially when actors' identity is not stabilized. The rise of a region-wide identity in East Asia (an East Asian identity) is a relatively new phenomenon compared with regional identities in other major regions such as Europe. External developments like the launch and/or strengthening of common institutions in Europe and North America, and the Asian Financial Crisis in the 1990s put pressures on East Asian

countries to pursue shared interests based on a newly constructed common identity. External pressures and the 'experience of common problems' helped East Asian countries recognize the existence of 'common' others (by distinguishing 'us' from 'them') and enhanced their collective consciousness of a common identity (Terada, 2003, p. 254). A regional identity in East Asia though is very shallow and unstable because it was externally imposed and lacks an internal cohesiveness. Unlike Europe, East Asia has a wide diversity in terms of cultural values, religious faiths, and political/economic ideologies and systems. On the other hand, two major powers in the region, China and Japan, have showed their very clear-cut interests in regional policies: taking a leadership role in constructing a regional economic/financial architecture. The two countries agree to establish a solid and common regional institution modeled on the European Union, but the problem is each wants to do that under its own leadership and direction (Grimes, 2008). Ideas on a regional project like the East Asian Community have been proposed and discussed among policymakers in East Asia, but there has been little progress in formal regional institutionalization under this divided leadership and there has been a wide gap between public statements and actual achievements. This case illustrates how actors' strong self-interests can trump their identity when their identity is shallow or unstable.

In short, as the three ideal-type categories of social action demonstrates, there are various motives of social actions that can generate significant political outcomes: (i) self-interest-driven behavior governed mainly by instrumental rationality; (ii) norm/identity-driven behavior governed primarily by *thymos* or affect, and/or value-oriented rationality; (iii) the combination or conflict between the two. In the third category, when there is a direct conflict between two different motives (interest versus norm/identity), we need to closely examine the direction of causal arrows. I suggest that when identities (or norms) are solid or deep and interests are unclear or fluid, causal arrows tend to move from identities (or norms) to interests. On the other hand, when identities (or norms) are contested or unstable and interests are well-defined, causal arrows tend to move from interests to identities (or norms). I admit that there should be more systematic empirical studies, especially on conditions under which an actor's identity (or norms) becomes unstable or contested. My study, however, shows that causal arrows can flow in either direction between identity/norms and interest, and that one theoretical approach based on a single motive cannot fully explain today's diverse international affairs that have political significance.

Conclusion

Rationalists in IR have assumed that actors are rational interest-seekers and for them the interests of actors (and their identities) are exogenously given. To be sure, all theories inevitably assume something as given or bracket some issues because we

cannot deal with all the issues at the same time (Wendt, 1999, pp. 33–34). But I agree with constructivism that rationalists' views on the motives of social actions are too restrictive to explain many important aspects of international political life. The maximization of one's interests through cost–benefit calculation is one of the dominant motives of social behaviors, but it is not the only significant motive. In some cases, social actors behave widely differently in the same or similar situation and certain actors do not follow expected patterns of behaviors (especially from the viewpoint of instrumental rationality). Social actions driven by strong ideological and moral commitment or loyalty are not captured very well by the simple logic of cost–benefit calculation. These ideational or social-psychological motivations are governed primarily by *thymos* and/or value-oriented rationality rather than by instrumental rationality, and the behaviors that are driven by these motivations can result in greatly crucial (international) political outcomes.

Especially, since the end of the Cold War, we have witnessed politically momentous events in the international arena including the proliferation of ethno-religious conflicts, the reemergence of religious fundamentalism, the spread of international terrorism, and the increasingly important role of norms entrepreneurs and NGOs in world politics that have led various global social movements. These important international political phenomena that are related to the politics of anger, loyalty, values or a sense of justice have not been explained appropriately or have been underexplained by rationalism in IR perhaps because it does not have an efficient analytical tool to account for those phenomena. We may need to have more flexible assumptions on main actors and their motives than those of rationalists to explicate them in a more appropriate way. With its attention to moral or ideational factors such as norms and identities in world politics, constructivism is better prepared to explain those phenomena. Constructivism, however, cannot totally replace rationalism in explaining international political affairs. Although it holds that identities or norms shape and change actors' interests, actors' strong and clearly defined self-interests can overrule their norms or identities as my arguments and examples suggest.

As the three ideal-type categories or models of social behaviors suggest, the two approaches are complementary rather than competitive in explaining social and international phenomena. In some cases when there is no serious conflict between norms or identities and self-interests, an eclectic mode of analysis or a bridge-building approach between rationalism and constructivism is possible and should be encouraged. When there is a direct conflict between the two sets of motives, we need to investigate carefully where causal arrows move as they can flow in either direction. There should be also more empirical research on conditions under which certain motives (for example, identity or norms) become very unstable or solid. Rationalism's parsimony is valuable in theory construction, but overemphasis on parsimony makes a theory lose its real-world or policy relevance. Thus, certain important international political questions or issues have not been asked or addressed seriously by it. We may have to make more efforts to strike a balance between theoretical 'parsimony'

and the 'complexity' of social actions in the real world to improve the political relevance of IR theory in a rapidly changing today's world.

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Notes

1 Constructivism has various branches, but here we focus mainly on a modern or mainstream version rather than on a postmodern or feminist one. Concerning different versions of constructivism, see Finnemore and Sikkink (2001, p. 395), Fearon and Wendt (2002, p. 57) and Adler (2002, pp. 97–98).

2 In fact, these psychological aspects of identity have been less investigated by constructivists than its social aspects and there should be further research on its psychological dimensions.

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