

Dialectics as Constitutive Process  
in Historical International Systems:  
From “Concrete Totality” to Context Sensitivity

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ABSTRACT: I present a theoretical synthesis of constructivist IR theory with dialectical theory of the Hegelian tradition to illuminate systems theories of international relations. I critique debates among Frankfurt School dialecticians and positivists, and demonstrate that when stripped of Marxist epistemological and ontological commitments attending the notion of the “concrete reality” in which Marxist proponents argue dialectical analysis must be situated, Frankfurt School dialectical theory may be synthesized with social constructivist arguments in IR theory, and helps explain constitutive and transformative processes in historical international systems. I draw upon a recent constructivist work and employ a recent constructivist study of sovereignty to argue that dialectical analysis may be employed to explain macro-historical transformation in international systems as constitutive process, even while causal processes may be traced at the micro-historical level. By eradicating *ad hoc* materialist assumptions we can benefit and learn from the insights of Hegel without embracing the materialist ontology of Marx.

A significant debate has been joined in recent scholarship in international relations theory regarding the relationship between causal and constitutive social processes, the manner in which they might be identified, and the utility of each form of analysis in the development of theories of international relations. Constructivist and some post-positivist and post-structuralist theorists contend with these issues when they struggle to generate theory that explicates social processes while seeking to avoid the structural determinisms, and unreflective, and even reifying uses of historical data, that can befall the analyst encumbered by the pitfalls of a naïve positivism. (See Lakatos 1970).

Constructivists with a strongly positivist epistemological orientation part company with those who maintain that ideas, and the social practices that give them meaning, have constitutive as well as causal effects. Constructivists who have been designated by others as “constitutivists” as opposed to “mediativists” (Adler, 1997: 323-4), or as “poststructuralists” (Fierke, 2002: 119), or as “postmodernists” or “radical constructivists” (Adler, 2002: 98) might deny that ideas have *causal* effects. They take a language-all-the-way-down approach to IR theory. Other scholars might question the utility of even making a rigid distinction between causal and constitutive effects. These include some scholars that Adler has designated as proponents of “modernist linguistic (or ‘rules’) constructivism.” (Adler 2002: 98). These scholars combine an emphasis on subjective hermeneutics

with an interest in “explaining and understanding social reality” by “uncovering the process by which social facts are constituted by language and rules.” (Ibid.) These causal effects are not to be understood with recourse to the hyper-rigorous Humean formulation typified by nomological-deductive theory, but are more consistent with the less demanding notion provided by Wendt who argues that to say “x causes y” we must assume 1) that x and y are independently existing, 2) that x is antecedent to y and 3) y would not have occurred but for x. (Wendt, 1998: 105).

These issues of causation and constitution that are of so much interest to contemporary IR theory are not entirely novel. They have antecedents in older literatures, especially within the discipline of sociology, in longstanding substantive, ontological and epistemological debates within the philosophy of science initiated by attempts to apply the methodologies of the natural sciences to the study of social phenomenon. In many aspects the emergence of the agent-structure debate in IR theory; (Wendt 1987; Dessler 1989) - though its immediate intellectual roots are clearly located within Giddensian structurationist sociology - is an almost predictable resurrection of the Marx-Weber Debate initiated by the Weberians critique of the limitations of a structuralist and economistic elements of the dialectical materialism of Marx. Even structural realists have remarked on the intellectual synergies between structural neorealism and Marxism; (Gilpin 1987) namely their shared commitments to structuralism, to economism, and as critics of each have argued, to determinism.

Marx’s dialectical materialism similarly has its own antecedents in the prior intellectual battles within and among the German idealism of Kant, and German romanticism of Fichte and Schelling. Hegel was well positioned to argue that every historical condition, idea, or situation, irrepressibly brought forth its opposite in reaction; and that in the synthesis of these opposing forces of thesis and antithesis, a different, more complex whole would emerge. This is the essence of Hegel’s theory of history. Stripped of its economism, its materialism, and its insistence of the primacy of class relations, Marx’s theory of history is, essentially Hegel’s dialectical theory of history. While the Hegelian dialectical philosophy pervades the work of Marx, it is in an early work - his “Theses on Feuerbach” - that he outlines what he describes as a dialectic of “concrete totality.” Marx proffered this thesis as a guide to concrete research in the socio-historical sciences. Following Marx, nearly all

subsequent neo-Hegelians in intermittent attempts to draw our attention back to the methods of dialectical inquiry would insist that we must analyze society as, and within, a context of this concrete totality.

This insistence upon dialectical analysis of society and history from a perspective of the context of “concrete totality” is characteristic of nearly all the contributions of the Frankfurt School authors, for whom dialectics are a form of rebellion against empiricism within a quixotically Marxist critique of positivist inquiry. The Frankfurt School emerged as a broader critique of the Enlightenment project that prefigures contemporary post-positivist and post-structuralist critiques in as much that the Frankfurt school dialecticians developed a broad critique of empirical imminence, with deep Hegelian roots. For constructivists, and other scholars with an ambiguous or agnostic view of the separability of subject and object in social analysis, this critique is interesting to the extent that it might be adapted to evade submersion within a Marxist political project that also has deep roots in Hegelian dialectics. It is interesting not only because the radical separation of subject and object in social analysis is problematized, but because it problematizes the primacy of the Popperian notion of scientific “facts” over political “decisions.” In dialectical thought the positivist notion of the imminence of facts, and the precedence they are accorded over decisions, acquires the characteristics of an intellectual fetish in purely positivist scholarship. I will return to the dialectical critique of the imminence of facts shortly. For the moment I simply alert the reader that I am going to argue that while the Hegelian origins of this critique do appear to me to hold out significant promise for the conceptualization of historical international systems as a constitutive process, the Marxian roots of the critique appear less promising in this context.

The source of my contention regards the distinction between Hegel’s concept of concrete totality, and subsequent Marxist adaptations of the same concept. For Hegel, the notion of the concrete was quite different from the empirical notion “which equated it with unmediated and simple facticity. Hegel chose to call the empiricist idea of the concrete the ‘abstract.’” (Jay 1984, 58). For Hegel, concrete totality “involved the creative interplay of various levels of social reality...rather than suppression of some in the name of the universality of one of the others.” (Ibid.) Subsequent

interpretations of Hegel's conception have violated, or at least circumscribed this interplay, tending to privilege some social aggregates and relationships over others as both causally and constitutively significant in explaining social outcomes. Such interpretations have tended to privilege strongly Marxist notions of social relations as largely circumscribed by the specific forms of production relation. This focus is compounded by the chronic insistence of Frankfurt School mandarins of concrete totality as an ultimate reality. This tendency is particularly notable in the writings of György Lukács, upon whom Adorno and Habermas more or less self-consciously draw. Lukács insists, for example, in his famous work on *History and Class Consciousness*, that it is only in this context of concrete totality, "which sees the isolated facts of social life as aspects of the historical process and integrates them in a *totality*, can knowledge of the facts hope to become knowledge of *reality*." (Lukács 1971[a], 8, emphasis original) Society is the totality to which Lukács refers as he regards it as to be a total subject, or as "the identical subject-object of the social and historical process of evolution" (Ibid. 149). While two years later (in 1924) when Lukács published his famous study on the work of Lenin, this process seems to have shifted from a process of evolution to a process of development. Significantly he argued, in this context that "for every genuine Marxist there is always a reality more real and therefore more important than *isolated* facts and tendencies – namely, *the reality of the total process*, the totality of social development." (1971[b], 18, emphasis original) For every genuine non-Marxist this assertion bears justification and explanation, which is never forthcoming from Frankfurt School dialecticians or from their adherents.

***Dialectics and IR Theory:***

One more recent exposition in this genre is an offering by Heine and Teschke that argues for dialectics as the conceptual tool needed for IR theorists to better understand continuity and change in the international system. (Heine and Teschke 1996). Their argument generates many points of agreement with constructivists of positivist, critical and post-positivist persuasions alike. They criticize structural and mainstream IR theory for its static features and for failing to account for systemic transformation, as well as for a failure to account for the causal significance of social

agency; or in their Hegelian lexicon, for “individual and collective human *praxis* as the underlying source of history.” (Ibid. 403). They explicate what they refer to as a number of “dialectical dimensions” they would apply to IR theory to lend it what they regard as missing characteristics of a social science. They generate three critiques of mainstream IR theory at the level of inter-paradigmatic debate without which, they argue, IR theory cannot benefit from their posited dialectical correctives.

Their first critique is an “empirical” critique in which mainstream IR theory is taken to task for ignoring Kuhn’s paradigmatic critique of “normal science.” (Kuhn 1962). IR theory largely continues to strive to generate Hempelian, nomological-deductive covering laws that are assumed to be empirically refutable and directly testable against an empirical reality that adherents assume generates few or no problems of interpretation. Constructivists, post-positivists and critical theorists alike would tend to respond positively to this “empirical” criticism of IR theory.

Their second critique is an “immanent” critique in which IR theory is criticized for generating theoretical conclusions that by no means logically necessarily follow from “pre-scientific” assumptions on the part of the analyst. (Ibid., 407; see also Ashley 1984). Critics of mainstream IR theory have similarly critiqued realism, for example, for “metaphysical precommitments” that are exempted from scientific criticism, such as realism’s commitment to a profoundly Augustinian notion of the nature of fallen man. Neither would constructivists necessarily disagree with Heine and Teschke’s description of the characteristics of a properly immanent critique, or their “focus on the contradictions between the value judgments and the claims to be discovering ‘scientific laws.’” (Ibid.) Yet ultimately, I will argue, Heine and Teschke’s strongly Marxist conception of the “concrete totality” - that in their view generates the context of evaluation required to evade the lash of immanent critique - itself fails to clear the hurdle of contradiction between value judgment and claims to scientific status, unless we are to accept *prima facie* this perennially problematic Marxist claim. Thus while constructivists, post-positivists and critical theorists will welcome their immanent critique, many will take issue with the assertion that a dialectical approach that incorporates a specifically Marxist variant of the Hegelian conception of “concrete totality” as a contextual guide for theory, in

any way evades the problem of the absence of logical necessity of conclusions derived from pre-scientific assumptions.

Heine and Teschke's third critique of IR theory is "fundamental" and conducted at the inter-paradigmatic level as they assert correctly, that ontology, epistemology and methodology all three remain contested domains in IR theory. More problematic is their subsequent assertion that dialectics provide "an articulated standard of rationality...for fundamental scientific critique" (Ibid. 408) of IR theory. This claim is supportable at one level in that dialectical analysis does provide a fundamental critique insofar as recourse to it necessarily problematizes epistemology, ontology, and methodology. It may abet a "scientific" critique in the sense that Wendt calls for a "scientific realism" that problematizes that which is ontologically primitive without abandoning macro-theoretical rational inquiry with intelligible standards of evaluation around which a "scientific" community of scholars can generate a consensus. (Wendt 1999, 47-50). But here again, many constructivists as well as post-positivist and critical theorists will part company because Bhaskar's scientific realist posture, however modified or partially adopted by Wendt, stands in somewhat ambiguous metatheoretical orientation with respect to other forms of constructivist, let alone post-positivist scholarship. (Kratochwil 2000, 89).

Heine and Teschke go on to stipulate the shortcomings of mainstream IR theory with which most of its critics can agree; namely "its artificially restricted object domain, its insistence on instrumental rationality, the absence of theorizing about systemic transformation, and its neglect of collective agency." (Ibid., 411). They argue that dialectics can illuminate the social praxis so neglected by structural realism and liberalism, for example, by placing in the foreground of analysis contradictions that "capture the real historically and socially-constituted antagonisms in the world." (412). Even while limiting themselves almost entirely to Marx, Engels and Hegel as interlocutors, they perform a creditable job of demonstrating how a theory of *praxis* develops a dynamic demonstration of the historical contingency of social relations and structures. This component of their argument is in itself a devastating critique of any structural ontology. (414) Matthias Albert and Yosef Lapid have similarly praised elements of their dialectical approach, acknowledging that it's potential benefits

include “a self-reflexive understanding of history as a *form of praxis*; a ‘*processual*’ understanding of society as a historically evolving *totality*...and an optimistic affirmation of the cognizability of social phenomena.” (Albert and Lapid 1997; 406; italics original).

Yet when they develop the notion of the “concrete totality,” within which their specifically Marxist dialectical approach demands that analysis must be contextualized, the issues of contention with non-Marxist IR theorists who are critical of mainstream approaches are amplified. Concrete totality emerges from their conceptualization exercise as simultaneously a “methodological postulate,” an “epistemological principle” and a “materialist concept.” (416). But I would argue that while this analytic trifunctionality is broadly consistent with the development of the notion of concrete totality in the writings of the notables of the Frankfurt School, this propensity for a single concept to acquire several meanings within multiple analytic categories might also signal its analytic underdevelopment. This is a topic to which I shall return.

Heine and Teschke make an important point in drawing out the aforementioned distinction of Hegel between the abstract and the concrete, and the manner in which this distinction can avoid the reification of social kinds, and of artificial boundaries between them. Here they have in mind the reification of the distinction between the political realm and the economic realm in liberal thought in general, and in neoliberal and neoclassical political economy in particular. Arguing that dialectical analysis can help to “dissolve such reifications by relating them to human praxis,” they attack the reification of distinct economic and political realms by demonstrating the reifying consequences of the creation of what Polanyi has called “fictitious commodification of nature.” (Polanyi 1944) This “private contract’ is only possible with the support of the prerequisite coercive power of a state determined to uphold private property and enforce private contracts. Private contractual relations are constituted only in the context of a preexisting public apparatus dedicated to what Ruggie has designated in a different context a liberal “social purpose” (Ruggie 1982). They conclude that “[o]nly if we can think in terms of totality can this constitutive nexus between the ‘economic’ and the ‘political’ be unearthed.” (Heine and Teschke 1996, 422).

Since we are continually told by dialecticians of the Marxist variant that we must analyze international processes within a context of totality we can only evaluate the merits of this claim by assessing what is meant by “concrete totality.” It is here that the potential force Heine and Teschke’s interesting proposals seem limited by a specifically Marxist and materialist perspective of this evaluative context. Albert and Lapid complain that their notion of dialectic is too “monistic with its conception of ‘concrete totality.’” (Albert and Lapid 1997; 403). Kratochwil similarly expresses skepticism “concerning the wider claim of the heuristic power of dialectic....[because of a].... tension between the argument about the primacy of practice and the emphasis on 'objective conditions' under which the historical process progresses.” (Kratochwil 1997; 440). Having stipulated the potential benefits of dialectical analysis, Albert and Lapid in turn specify the potential downsides, which include “unintentionally buying into the politics of Marxism, Hegelianism, unduly de-emphasizing theory” in favor of an empiricist totality that is reified in its self-conscious emphasis on the material and the “concrete.” (Albert and Lapid, 1997; 410). In addition we risk “adopting a realist-pessimist view of the world, and uncritically adopting a one-sided ‘social totality’ perspective.” (Ibid.) Or as Kratochwil puts it, “[p]recisely because the human world is one of artifice, not of natural fact, 'needs and interests' cannot provide an absolute foundation....the argument about the historical and practical nature of the social world runs up against the old desire to provide an absolute point of reference, a problematic notion that ... has its analog in the claim of dialectic to 'totality' within which everything can be comprehended. (Kratochwil 1997; 441)

***Dialectics and the Critique of Positivist Social Science:***

A more generic critique of the positivist notion of nomological-deductive positivist social theory emerges from the writings of the proponents of the Frankfurt School of critical theory themselves. Here again, much emerges from this critique that will resonate with constructivist, post-positivist and post-structuralist theorists of international relations; while much remains steeped in materialist precommitments. I want to draw out the elements of this critique that I believe we can use to join dialectical approaches to the emerging repertoire of proposed theoretical correctives to the structural

limitations of realism and neoliberal institutionalism as theoretical tools for the explanation of social change in historical international systems. In the process of doing so I will elaborate and critique the conception of “concrete totality” that the Frankfurt School authors regard as a central conceptual framework within which the dialectical analysis of society and its changing historical “moments” must be conducted. Ultimately I will argue that the materialist interpretation of this concept of concrete totality must be discarded, or at least modified if dialectical analysis is to avoid the ideological content, and the tendencies toward tautology and reification with which the dialecticians of the Frankfurt School quite legitimately charged nomological-deductive social theory.

In a famous essay in which he elaborates the distinctions between critical, dialectical social science and what he calls hypothetico-deductive, or positivist social science, Jürgen Habermas stipulates and discusses at length four characteristic distinctions between these forms of theorizing. Dialectical theory generates four different transformations among analytic referents that characterize dialectical theory and to delineate it from what I shall instead call nomological-deductive theory. Dialectical theory first generates a transformation of the relation of theory to its object; second, a transformation of the relation of theory to experience; third, a transformation of the relation of theory to history; and finally, a transformation of the relation of science to social praxis.

#### The Relation of Theory to Its Object:

While nomological-deductive theorization insists upon a rigorous distinction between subject and object, Habermas doubts whether social science can proceed in the same way. The manner in which the analyst theorizes about the behavior of a physical object and the physical determinants of its behavior has no bearing on that behavior in the physical sciences. However, the object “takes its revenge on the human subject” in the social sciences. (Habermas 1976; 134). In engaging in social theory, the analyst is “in the very act of cognition...bound to the constraints of the very sphere he wishes to analyze” and escapes this liability “only to the extent to which he grasps the societal life-context as a totality” through which his data must be structured as well. (Ibid.) As a consequence, instead of the explication of hypothetico-deductive propositions that might be tested with recourse to

neutral empirical “facts” the task of the dialectical theorist becomes the “hermeneutic explication of meaning,” with the consequence that “concepts of a relational form give way to concepts which are capable of expressing substance and function in one.” Dialectical theorists then “incorporate reflexively the fact that they themselves remain a moment of the objective context which, in their turn, they subject to analysis.” (Ibid.)

In a set of lectures for an introductory course in sociology that he taught at Frankfurt in 1968 not long before his death, and in which he defended the Frankfurt School against its positivist critics, Theodor Adorno argued that nomological-deductive social science objectifies and reifies a specific concept of society, which a dialectical approach would avoid. This reification is “implicit in the logic of the commodity character ...[of that concept of]...society...[while]...the true application of a critical dialectical theory of society consists precisely with not equating society as a subject with society as an object.” (Adorno 2000; 137-138) But while Adorno’s approach has the advantage of problematizing the existing social order rather than taking the given order as the natural order, and of suggesting a separation of subject and object in social inquiry, his rationale require those who would like to embrace his argument to accept his Marxist view of the given order. Adorno argues that “society as an object” by which he means “the social process, is not yet by any means a subject, or free, or autonomous.” (138) On the other hand “society as subject...that is, conceived as a self-determining, mature society which is also liberated in terms of its content, resists and is incompatible with precisely the objectifying, reifying kind of thinking which is inflicted on it by the established...methods” (ibid.) of social inquiry. Yet I would argue that we can critique these methods, and the objectifying and reifying effects of the intellectual edifices constructed with them, and still employ a dialectical approach to inquiry, without embracing Adorno’s Marxist alternative. All post-positivists, and many post-structuralists and even some of those constructivists who identify themselves as positivists, posit a separation of subject and object in their inquiry, and express concern with the dangers of reification of theoretical constructs.

The Relation of Theory to Experience:

The only type of experience that analytical-empirical models of procedures tolerate, and which they themselves define, are “controlled observations of physical behavior.” (135). But in generating a dialectical theory of society, its concepts and categories and the relationship between these, the analyst may not “blindly follow the abstract rules of a general methodology but...must in advance measure up to a pre-formed object.” (Ibid.)

Adorno has elaborated on this theme in an extended critique of positivist methodology in social science, and particularly his critique of quantitative methodology. (see Adorno 2000). He develops an extensive critique of formalism and instrumentalism and of methodology as a panacea and a substitute for knowledge. (64-5). He argues that this formalism constitutes a hypostatization of a specific concept of science with the dangerous consequence that it masks the ideological content of positivist inquiry. (67) Moreover, the recourse to methodology relieves the analyst of the burden of substantive knowledge about his subject. In the recourse to methodology “there is a constant temptation to assume a wise expression and pass judgment on subjects which one is unable to judge” (65) and has generated the practice among academics “that whenever they are unable to understand a subject properly they fall back on talking about method.” (69)

Thus, Adorno argues in a fashion that will resonate with many theorists of international relations, that we can not begin *a priori* with method and apply it to any subject. We need to generate method “from the subject matter, through immersing ourselves in it...methods have to vary according to subject.” (70) Else methodology ends as tautology and social inquiry becomes an unenviable enterprise in which “provided people can only point to something absolutely certain, they lose sight of the relevance, the content, the substance of that to which this certainty refers. They make a fetish of certainty as such, at the expense of what one is certain about” which explains the observed “predilection for tautology and...logical tidiness [where] people prefer to cling to ... the absolute certainty of the proposition that  $A = A$ , rather than importing into the realm of knowledge the risks...imposed by an existence liable to be annihilated at any moment.” (76) In such an enterprise “knowledge itself is determined operationally as it does no more than fulfill the demands of

method...it falls short of the concept of science that was once upheld, and regresses into mere clerical technique.” (76-7) As such, this operationally determined knowledge is not only tautology it is a form of reification.

While we might sympathize with Habermas’ and Adorno’s critiques of the tyranny of method over subject characteristic of so much self-consciously positivistic theorizing in the social sciences it is unfortunate that here, as Hans Albert points out in his critique of Habermas’ essay, (Albert 1976) that it is maddeningly difficult to pin down precisely what Habermas means by this pre-formed object to which social inquiry must measure up, beyond calling it “the societal life-context as a totality.” (Habermas 1976; 134.) Further on Habermas refers to “the prior experience of society as totality” (135) This experience is “pre-scientifically accumulated” (Ibid.) and constitutes “The education acquired by the total human subject.” (Ibid.) Habermas argues that not all of the knowledge generated by dialectical theory can be expressed in nomological-deductive fashion, nor could any experiment “demonstrate the dependence of each social phenomenon on the totality” (136) yet insists that “the dependence of that which can be socially observed upon the total structure is...more valid than any findings which can be irrefutably verified in the particular.” (Ibid.) Thus from the dialectical perspective “even the categorical means [of explication]...must themselves be legitimated in experience.” (ibid.)

Adorno fleshes out some of what Habermas leaves unsaid in this context in one of his lectures in which he responds to Hans Albert’s criticism in Albert’s critique of Habermas. Albert had criticized the conception of society advanced by Adorno in his critique of the Parsonian notion of the “social system,” as reducing to the argument that “everything is connected to everything else.” (Adorno 2000; 30-31) Adorno replies that society “is not merely a functional relationship between socialized people...but is determined by its fundamental precondition, by exchange. What really makes society a social entity...is the relationship of exchange” (31) Just as history is, for Adorno, “constitutive of all sociological knowledge,” (29)

Exchange is, for Adorno, “constitutive of society.” (31) Moreover, Adorno argues that the concept of exchange is “the hinge connecting the conception of a critical theory of society to the

construction of the concept of society as totality.” (32) Adorno’s “functional” concept of society permits him to be critical and problematize existing social arrangements. The notion of exchange is crucial for him because “by virtue of existing for others and being defined essentially as workers human beings cease to be something existing in itself...but define themselves by what they do and by the relationship [of exchange] existing between them.” (33)

A couple of points are worth emphasizing with respect to the development of the arguments of Habermas and Adorno above. Habermas might have well simply said that one must evaluate social phenomenon with an apparatus incorporates a Marxist view of social history in order to proceed with any “legitimate” social analysis. This is highly problematic. Habermas would be correct in asserting, as he might have from his observations, that social history imposes, as it develops, a path dependence that circumscribes the effects of the capacity of human agency to transform social structure. But this he does not do. Instead he insists upon analysis that proceeds from the assumption that socio-historical development must be constrained and analyzed from the perspective of a Marxist, or at least from a materialist structure of totality. This scarcely avoids ideological content or tautology. Neither does it avoid reification. The application of Marxist categories of analysis to pre-capitalist periods of history can reify social groupings that were wholly inconsistent with the self-identifications and self-understandings of the historical contemporaries themselves. This problem is evidenced by a work by Teschke in which he criticizes a constructivist study of the politics of feudal Europe (Hall 1997) from a Marxist perspective of the form Habermas seems to indicate. As a consequence, Teschke would have us believe that in a period in which capitalism was unknown, and even the notion of accumulation was proscribed by the medieval Church as a sin, the medieval peasant got up in the morning and debated with himself whether he would deal that day with his “land lord,” his “liege lord,” or his “banal lord.” (Teschke 1998)

Adorno neglects to consider that what he describes as a functional relationship among people in society; their relations of exchange; are as much a product of ideas as material structures. These ideas and the exchange relations they engender are constitutive of the capitalist production relations made possible by these ideas. And while his ethical critique of capitalism bears a more than superficial

resemblance to John Paul II's admonition to avoid social practices that deny the inherent "dignity of the human person," by treating people as objects, he fails to acknowledge that the socially constitutive arrangements of regimes built upon Marxism-Leninism were themselves prone to highly dehumanizing social practices. But if, unlike Adorno, we recognize that exchange is not the only social process that is constitutive of society, the transformation of the relationship of theory to experience touted by the dialectical approach to social theory offers much that is familiar to, and welcome by, constructivist theory in international relations.

The Relation of Theory to History:

Habermas notes that the historical sciences aim to explain individual events rather than derive and corroborate universal laws, and though each employ a similar causal form of explanation, natural and the more generalizing social sciences aim for "deductively acquired laws under limiting conditions," while the historical sciences "refer to these limiting conditions themselves." (Habermas 1976; 137). As we shall see, these limiting conditions to which, Habermas suggests, historians ascribe causal significance in and of themselves, set the boundaries of probable, if not permissible, social movement. This is of great interest to constructivists as these limiting conditions can be embedded in social structures, as are norms and legitimating principles of social order, and they may at the same time be socially and historically contingent and mutable. But when we move from the explanation of individual events, that constitute limiting conditions to the broader explanation of general trends or recurring patterns of socialized behaviors, Habermas says the historian becomes a sociologist (or, we might add, a political scientist.) Then according to Popper, Habermas suggests, positivist social science asserts that the historian has left his province. For Popper, "there can be no such thing as historical laws" (138) and such regularities as might be observed cannot aim "beyond the particular dependent relations of historically neutral quantities." (Ibid.) But Habermas asserts that dialectical theory views historical regularities as "signifying developments which [are] mediated through the consciousness of the acting subjects." (139) This approach is of enormous interest to constructivist theorists of international relations. The assertion of the importance of this mediation of

historical regularities through the consciousness of acting subjects - in the parlance of Frankfurt School dialectics – has been developed within the constructivist analysis of the centrality of societal self-identifications and of intersubjectively shared social meanings to the designation of the interests and motivations of social actors *qua* subject.

Moreover, dialectical theorists “claim to articulate the objective meaning of the historical life-context” such that “the comprehension of meaning, to which the analytical-empirical theories attach a merely heuristic value, is *constitutive*” of the social realm whose explanation and understanding our theory seeks to explicate. (ibid. Emphasis added.) The analysis is constitutive rather than causal in that “it gains its categories primarily from the situational consciousness of acting individuals themselves, in the objective spirit of the social life-world, that meaning is articulated which...interpretation takes up through identification and critique.” (ibid.) In as much as Habermas again hearkens to the importance of societal self-understandings in social analysis and similarly argues that the comprehension of meaning is constitutive of the system (or “social life-world”) we seek to understand, his dialectical transformation of the relation of theory to history is a move with which constructivists are quite comfortable and quite familiar. The only real problem here comes, again, with the assertion that the social reality so described renders an “objective” understanding.

The Frankfurt School figures never fully explain their claim to incorporate an “objective” configuration of societal reproduction. However, similarities their approach otherwise bears to the constructivist approach to social inquiry suggests their dialectical logics are potentially very useful provided they could be stripped of these unsubstantiated claims to monopolize an historically or scientifically “objective” truth, while simultaneously proceeding somewhat uncritically from the posture of Marx with respect to the question of social reproduction and transformation.

Habermas goes on in this vein with a claim that is even more problematic when he argues that the dialectical approach “resists the danger of ideologizing which exists as long as hermeneutics naively measures the relationships [under study] solely in terms of that which they regard themselves to be. The [dialectical] theory will adhere to this meaning, but only in order to measure it – behind the back of subjects and institutions – against what they really are.” (ibid.) Many constructivists would readily

concede that the liberalism from which so much positivist theorizing in social science proceeds is certainly quite vulnerable to critique as ideology. Habermas, however, ignores the risk of reifying analyst designated understandings of social actors in departing in analysis from actor self-understandings. This risk is amplified when the system under analysis is historically and/or socially remote from the perspective of the analyst. Recall, in this context, Teschke's (drawing apparently on Perry Anderson's) curious imposition of Marxist categories of actor designation into the theologically self-designated social milieu of the feudal middle ages in Europe. No better or worse, in this context, is the structural realist designation of relevant actors in international politics as (by definitional fiat) states who are necessarily unitary, self-regarding, rational utility maximizers. Both of these actor designations, from a Marxist and structural neorealist perspective respectively, might say a good deal more about the analyst than they do about the social system under study. None of Habermas' claims to supplant subjective self-understandings with objective analytic understandings can be supported, nor can these claims be retrieved from their own excursions into teleology.

Habermas claims further that in "linking the method of *verstehen*...with the objectivating [*sic*] procedures of causal-analytical science and by permitting the realization of both through a mutually transcending critique, the dialectical approach overcomes the separation of theory and history." (140) Constructivist theorists would respond that the separation of theory and history might well be overcome to the extent that a critical reformulation of Max Weber's concept of *verstehen* might contextualize historically and social contingent social meanings within a thorough investigation of actor self-understandings, thereby generating context sensitivity in social analysis. But he ignores the danger that far from transcending what he regards as Max Weber's "subjectively arbitrary 'value relation,'" his particular objectifying procedures might also reify a specific ontology among social categories that cannot be said to avoid ideological content. I am not suggesting that the application of categories of analysis traditionally associated with the repertoire of Marxist analytic concerns; such as social class relations, production relations, or the relationship between social and economic power; in any way brands the analyst who employs them as ideologically compromised. Neither can I envision a complete analysis that wholly excludes them. But it is the claim, constantly and boldly repeated in

the writings of Frankfurt School scholars, that featuring contingently prevailing configurations of these categories as an historically, and ostensibly scientifically “objective” explication of a social and historical “concrete totality” to which the non-Marxist analyst must object.

The Relation of Science to Practice:

Finally dialecticians claim that in application to social phenomena law-like hypotheses that are proven empirically (if they existed) have little prescriptive value as they can be “translated into technical recommendations for a purposive rational choice of means only if the ends are pre-given.” (141) By contrast, dialectical theories of society can “indicate the gaping discrepancy between practical questions and the accomplishment of technical tasks” (142) as it “allows its problems to be posed by its object” (143) rather than the teleological problems of deduction by the subsumption of practical problems of social relations beneath a deductive exercise that treats the extant social order as natural. In this context Habermas quotes Adorno, who intones that “one would fetishize science if one separated its immanent problems from the real ones, which are weakly reflected in formalisms.” (143) Critical IR theorists will recognize in this *problemmatique* the distinction posited by Robert Cox between “problem solving” theory and “critical” theory. Cox’s distinction is precisely that what he refers to as problem solving theory takes the extant social order as given and natural, and fails to problematize it or even inquire into the manner in which it was brought about. Problem solving theory then proceeds deductively to inquiry as to how the “problems” indicated by the world-view in which it appears as natural and given might be resolved.

In this context Habermas critiques Karl Popper’s argument that there is a dichotomy between empirical regularities in the natural sphere, and the rules of human behavior and social norms. Popper then argues that natural phenomena are “invariant” and “fixed by natural law” in a fashion that is “independent of the influence of acting subjects” while social norms are “posited and implemented under the threat of sanction...valid only meditatively, through the consciousness of human subjects who accept them and alter their actions accordingly” (Habermas 1976, 144). Natural laws are, in Popper’s view, articulated as hypotheses while social norms are articulated through statements and

assertions. The former are empirically true or false. The latter are neither. We can “accept, repudiate, approve or reject” them. (Ibid.) Consequently “the former judgments rest on knowledge, the latter on decision.” (Ibid.) For Popper these realms of these judgments are entirely distinct because “statements of a descriptive language cannot be translated into a prescriptive language.” (145)

Habermas dismisses Popper’s dualism of facts and decisions as a chimera primarily with two critiques that will also resonate with constructivists, with critical theorists, and with post-structuralists. The first criticism is that this dualism of facts and decisions relegates the production of knowledge entirely to the “strict empirical sciences” and consequently eliminates entirely “questions of life practices” from the realm of the sciences. (Ibid.) Thus only rational decisions are possible in positivist inquiry, quite tautologically, by definitional fiat, and “we act rationally in so far as we establish social norms and institutions in the knowledge of these natural laws and select our measure according the technical recommendations which result from them.” (148) Constructivists would argue that this move deprives the human social actor of agency. Unfortunately, contra the recent recommendations of Stephen Roach, the solution to this problem is not adoption of Adorno’s conception of “negative dialectics,” which so circumscribes the actor analytically as to obliterate the possibility of social agency by even denying the actor social identity and thus social subjectivity. (Roach 2007, 330). The natural necessity of problem solving, constrained entirely by the small solution set of remedies that emerge as technical recommendations this circumscribed mode of reasoning, ensures reproduction of the extant social order, depriving society of a remedy that would problematize the natural necessity of this order. This result of Popper’s dualism between facts and decisions also places him on shaky empirical ground because, as we shall see, society periodically fails to act in this fashion, and fails to reproduce the extant social order, instead demolishing it and reconstituting it on a different basis. Popper’s move indeed constrains social inquiry and exploration of genuine social problems within it to a necessarily “decisionistic basis” without any real purchase in historical empirical reality. In this context, Habermas chides Popper for revealing, by this move, “his rationalistic confession of faith in a scientifically guided political practice [that] develops naturally from a questionable presupposition which he shares with...pragmatism...that human beings

can direct their own fate [only] to the extent which they utilize social techniques.” (Ibid.) It is far from obvious that this “rational administration of the world” is well-suited to generate solutions to practical social problems, or even well suited to explain the manner in which they have been resolved historically – often in a cataclysmic, society transforming, and system transforming fashion proceeding from a very different logic than that proffered by Popper’s posited dualism between facts and decisions.

Habermas’ second criticism regards the problems of operationalizing Popper’s dichotomy in practice due to the manner in which research communities actually function. Precisely because research “is an institution composed of people who act together and communicate with one another” and whom “determine through communication...that which can theoretically lay claim to validity” the decision of what constitutes valid knowledge is communal, and in consequence is itself based on intersubjectively shared social understandings within a community of scholars. The problem here is that “the demand for controlled observation as the basis for decisions concerning the empirical plausibility of law-like hypotheses already presupposes a pre-understanding of certain social norms.” (152) Put differently, both facts and decisions are based upon intersubjectively shared social understandings. In fact “the empirical validity of basic statements, and thereby the plausibility of law-like hypotheses and empirical scientific theories as a whole, is related to the criteria for assessing the results of action, which have been socially adapted in the necessarily intersubjective context of working groups. It is here that the hermeneutic pre-understanding, concealed by the analytical theory of science, is formed; a pre-understanding which first makes possible the application of rules for the acceptance of basic statements.” (154). Thus the realm of nomological-deductive theory, due to the necessarily intersubjective basis of shared meanings regarding evidentiary criterion for acceptance or rejection of law-like hypotheses criterion for their empirical validation, is no less a norm-governed or rule-governed realm. Participants necessarily take decisions, and rely upon intersubjectively shared social meanings as a basis for doing so. Laws and decisions are both assessed as valid based, of necessity, on their conformity to intersubjectively shared prior understandings.

***Dialectical Processes in Constructivist Socio-historical Analysis:***

The four transformations of the relations of theory in dialectical thought outlined above lead to an understanding of dialectical processes in history as better understood as constitutive rather than causal processes. I now turn to a description and extension of a recent constructivist work that illustrates how dialectical processes are constitutive, resulting in reconstitution of historical international systems. In National Collective Identity I argued that changes in co-constituted individual and collective identity result in changes in the legitimating principles of global and domestic social order, and consequent changes in the institutional forms of collective action, through which that identity is expressed to other societies. (Hall 1999) The norms, rules and principles of social interaction within, and between, these new institutional forms of collective action, are developed by social actors through practice to accommodate the new institutional structure. This new structure manifests the new societal identity and system change. I then linked all of these analytic referents with one another theoretically and employed the resulting variate matrix to illustrate how change in co-constituted individual and collective social self-identity resulted in changes in system legitimating principles, institutional forms of collective action, and norms, rules and principles of inter-societal interaction, thus system change. The major result was the constitution and reconstitution of three major system transitions in the context of modern European history, with the bulk of the book applied to specifying how this constructivist theoretical framework illustrated what I call the territorial-sovereign-to-national-sovereign transition. This transition occurred between what I called the Westphalian System and the present (transitioning?) National-State System. The result is the matrix in Figure 1.

INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

This explanation of how changes in social identities result in transitions in the international system is conveyed in the following sequence:

{  $\Delta$  (co-constituted individual / collective identity)  $\rightarrow$   $\Delta$  legitimating principles  $\rightarrow$   $\Delta$  institutions  $\rightarrow$   
 $\Delta$  domestic & international norms/rules/principles  $\rightarrow$   $\Delta$  system }

While change in co-constituted individual and collective identity are treated, for purposes of a systems analysis (in the lexicon of positivist discourse) as an “independent variable,” it is clear that social identities, in their turn, often change in response to some stimulus. The nature of this stimulus, however, has always proven to be both historically contingent, and a product of sources of transformations in societal collective identity that are both endogenous and exogenous to domestic society. But it is clear that there is a reciprocal relationship between changes in social identities and changes in the legitimating principles of domestic and global social orders. While structural changes in the environment in which social collectivities are formed and maintained provide impetus for transformation of these social identities, global and domestic social orders remain relatively stable until malleable social collective identities have traveled so far from those that had constituted the social order, that the social order becomes an impediment to the possibility of manifesting the emerging societal collective identity in social action. And even then, the mismatch (or contradiction) between emerging social collective identity, and the social identity that is institutionalized in the dominant (or, at least, in the extant) social order, must widen sufficiently to induce a legitimation crisis of the prevailing social order. In Habermasian terms “a social system has lost its identity as soon as later generations no longer recognize themselves within the once-constitutive tradition.” (Habermas 1975, 4)

***Constitutive and Causal Relationships: Dialectical Processes as Constitutive Processes:***

I have argued that some of the linkages between analytic referents employed in my theoretical schema are constitutive, and some are causal. For example, individual and collective identities are co-constituted and the relationship between them is *constitutive*. Our socially salient identities are embedded in our membership in some or another social collectivity, which are co-constituted through the processes of emotive identification with others, and socialization by them (34-8). However, other linkages between analytic referents can be characterized as *causal*. New collective identities generate new legitimating principles of social order, for example. These obviate, replace, and render anachronistic older principles and the social institutions that they have legitimated have become

archaic as changing societal self-conceptions obviate the principles upon which these older institutions are founded.

These transformations in social identities, when coupled with socially and historically contingent shocks – or legitimation crises - have historically constituted proximate “causes” of social change with a number of effects. First, collective identities social orders and their institutional manifestations have ceased to be reproduced. Second, agents constructing these new social collective identities have constructed new legitimating principles of new social orders that are subsequently founded on these new forms of social collective identity. Third, these same agents have demolished the institutions of the prior social order and have constructed new institutional forms of collective action to reproduce the new social order. The social relationships between these analytic referents are all *causal* in the sense that they are independently existing entities and they impute antecedent conditions for subsequent effects. (Wendt 1999, 105) The new norms, rules and principles of interaction within and among societies then develop through practice. In the classic Weberian formulation, the new norms of behavior become rules for behavior.

These new rules of societal interaction are both constitutive and regulative in character. They constitute the system, in the sense of defining the new order, and in the sense of generating a social order distinct from previous orders. They regulate the system in the sense that they prescribe and proscribe behaviors that are distinct from those of the previous social order. But this theoretical schema is *constitutive* in a different sense, even as it “mixes and matches” causal and constitutive analytic referents. I will also argue that the new social order, and attendant new international system, is *constituted* through a dialectical process that is mediated through (largely) ideational forces, but also through material forces. Some of the processes involved in systemic transformation may, to be sure, be analyzed through causal analysis, and causal mechanisms may in some cases be identified, but in others they cannot.

Moreover, when viewed through the heuristic of dialectics, the entire sequence of changing identities and consequent events may be viewed as profoundly *constitutive* in that they constitute the generative moment of a new international order. We can envision these macro-dialectical processes

as constitutive rather than causal when we think the matter through in terms of our understandings of the co-constitution of agents and structures. Another way of saying this is to assert that both agents (and the changing ideas that agents generate about their social environment) and structures have constitutive (vs. causal) effects.

Wendt, among others, gets at this in at least two ways. First, he points out that many ideas cannot be said to be purely causal, as is asserted when neoliberal institutionalists argue that interests, which have causal effects, are themselves ideas. He points out that “among the different kinds of ideas are some that constitute interests, and ... the explanatory power of these ideas therefore cannot be compared to interests and competing causal variables.” (Wendt 1999, 114ff) To the extent that ideas constitute *interests*, they may later generate a *causal* effect. To the extent that they constitute *understandings* about social reality, the effect is *constitutive*, and agents may have a constitutive effect on structures through the cognitive understandings they generate which may constitute these structures. The unintended consequences of rational action aside, agents must be able to conceptualize political structures that are at variance with existing structures in order to generate them through either strategic or communicative action. Second, Wendt points out that holistic approaches to macro-theorizing have focused on the idea that “if ...[constitutive] effects are present, then there is at least some sense in which the *relationship between agency and structure is not one of ‘interaction’ but of mutual constitution instead.*” (171) The idea that social structure constrains agents is hardly controversial in international relations theory among rationalists and materialists, and is in fact a core assumption of structuralists of all descriptions. The idea that social structure *constitutes* agents runs up against the difficulties inherent in the constraints of positivist inquiry, such as those outlined by Habermas, and the problems of incorporating constitutive relationships into social ontologies thus limited.

It might be worthwhile, in this context, to explore the extent to which dialectical processes can have constitutive effects at the macro-level of socio-historical inquiry, and demonstrate the co-constitution of agents and structures at the macro-level even as we can identify causal mechanisms en route to the institutional (vs. ideational) instantiation of the process at the micro-level. Certainly the

system is re-constituted through this dialectical process. Political structures are re-constituted by the changing self-referential ideas of agents and their “other-referential” ideas about structures and institutions. The following reminder from the historian, Collingwood, is highly suggestive of the manner in which historical transformation is at the same time amenable to causal (process tracing) and constitutive (dialectical) analysis when he suggests that unlike events in natural world, the social world of “history consists of action, and actions have an inside and an outside; on the outside they are mere events, related in space and time but not otherwise; on the inside they are thoughts and bound to one another by logical connections.”(Collingwood 1993, 118) It’s useful in this context to elaborate a bit on what Collingwood means by the “inside” and “outside” of an historical event. “By *outside* the event I mean everything belonging to it which can be described in terms of bodies and their movement ... by *inside* the event I mean that which can only be described in terms of thought...[the analyst] must always remember that the event was an action and that his main task is to think himself into this action to discern the thought of its agent. ” (213. The emphasis is mine.)

The outside of an event, so described, can clearly be analyzed in causal terms. But to the extent that the notion of causality may be invoked at all to describe the inside of an event, it may only be done “in a special sense.” (214) This is because “The cause of the event...means the thought in the mind of the person by whose agency the event came about: and this is not something other than the event, it is inside the event itself...The processes of nature can therefore be properly described as sequences of mere events, but those of history cannot.” (214-5) Neither can historical events be analyzed as mere data or “spectacles to be watched” as “they are objective, or known” to the analyst “only because they are subjective, or activities of his own” (218) which are objectively known only when they are understood, while, conversely, “the data of physical science are given by perception, and *perceiving is not understanding.*” (222)

It seems fruitful at this point to pause and examine this dialectical process, and then to analyze the constitutive effects on both agents and structures. My theoretical schema may be depicted as a dialectical process in the following sense. I begin with a *thesis*. To wit: an international system constituted by actors / agents whose co-constituted individual and collective social identities impel

them to accept certain principles which legitimate the domestic and global social order. These principles are institutionalized, and reproduced within these institutions. The norms, rules and principles of inter-societal interaction then have emerged from these arrangements through practice, and with recourse to “practical reason.” (Alker 1996, 402-9) The norms of inter-societal interaction provide reasons for (rather than causes of) social action, (Kratochwil 1989, 69) and constitutive and regulative rules derived from these norms constitute and order the system.

I then proceed with an *antithesis*. Societal self-conceptions begin to change. These are the collective self-understandings upon which the legitimating principles of the social order had previously been founded. These are the principles that have been embedded in the institutional edifice of the social order, and reproduced within these institutions. These self-conceptions may begin to change through a singular exercise of social agency, or in response to changes in social or material conditions, or through a combination of these stimuli. But these new social collective identities sometimes evolve to a point where existing institutional forms of collective action no longer serve as a vehicle by which these new identities may be represented, or expressed. The social agency latent within these new forms of collective identity is obstructed rather than enabled by the extant institutions by which society is organized.

At this point in the macro-dialectical process my theoretical framework describes, the conditions for transformation rather than reproduction of the social order have been approached, but not yet reached. Collective identities now contradict the principles that legitimate the extant social order, and the new collective identities find the institutional order to be obstructive, impeding the exercise of trans-societal social agency. There are tensions, mismatches, or in Hegelian terms, “contradictions.” But the existing social order can “muddle through” in the absence of historically and socially contingent events that generate legitimation crises for the extant social order. When these events occur, somewhat unpredictably, then historically there arises a significant probability that the agents constituted by emerging collective identities will employ their social agency to demolish the existing social order, its legitimating principles, and its institutional structures and practices, and replace them, transform them, reconstruct and reconstitute the institutional social order and its practices. Here, in

dialectical terms, is our *synthesis*. New norms, rules and principles of domestic and inter-societal interaction arise, then, through practice. The system is reconstituted. *The macro-socio-historical process is a highly, dialectically constitutive process, even if we can identify some causal mechanisms functioning within the antithetic and synthetic processes at the micro-socio-historical level.*

The matter is well illustrated in the extension of Hegel's dialectical philosophy of history by Marx and Ranke; "Capitalism in Marx or Protestantism in Ranke is an 'idea' in the true Hegelian sense: a thought, a conception of man's inner life held by man himself...a way in which people come to think at a certain time, and in accordance with which they organize their whole life, only to find that the idea changes by a dialectic of its own into a different idea and the manner of life which expressed it will not hold together, but breaks up and transforms itself into an expression of a second idea which replaces the first." (Collingwood 1993, 121)

There can be no more socially salient "conceptions of man's inner life held by man himself" than his self-identifications with respect to other social groupings. When these "break up" and are transformed into "a second idea which replaces the first" the social order must be reconstituted. Dialectical social processes function within this macro-historical context sensitivity on the participating actors. If permitted to transcend their Marxist restriction of the concept, this context sensitivity is an extension of Habermas and Adorno's "concrete totality."

These observations help to illustrate that while it is possible to draw causal inferences among my analytic referents within the dialectical phases of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, *the macro-process is nonetheless constitutive rather than causal*. As Wendt has argued in a different context, "independent variable / dependent variable language that characterized causal inquiry makes no sense, or at least must be interpreted very differently in constitutive inquiries. The effects of constitutive structures might be said to 'vary' with their constituting conditions, but the dependency reflected in this variation is conceptual rather than causal. When constituting conditions vary, then so do their constitutive effects, *by definition*." (Wendt 1998, 106)

The reader will note the similarity between Wendt's notions of the inapplicability of the language of causation in constitutive inquiry, to Collingwood's arguments of the limitations of the language of

causation in historical analysis. Collingwood argues that in the case of historical inquiry, the “inside” of a historical processes (or the ideas that enable them) may only be described as causal “in a special sense.” (Collingwood 1993, 214) Wendt similarly argues that in the case of constitutive inquiry (of which, I argue, inquiry into historical dialectical processes are an example) the language of causal inquiry “makes no sense, or at least must be interpreted differently.” (Wendt 1998, 106) More to the point, Wendt continues that ideas “have constitutive effects insofar as they make social kinds possible...[that] do not exist apart from the shared understandings that constitute their identities as such. But those shared understandings also have causal effects...functioning as independently existing and temporally prior mechanisms motivating and generating...behavior.” (107)

In precisely this sense I have argued that changes in co-constituted individual and collective identities have causal effects on system legitimating principles, institutional forms and subsequent norms, rules and principles of inter-societal interaction. I go on to demonstrate how these legitimation crises and “identity crises” resulted in three system transitions in the context of modern European history, culminating in a “national-sovereign” system whose status and permanence are also in question, according to many analysts. But before moving on the question of the stability of an international system founded upon a system legitimating principle of national self-determination, let me establish further the manner in which Wendt’s analysis imparts a constitutive rather than causal character to this analysis of historical international systems. In Wendt’s lexicon, we are engaged in constitutive rather than causal inquiry, in as much as we are asking “what” questions. I ask questions such as “What among the Dynastic Sovereign System of states preceding Westphalia? What was the nature of social relations in the subsequent Territorial-Sovereign and National-Sovereign Systems? What social changes in domestic society abetted these transitions? What legitimation crises – or in the lexicon of the Frankfurt School, what social “moments” resulted in dialectical reconstitution of these systems? What were the core constellations of social collective identity of these systems? What were their system legitimating principles?” These questions are very similar in form to the question Wendt employs as an example, to illustrate the constitutive nature of explanations offered in answer to the question “What is the EU?” Wendt argues that each of the proposals he offers in answer to this

question “is an attempt to classify and unify a diverse and complex set of phenomenon under a single concept.” (107) The concepts are both descriptive and explanatory “yet the kinds of explanations which these concepts offer are constitutive, not causal. Each tries to make sense of the properties of the EU, and in so doing provide insight into its dispositions. Dispositions are propensities to behave in certain ways under certain conditions.” (111)

The "international systems" (dynastic-sovereign, territorial-sovereign, and national-sovereign) I describe are certainly, similarly, attempt to classify and unify a diverse set of phenomena under a single concept. As are the "Weberian, ideal-type" potentially "post-national-sovereign" systems I'm constructing later on in this paper, with recourse to my dialectical schema, to explore dialectically the possible configuration of a post-national sovereign system. In the latter sense, I certainly try to offer insights into the "dispositions" of actors in each system, a historically and socially contingent set of conditions, with their own, unique, structures of identities and interests. What Wendt here refers to as a "disposition" I explicate as "norms, rules and principles of inter-societal interaction" that develop, in practice, subsequent to the demolition of the old system and its reconstitution.

Thus, while we will make causal arguments about a generic sequence of events that must occur before the system is reconstituted, we must also describe new social institutions and new "dispositions...[that]... are propensities to behave in certain ways" as well as the "conditions" under which these dispositions arise. Moreover, while we will begin the discussion of each new system with the emergence of new social collective identities, we will ultimately delineate the systems by the reconstitution of system legitimating principles, which mediate the new social structure, as well as the variations in the rights and norms of sovereignty resulting from the system transition. These “international systems” are intended as complete descriptions of these successive social structures and their consequences. In this context, Wendt notes that “social structure does not merely describe...rights... but it *explains* them, since without it those rights by definition could not exist...Hegelians call this kind of relationship an ‘internal relation’ by which they mean that the properties of a relationship’s elements are internal to the relation itself, and so do not exist apart from it.” (Ibid.) This is precisely the manner in which system legitimating principles function in my

theoretical schema, and the manner in which the descriptions of the other analytic referents function as well. They are needed to explain the system constituted via ideational dialectic. The norms, rules and principles of inter-societal interaction, as well as the attendant changing “rights” of sovereignty could not exist in the absence of the “social structure” thereby described. The properties of the inter-societal relations that I describe are internal to the co-constituted relations between agents and structures, and don’t exist apart from these relations. The structure of the social institutions described are constitutively related to the rights of sovereignty (which stem from norms and principles) within them.

When joined with the constructivist insights regarding constitutive processes, and the heuristic device of the ideal type so useful in Weberian sociological analysis, we might profitably explore both the predictive and explanatory limits of a fusion of constructivist and dialectical theoretical tools. Provided this dialectical logic is reconstituted to abandon the problematic claim to the render “concrete totality” touted in the Marxist variant, it does seem to render some social and historical context sensitivity that permits us to problematize socially and historically contingent structures of identities and interests (Wendt 1992) rather than impute them exogenously as analysts.

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Figure 1: Systemic Change with Changes in Collective ID (Hall 1999, 29)

	<b>Dynastic-Sovereign</b>	<b>Territorial-Sovereign</b>	<b>National-Sovereign</b>
<b>Individual Identity (coconstituted)</b>	Subject of confessional Prince	Subject of Sovereign State	Citizen or Subject of Nation
<b>Collective Identity (coconstituted)</b>	1. Reformed / Unreformed people of Christendom 2. Subjects of Prince "X"	1. Member of social class (aristocrat, <i>Bürger</i> , or peasant) 2. Subject of Crown and state "Y"	1. Member of national community by shared ancestry/culture/history 2. National citizen of "Z" - land.
<b>Legitimizing Principle</b>	<i>Cuius regio eius religio</i> (Dynastic authority)	<i>Raison d'etat</i> (Territorial authority)	National self-determination (Popular or national authority)
<b>Institutional Forms of Collective Action</b>	Kingdom and Realm	Territorial-state	Nation-state
<b>Norms, Rules, Principles (socio-political)</b>	Allegiance to Prince / creed. Prince gives the domestic law	Allegiance to Sovereign in service of his/her state. Sovereign gives domestic law. Emergence of civil society.	Allegiance to imagined community of shared ancestry, culture or history. Welfare state gives domestic law with counsel of enfranchised citizenry.
<b>(socio-economic)</b>	Division of labor expands to encompass lay bureaucracy. Limited international trade	Division of labor expands to encompass capitalist production relations. Expansion of international trade	Global Division of labor. Global capitalist economy. International economic interdependence
<b>(inter-societal)</b>	Prince <i>de facto</i> emancipated from Papacy. Legal anarchy	State <i>de jure</i> emancipated from all sacral legitimacy. Inception of idea of international law	Nation Self-Determination. Limited international law
<b>(security)</b>	Dynastic-Confessional Conflicts	<i>Raisons d'etat = casus belli</i> Territory / Resources/ Status Limited wars of Acquisition	Secessionist/Irridentist Conflict Wars of Unification / Liberation Total Wars of National Conquest
<b>Resulting System</b>	<b>Augsburg System</b>	<b>Westphalian System</b>	<b>National-State System</b>