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The Thrust of Wendtian Constructivism

By [Maysam Behravesh](#) on March 9, 2011

The Opening Note

The core of Alexander Wendt's theorization of international politics consists in his intellectual endeavour to develop a theory of the international system as a "social construction," which lies in stark contrast to the positivist and materialist conceptions of IR as theorized particularly by realists and liberalists. In fact, it is an originally "cultural" theory of international politics explained by different "cultures of anarchy" constructed by states themselves, which contests the "ontological atomism" and "epistemological positivism" both neorealism and neoliberalism as traditional theories of IR share in principle.^[1] As a social theory, constructivism challenges materialism by hypothesizing the structures of human association as "primarily cultural rather than material phenomena," and rationalism by arguing for their function as not only behaviour-regulating but also identity- and interest-constructing, though "material forces," it admits, "still matter," and "people," it acknowledges, "are still intentional actors."^[2] For Wendt,

Constructivism is a structural theory of the international system that makes the following core claims: (1) states are the principal units of analysis for international political theory; (2) the key structures in the states system are intersubjective rather than material; and (3) state identities and interests are in important part constructed by these social structures, rather than given exogenously to the system by human nature [as neorealists maintain] or domestic politics [as neoliberals favour].^[3]

In his groundbreaking *Social Theory of International Politics* (1999), he articulates the central tenets of constructivism and, drawing on the philosophical views of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Immanuel Kant, theorizes three cultures of anarchy characterized respectively by "enmity," "rivalry," and "friendship." He calls his "moderate" version of constructivist theory "thin constructivism" as it "concedes important points to materialist and individualist perspectives [of neorealism] and endorses a scientific approach to social inquiry."^[4]

Identities and Interests

For constructivists, the concept of "identity" matters a great deal as it plays a crucial part in interpersonal and international interactions. Wendt treats it as a subjective "property of intentional actors that generates motivational and behavioral dispositions" and which is rooted in their "self-understandings." Identity does not have a simply "subjective or unit-level" quality, as understandings about the Self also depend on the Other's understandings and representations of it, hence the "intersubjective or systemic" quality of identity and its construction by "both internal and external structures."^[5] Contending that identity is not "a unitary phenomenon susceptible to general definition", Wendt stresses the existence of different "kinds" of identities and discusses four of them.

The first is "personal or corporate" identity which is constituted by the "self-organizing and homeostatic structures" that distinguish Self from the Other. As construction of this identity in personal actors involves "a sense of 'I'" or personal Self through the workings of consciousness and memory, its construction in corporate actors like states requires a sense of "we" or "group Self" through the formation of a joint narrative of "ourselves." Having an "auto-genetic" quality, "personal and corporate identities are constitutionally exogenous to Otherness."^[6] The second is "type" identity that is placed within the "site" of personal/corporate identity and refers to a "social category" or, as James Fearon puts it, "label applied to persons who share (or are thought to share) some characteristic or characteristics, in appearance, behavioral traits, attitudes, values, skills (e.g. language), knowledge, opinions, experience, historical commonalities (like region or place of birth), and so on."^[7] For shared characteristics to count as type identities, they must have "social content and meaning" that are provided by defined membership rules of a group or society, though they also incorporate characteristics which are basically "intrinsic" to their holders, hence their simultaneous social and self-organizing qualities. Therefore, these identities are in part dependent for their constitution on the understandings and perceptions of Others. Type identities in the international system correspond to "regime types" or "forms of state," like democratic, theocratic, monarchical, capitalist and communist states.^[8]

The third is role identity that depends upon culture and shared expectations and as such exists "only in relation to Others" and thus cannot be enacted solely by the Self on its own, but is achieved by occupying positions in a "social structure" and observing "behavioral norms" towards Others who possess relevant

“counter-identities.”^[9] Contrary to many foreign policy role theorists who appear to have avoided applying role theories to structural IR theory, Wendt argues for strong connections between the two conceptual categories. And the fourth kind is collective identity that leads to the “identification” of Self with Other through blurring the distinction between them, that is, “Self is ‘categorized’ as Other.” Collective identity formation makes use of role and type identities, but also transcends them by merging Self and Other into a “single identity” whereby actors define “the welfare of the Other as part of that of the Self” and thus behave altruistically.^[10]

While identities tell “who or what actors *are*,” interests designate “what actors *want*” and show their behavioral motivations. “Interests,” argues Wendt, “presuppose identities because an actor cannot know what it wants until it knows who it is, and since identities have varying degrees of cultural content so will interests.” Absent interests, however, identities lack “motivational force” and cannot explain action which results from a combination of “desire” and “belief.”^[11] Interests in the social theory are divided into objective and subjective kinds, with the first referring to those “needs or functional imperatives” whose fulfillment is necessary for the reproduction of all four kinds of identity – corporate, type, role and collective – and the second consisting in those “beliefs that actors actually have about how to meet their identity needs,” which are in fact “the proximate motivation for behaviour,” what rationalists call “preferences” or “tastes.”^[12] Along parallel lines, state behaviour is motivated by a variety of interests rooted in a variety of identities, and as “states share essential properties in virtue of their corporate identity as states,” one can talk of “universal ‘national interests’”. Explaining the concept of “national interest” in terms of objective interests, namely, as fulfillment of “the reproduction requirements or the security of state-society complexes,” Wendt argues that states’ subjective interests or preferences are defined in part on the basis of their “certain security needs” or objective interests and that “in the long run a persistent failure to bring subjective interests into line with objective ones will lead to an actor’s demise.”^[13]

He draws on Alexander George and Robert Keohane^[14] to explicate three categories of national interest that they describe as “life, liberty and property,” to which he adds a fourth category, “collective self-esteem.” The forms these interests may take differ from state to state in accordance with their type, role and collective identities, but their “underlying needs are common to all” whose fulfillment is necessary “if states are to reproduce themselves” as corporate entities.^[15] The first national interest is *physical survival* that refers to the life-continuance of a “state-society complex” as made of individuals. Though today survival is increasingly identified with the preservation of possessed territorial property, its meaning differs historically, and a given state may decide to allow the surrender or secession of a part of this property to protect its national interest. *Autonomy*, the second national interest, consists in “the ability of a state-society complex to exercise control over its allocation of resources and choice of government,” which follows from state sovereignty and along with physical survival is necessary for the reproduction of corporate state identity. Without this “liberty” to exercise control, states, but also all other organizations, will not be able to address their internal needs and external exigencies. The third national interest Wendt draws attention to is *economic well-being* that is achieved by the appropriate and effective “maintenance of the mode of production in a society and, by extension, the state’s resource base.”^[16]

Unlike many International Relations scholars who assume economic growth as an essential interest of states in general, Wendt contends that this depends on production modes within states and, more broadly, state *forms*, like capitalist, and therefore is a function of states’ “historically contingent” type identities rather than their corporate identities. *Collective self-esteem* is the fourth national interest he introduces, namely “a group’s need to feel good about itself, for respect or status”, that largely depends upon the “collective self-images” as positive or negative, which are in turn created partly on the basis of relationships with “significant Others” as “it is by taking the perspective of the Other that the Self sees itself.” While positive self-images emanate from “mutual respect and cooperation” between actors and to a great extent presuppose “recognition of sovereignty” by other states, negative self-images result from perceived disrespect or contempt by Others and might prompt states to make compensations by “self-assertion and/or devaluation and aggression toward the Other.”^[17]

Anarchy as Made by States

The critical questions Wendt raises in his path-breaking 1992 article, “Anarchy is what states make of it: The social construction of power politics,” revolve around the nature of anarchy and the extent to which actions and behaviours of states result from an interplay between the international “structure” of power and the “process” of state-to-state interaction: “Does the absence of centralized political authority force states to play competitive power politics? Can international conditions overcome this logic and under what conditions? What in anarchy is given and immutable and what is amenable to change?” The general neorealist and neoliberal answer to these questions is that “anarchies are necessarily ‘self-help’ systems” in which states have to struggle for their security and survival due to the absence of a security-providing central orderer as well as a lack of collective security guarantees; a condition which gives rise to the “inherently competitive

dynamic of security dilemma and collective action problem.” In answering so, therefore, Wendt contends, neorealist and neoliberal scholars of international relations ignore “questions of identity- and interest-formation.”[\[18\]](#)

He acknowledges, however, the neoliberalist argument of such theorists as Joseph Nye, Robert Jervis and Robert Keohane – whom he calls “strong” liberals in contrast to predominantly realism- and rationalism-oriented liberals whom he dubs “weak liberals” – that identities and interests of state actors can be transformed through the “process” of learning/cognition and interactions and under the effective influence of institutions and regimes in world politics, but transcends it to develop a constructivist theory of international politics whereby identities and interests, being endogenous to process rather than exogenous to it, are socially constructed by “knowledgeable practices.” Thus his theorization moves away from the (micro)economic theorizing which in tune with scientific rationalism dominates the neorealist systemic theory of international relations, and instead embodies a “sociological social psychological’ form of systemic theory” where identities and interests are seen as “dependent variables,” that is, amenable to transformation.[\[19\]](#) He challenges the neorealist claim that self-help is logically and necessarily caused by the anarchic structure of international system as exogenous to or regardless of process, and instead contends that,

[S]elf-help and power politics do not follow either logically or causally from anarchy and that if today we find ourselves in a self-help world, this is due to process, not structure. There is no “logic” of anarchy apart from the practices that create and instantiate one structure of identities and interests rather than another; structure has no existence or causal powers apart from process. Self-help and power politics are institutions, not essential features of anarchy. Anarchy is what states make of it.[\[20\]](#)

In contrast to neorealists, and in particular Kenneth Waltz, for whom anarchy is a material phenomenon from which state interests stem in the form of material capabilities and security concerns, for constructivists and Wendt in particular, the structure of anarchy consists of ideational or cultural elements that in turn render the “logic of anarchy” susceptible to variation. Making great theoretical strides in the development of constructivism, he propounds a new theory of anarchy in *Social Theory of International Politics* by initiating a seminal argument on different “non-Realist’ cultures of anarchy” in international politics on the basis of Hobbesian, Lockean and Kantian philosophical views of human nature and social association. These cultures derive from different types of role structures and subject positions – enemy, rival and friend – in terms of which states represent “Self and Other,” and have “different rules of engagement, interaction logics and systemic tendencies.”[\[21\]](#) They might be found, according to Wendt, in “regional sub-systems of the international system – Buzan’s ‘security complexes’[\[22\]](#) – or in the system as a whole”. The subject position at the core of Hobbesian culture of anarchy is “enemy,” at the core of Lockean “rival” and Kantian “friend,” each of which involves a “distinct posture or orientation of Self toward the other with respect to the use of violence,” that is, enemies are characterized by threatening each other with violent actions in an unlimited manner, the posturing of rivals is one of competition which includes the use of violence for maximization of interests, however in a limited and calculated manner, and the orientation of friends is based on alliance that excludes violence to settle disputes and encourages collective action against security threats.[\[23\]](#)

Anarchies, even the most conflictual of them, are often constituted by shared ideas or understandings, or by “shared knowledge.” One of Wendt’s central theses in his theorization of constructivism is that “‘culture’ just lurks behind ‘interest’,” that the meaning of the distribution of power at the systemic international level is determined by cultural formations and constituted by “shared ideas” which make up norms and institutions. Such a meaning-constitution is achieved through the shared knowledge by “constituting states’ perceptions of that distribution or by constituting their identities and interests.”[\[24\]](#) Put more simply, the meaning of anarchy at the international level or power and interests distribution among states depend in important part upon the perceptions they hold of one another or the shared ideas that constitute their identities and interests in the eye of others. The meaning and effects of power and interests depend upon the actors’ ideas. US military buildup in the Middle East or Persian Gulf conveys different meanings to Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Iran. In the words of Wendt, “[f]ive hundred British nuclear weapons are less threatening to the US than five North Korean ones because of the shared understandings that underpin them. What gives meaning to the forces of destruction are the ‘relations of destruction’ in which they are embedded: the shared ideas, whether cooperative or conflictual, that structure violence between states.”[\[25\]](#)

The centrality of shared knowledge among states in the constructivist theory to how relations of power are organized and understood in the international system arises from its two fundamental assumptions: “(1) that the structures of human association are determined primarily by shared ideas rather than material forces, and (2) that the identities and interests of purposive actors are constructed by these shared ideas rather than given by nature.”[\[26\]](#) So to speak, intersubjective knowledge “that constitutes competitive identities and interests” is not given exogenously, but is “constructed every day by processes of ‘social will formation’.”[\[27\]](#) It should be added here that for moderate constructivists, “shared ideas”, beliefs and the practices they prompt actors to conduct have an “objective reality” in the form of “external social facts” which

are, nonetheless, “external to actors collectively.” “Social structures,” therefore, argues Wendt, “are no less real than material ones.”^[28] Ideational nature of socially constructed structures in the international environment does not mean that their transformation is easy in a given context, but that for the social change to be realized problems of “institutionalization, power asymmetries and collective action” must be sorted out, which might prove “more difficult,” as Wendt claims, in social structures than material ones.^[29]

a. The Hobbesian Culture of Anarchy and Enmity Construction

In the Hobbesian culture of anarchy, which neorealists often generalize as the “permissive cause of war,” inter-state relations are marked by “enmity” more than anything else, that is based upon representation of the “Other” as an actor who, according to Wendt, “(1) does not recognize the right of the Self to exist as an autonomous being, and therefore (2) will not willingly limit its violence toward the Self.”^[30] An “enemy,” whose “intentions are unlimited in nature” is distinguished from a “rival” whose “intentions are limited”, that is to say, the enemy “does not recognize the right of the Self to exist as a free subject at all, and therefore seeks to ‘revise’” its life or power, whereas a “rival” is supposed to “recognize the Self’s right to life and liberty, and therefore seeks to revise only its behaviour or property.” Wendt calls the former posturing or orientation “deep revisionism” and the latter “shallow revisionism.” He also points to the real or imagined status of the enemies and adds that “[s]ome enemies are ‘real,’ in that the Other really does existentially threaten the Self, as the Nazis did the Jews, and others are ‘chimeras,’ as the Jews were to the Nazis.”^[31] What matters enormously, however, is that such a difference in status and nature does not affect the “reality” of Hobbesian cultures, and actors’ actions depend upon their perceptions of their enemies, either they really exist or are imaginary.

Wendt maintains that at the systemic level of analysis, anarchy takes shape and operates differently. Macro-level collective representations, in which micro-level role identities are embedded, follow a specific logic of their own that “cannot be reduced to actors’ perceptions or behaviour.” He is well worth quoting here,

As more and more members of a system represent each other as enemies, eventually a “tipping point” is reached at which these representations take over the logic of the system. At this point actors start to think of enmity as a property of the system rather than just of individual actors, and so feel compelled to represent all Others as enemies simply because they are parts of the system. In this way the particular Other becomes Mead’s “generalized Other,”^[32] a structure of collective beliefs and expectations that persists through time even as individual actors come and go, and into the logic of which new actors are socialized. (The concepts of “discourse” and “hegemony” I take it have a similar, macro-level orientation.) It is in terms of positions within this structure that actors make attributions about Self and Other, rather than in terms of their actual qualities.^[33]

It should also be added that the frequency with which an action or behaviour of the Other’s happens or is perceived to happen plays a key part in forming collective representations of it or its role. “Collective representations,” argues Wendt, “are ‘frequency-dependent’ in that they depend for their existence on a sufficient number of representations and/or behaviors at the micro-level ...”^[34] When the Self’s knowledge of the Other is private and domestically constituted, it could be claimed that actors are situated in a kind of Hobbesian anarchy that lacks a shared culture. Such a situation tends to prompt a Hobbesian First Encounter, in which a state actor is likely to jump to the worst-case conclusion about another “previously unknown state” at first impression and therefore try to kill, conquer or enslave it. These situations of private knowledge, according to Wendt, still have a “social” structure, because they involve ideational conceptions of, and calculations about, the Other which yet do not form a culture as they are not shared. Following a First Encounter, however, actors start to learn about each other and form a “shared understanding” of their condition, that is, the Hobbesian culture. Nonetheless, anarchy does not necessarily lead to the emergence of situations marked by Hobbesian encounters, even if it might often be the case. In the words of Wendt, “one can imagine Lockean and Kantian First Encounters as well.”^[35] He analyzes three principal ways whereby Hobbesian cultures may help constitute interests by constructing enemies of one another, which could also be defined in terms, or within the conceptual framework, of “adversary symbiosis.”

The most conventional explanation on this phenomenon concerns the interests of certain groups that are created within the state as a result of interaction with a Hobbesian international environment and that seek to maximize their power by encouraging a military competition with a constructed adversary and lobbying national decision-makers to cope with it. In so doing, they help to constitute a state identity whose existence depends on the existence of an “enemy Other.” Thus the Self encourages the Other to take on the enemy identity so that it itself could in turn maintain its own identity. The enmity between the US and Soviet militaries during the Cold War have been cited as an example of such a form of interests constitution through adversary symbiosis.^[36] According to the second debate, which concerns “in-group solidarity,” enemy is constructed to enable states to fulfil their national interests, particularly those of security and self-esteem. Wendt refers to David Campbell^[37] and Jonathan Mercer^[38] to elucidate this type of enemy construction as

an act of interest constitution within a Hobbesian structure. Campbell contends in a postmodernist mode that the US state uses a “discourse of danger” to justify its existence, in the sense that it invents or overstates threats to its “body politic” to construct an “us” and distinguish it from a “them”.

Such a hypothesis bears analytical resemblance in some respects to the “diversionary theory of war” according to which “weak governments divert internal dissent by engaging in external aggression.”^[39] Following a similar argumentation, Mercer is concerned with the states’ needs for self-esteem, and employing social identity theory, argues that members of groups within states compare themselves favourably to other states to boost their self-esteem, which in turn inclines states to define their interests egoistically. This represents an “in-group bias” that provides a “cognitive resource” for aggressive or hostile behaviour. “If a shared understanding exists that,” explains Wendt, “this is how states are going to constitute each other, in turn, then states may find that enmity has value in itself, since by mobilizing in-group/out-group dynamics it can significantly bolster group self-esteem.”^[40] Accordingly, in the light of securing national interest in collective self-esteem, such a desire in the Hobbesian cultures of anarchy tends to be translated into “needs for “glory” and “power” at others’ expense.”^[41] “Projective identification” is the third mechanism of interest constitution Wendt identifies in Hobbesian cultures and teases out by drawing on psychoanalytic theory. It constructs the Other as enemy and emphasizes its role as a “site for displacing unwanted feelings about the Self.” According to the projective identity thesis,

[[I]ndividuals who, because of personal pathologies, cannot control potentially destructive unconscious fantasies, like feelings of rage, aggression, or self-hatred, will sometimes attribute or “project” them onto an Other, and then through their behaviour pressure that Other to “identify” with or “act out” those feelings so that the Self can then control or destroy them by controlling or destroying the Other.^[42]

Apart from the self-esteem enhancement function this mechanism has, which causes it to make favourable comparisons with the Other, it moves a step further and tries to destroy it. This process requires the “splitting” of the Self into “good” and “bad” elements of which the latter is projected on to the Other. In this cultural construction of enmity, the Self needs the Other to “collude” with in order to justify its rejection and destruction of unwanted elements. In fact, the Self seeks or even drives the Other to be as it desires, bad or evil. Then if the Other does not cooperate with the Self to fulfil this desire, the Self will be left with “chimerical enemy images” rather than a “shared culture,” but if the Other in return projects its own bad attributes onto the Self and thus allows it to direct its desire for destruction towards the Other, then “each will play the role the other needs, and their shared (if tacit or unconscious) knowledge to this effect will make their revisionist desires meaningful.”^[43]

b. The Lockean Culture of Anarchy and Predominance of Rivalry

In contrast to neorealists who refer to the predominance of Hobbesian logic in the international history and focus on continuities rather than change, in the sense that “wars still happen” and “power still matters,” Wendt recognizes a “qualitative structural change” in international politics generated in the past few centuries principally by the establishment of Westphalian states system, which means “[t]he kill or be killed logic of the Hobbesian state of nature has been replaced by the live and let live logic of the Lockean anarchical society.”^[44] The role structure of this culture is rivalry rather than enmity as its subject position is “rival” rather than “enemy,” which are constituted similarly by representations about Self and Other but differ in their type since Lockean representations are “less threatening,” namely, “unlike enemies, rivals expect each other to act as if they recognize their sovereignty, their “life and liberty” as a *right*, and therefore not to try to conquer or dominate them.”^[45] When sovereignty of the Other is recognized by the Self and the other way around, it develops in principle from merely being “a property of individual states” into “an *institution* shared by many states” that is based upon the “shared expectation” that they will not seek to destroy each other’s life and liberty. In the words of Wendt, “[m]odern inter-state rivalry ... is constrained by the structure of sovereign rights recognized by the international law, and to that extent is based on the rule of law.” This does not mean, however, that the use of force and violence has no place in this culture, but that it is expected to be employed at times for dispute settlement, yet “within ‘live and let live’ limits.”^[46]

Rivalry as a “collective representation” at the macro-structural level of international system creates an “anarchical society” in which, according to Wendt, four tendencies can be observed. The first tendency consists in the simultaneous acceptance of war as a normal and legitimate means to advance state interests and constriction of it as an instrument to kill “*states*,” that is to say, the Lockean culture of anarchy is not dominated by what John G. Ruggie calls “constitutive” wars, in which the very existence of state units is at stake, but by “configurative” wars that are staged over “territory and strategic advantage” while the sovereign existence of the rival is conceded though violated by the very use of violence.^[47] The second tendency which follows from the first one – limited warfare – is permission of a “relatively stable membership” or reduction of state death rate in the international system. The fact that this tendency or membership only applies to those states whose sovereignty is recognized by the system and thus places the fate of

“unrecognized states next to that of the recognized ones,” shows a merit of the Westphalian norms by virtue of which weak “micro” or even “failed” states manage, in stark contrast to the Pre-Westphalian era, to survive “because the international society recognizes their juridical sovereignty,” an indicator of “the restraint of the strong” in the modern era.[\[48\]](#)

The third tendency is the effort for power balancing which, argues Wendt, is not “an effect of anarchy as such” as Kenneth Waltz sees, but that of “the mutual recognition of sovereignty,” that is, if states think that their sovereignty is recognized by others and therefore their survival is not at stake, then “the Hobbesian tendency” towards power concentration and maximization will be “arrested,” and thus “balancing can paradoxically become a relative stable source of order” because it is “*not* essential” for survival.[\[49\]](#) The fourth tendency is that in the Lockean system of anarchy, “neutrality or non-alignment becomes a recognized status” as a result of states’ potential for resolution of their differences and the consequent elimination of the threat of revisionism. Thus, in spite of the states’ propensity for “violence and security dilemmas,”[\[50\]](#) the assumption that conflicts can be resolved without posing a serious threat to their survival and autonomy causes “mutual indifference” to become “a stable outcome in a live and let live system.” These explanations are enough to indicate the degree of importance constructivism attaches to the institution of “sovereignty” which, in the words of Wendt, is “the basis of the contemporary international system.”[\[51\]](#)

An important virtue of sovereignty as an established institution in a Lockean culture of anarchy is that it helps states to achieve their national interest in collective self-esteem in a much less threatening and more virtuous way than in a Hobbesian culture in that it helps pacify them not only by minimizing, if not eliminating, the physical threat to their survival, but also by reassuring them against the “*psychic* threat of not having standing.”[\[52\]](#) This in part concerns an “individualizing” effect of the Lockean culture that defines the “criteria for membership” in the international system and thus determines “what kinds of ‘individuals’ have standing and are therefore part of the distribution of interests.” It goes without saying that in the Westphalian system of international politics only states, namely those individual actors who enjoy empirical sovereignty and whose juridical sovereignty have been internationally recognized, have such a standing. So it might be safe to argue, as Wendt and other constructivists do, that the Lockean culture of anarchy involves a “structure of closure,” embodied by sovereignty, which exerts structural power, excluding certain kinds of “players” from the “game” of international politics.[\[53\]](#)

Determining what kinds of *type* identities deserve recognition as individuals is another way in which the Lockean culture constitutes states. This means that to acquire membership of the Westphalian system, actors must not only have the corporate identity of a state, but ought also to conform to type identity criteria for legitimacy as defined by the system. These criteria historically relate to the ways in which states’ domestic “political authority” are achieved and organized, and have come in the contemporary era to be institutionalized as norms like “being a ‘nation-’state, having the institutions of a ‘modern’ state, refraining from genocide, and, increasingly,” according to Wendt, “being a ‘capitalist’ and ‘democratic’ state.”[\[54\]](#) The third constitutive effect of the Lockean culture on states concerns their “collective or social identities,” that is, in spite of their self-interest tendency and individualization within the group which the culture defines, internalization of such a culture inclines states to “feel a sense of loyalty and obligation” to the group so culturally defined. The significance of this collective/social identity construction lies in the fact that it helps mobilize “collective action” against threatening outsiders: “when the group is threatened, its members will see themselves as a ‘we’ that needs to act collectively, as a team, in its defense,” Wendt argues.[\[55\]](#)

The Lockean culture of anarchy’s final effect on states is its constitution of them as “‘possessive’ individuals,” which is seen in the Wendtian constructivism as an effect on their “role identities” and a “key basis” for inter-state rivalry. As a distinguishing characteristic of the *liberal* view of the individual, “possessive individualism” is manifested in the individual’s conception of herself/himself as the sole “proprietor” of her/his person, merits and potentialities, for which, so to speak, s/he owes nothing to society. “The individual,” in the words of Crawford MacPherson, “was seen neither as a moral whole, nor as a part of a larger social whole, but as an owner of himself.”[\[56\]](#) Ruggie, as referred to by Wendt, recognizes a similar impact exerted by the Westphalian culture on states. The latter’s explanation is illuminating:

Westphalian states are possessive individuals who do not appreciate the ways in which they depend on each other for their identity, being instead “jealous” of their sovereignty and eager to make their own way in the world. An important reason for this individualistic attitude may be the criterion for membership in the international society itself, which encourages states to treat juridical sovereignty as an entitlement due them as a result of purely their own efforts to establish empirical sovereignty first.[\[57\]](#)

This “collective amnesia” about their identity and sovereignty causes states to constitute “self-interest” as a right of theirs that should be recognized and respected by others; a practice which results in “self-help” at the systemic level. “Self-interest and self-help,” concludes Wendt, “are not intrinsic attributes of states and

anarchy,” as neorealists and neoliberals claim, but “effects of a particular conception of the individual.”^[58]

c. The Kantian Culture of Anarchy and Centrality of Friendship

Finally, Wendt identifies a third culture of anarchy in the international politics and calls it “Kantian,” in contrast to Hobbesian and Lockean, following Immanuel Kant’s famous work, *Perpetual Peace*. The role structure a Kantian culture is based upon is “friendship” and its subject position “friend.” Within this role structure, friends are expected to follow two basic rules, first “the rule of non-violence” that means the resolution of disputes without recourse to war or even threat of war, and the other that of “mutual aid,” namely taking collective action as a “team” against an outsider who threatens the security of a team member.^[59] Both rules are “independent and equally necessary” and give rise to friendship when they are observed by states; however, friends might show indifference to one another’s fate by arranging to “live in peace but go their separate ways,” and use force within the framework of friendship. Within these limits, they might have considerable conflict with each other over a variety of issues, but when it comes to national security, the differences are suspended and defence of a fellow friend is prioritized. Unlike alliance which is “a temporary, mutually expedient arrangement within rivalry, or perhaps enmity,” friendship is “temporally open-ended” as the relationship between friends is expected to continue in spite of occasional fallouts.^[60] A result of the Kantian culture of anarchy is the formation of “collective security” and “pluralistic security communities” within which members are assured that disputes will not be settled by physical fighting or threatening, which is not caused by “a Leviathan” or a central authority enforcing peace upon members, but comes, according to Wendt, from “shared knowledge of each other’s peaceful intentions or behaviour” that in general constitutes the community as such.^[61]

The norm of mutual aid or “all for one, one for all” on which collective security systems are based is a matter of “generalized’ reciprocity” in which reciprocal help is not denied “even when there is no direct or immediate return,” in contrast to “specific reciprocity” where each side is expected to return the other’s favour.^[62] “When such a norm is functioning properly”, explains Wendt, “the dominant behavioral tendency will be one of multilateralism or other-help with respect to national security.”^[63] In the contemporary era, the special relationship between the UK and US as well as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) may be cited as working examples of adherence to a Kantian culture of anarchy. The point is that members of these “regional sub-systems” or “security complexes” might be collaborating, not because they perceive outsiders as a threat to their individual security, but “because they believe in a team approach to security with the members of their bloc.”^[64]

The Closing Note

Despite being a state-centrist scholar of international politics, Wendt criticizes neorealists and neoliberals for reifying the structure of states system and taking for granted its ontological and ideational properties, which precludes us from considering and assessing the potentials for structural and institutional change in international politics. He contends that states are “intentional and corporate actors whose identities and interests are in important part determined by domestic politics rather than the international system,” and as states change so does the international structure. This does not contradict the argument for the structural social construction of states and their identities as well as interests, but that “this is a different level of construction; relative to the international system, states are self-organizing facts. This means that if we are interested in how the states *system* works, instead of how its elements are constructed, we will have to take the existence of states as given, just as sociologists have to take the existence of people as given to study how society works.”^[65] This is perhaps the major reason why Wendtian constructivism is widely viewed as being a quintessentially systemic theory. There lies, however, a fundamental critique of conventional thinking in the contention, namely, as Wendt puts it, “systemic theory cannot problematize the state all the way down” since this would involve a change of subject “from a theory of the states system to a theory of the state,” which neorealists already treat as a “fixed” phenomenon having essential features inherent to it such as egoism, sovereignty, rationality and power pursuit.^[66] According to him, “[b]y denying or bracketing states’ collective authorship of their identities and interests ... the realist-rationalist alliance denies or brackets the fact that competitive power politics help create the very ‘problem of order’ – that realism is a self-fulfilling prophecy.”^[67]

What Wendtian constructivism strives to illuminate is that the meanings of material forces and intentionalities of state actors “depend largely on the shared ideas in which they are embedded, and as such culture is a condition of possibility for power and interest explanations.”^[68] It stresses the significance of normative structures that exert as great impact on the conduct of international relations^[69] as material structures, upholds the role of identity as a factor that shapes states’ interests and behaviours and attaches a high degree of importance to the dynamic interplay between agents and structures.

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Notes

- [1]. Martin Griffiths, *Fifty Key Thinkers in International Relations* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 200.
- [2]. Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 193.
- [3]. Alexander Wendt, "Collective Identity Formation and the International State," *American Political Science Review* 88 (1994): 385; Also for a critical explanation of Neoliberals' emphasis on domestic politics in theorizing state interests, see Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 35.
- [4]. *Ibid.*, 1.
- [5]. *Ibid.*, 224.
- [6]. *Ibid.*, p 224-25; Wendt refers to the following works for further analysis, John Hewitt, *Dilemmas of the American Self* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989); John Greenwood, "A Sense of Identity: Prolegomena to a Social Theory of Personal Identity," *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 24 (1991): 25-46; Michael Schwalbe, "The Autogenesis of the Self," *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 21 (1991): 269-295.
- [7]. Cited in Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 225.
- [8]. *Ibid.*, 226.
- [9]. *Ibid.*, 227.
- [10]. *Ibid.*, 229; For further study of the collective or social identity, see Jonathan Mercer, "Anarchy and Identity," *International Organization* 49 (1995): 229-252.
- [11]. Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 231.
- [12]. *Ibid.*, 231-32.
- [13]. *Ibid.*, 234.
- [14]. Alexander George and Robert Keohane, "The Concept of National Interests: Uses and Limitations," in *Presidential Decisionmaking in Foreign Policy*, ed. Alexander George (Boulder: Westview, 1980), 217-38.
- [15]. Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 235.
- [16]. *Ibid.*, 236.
- [17]. *Ibid.*, 336-37.
- [18]. Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics," *International Organization* 46, no 2 (1992): 391-92.
- [19]. *Ibid.*, 94.
- [20]. *Ibid.*, 394-95.
- [21]. Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 43.
- [22]. For the original argument on "security complexes", see Barry Buzan, *People, States, and Fear*, 2nd ed.

(Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1991).

[23]. Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 257-58.

[24]. *Ibid.*, 104.

[25]. *Ibid.*, 255; Alexander Wendt, "Constructing International Politics," in *Theories of War and Peace*, ed. Michael E. Brown and others (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1998), 418; Also see Jeffrey T. Checkel, "Constructivism and Foreign Policy," in *Foreign Policy: Theories. Actors. Cases*, ed. Steve Smith, Amelia Hadfield and Tim Dunne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 72.

[26]. Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 1.

[27]. Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics," *International Organization* 46, no. 2 (1992): 410.

[28]. Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 24.

[29]. *Ibid.*

[30]. *Ibid.*, 260.

[31]. *Ibid.*, 261.

[32]. George H. Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934), 154-56.

[33]. *Ibid.*, 264.

[34]. *Ibid.*

[35]. *Ibid.*, 267-68.

[36]. *Ibid.*, 274-275.

[37]. David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

[38]. Jonathan Mercer, "Anarchy and Identity," *International Organization* 49 (1995): 229-252.

[39]. Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 275; For a detailed study, see Jack Levy, "A Diversionary Theory of War: A Critique," in *Handbook of War Studies*, ed. Manus I. Midlarsky (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988), 259-288; Also for an application of the diversionary theory of conflict to the foreign behaviour of Ahmadinejad government, see John A. Tures, "Rattling the *Hesam*: International Distractions from Internal Problems in Iran," *Asian Politics and Policy* 1, no. 1 (2009): 50-78.

[40]. Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 276.

[41]. *Ibid.*, 237.

[42]. *Ibid.*, 277.

[43]. *Ibid.*

[44]. *Ibid.*, 279; For a systematic study of the anarchical society and intellectual foundations of the English School of IR theory, see Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977).

[45]. Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 279.

[46]. *Ibid.*, 281.

[47]. *Ibid.*, p 283-84; For further details see, John G. Ruggie, *Constructing the World Polity: Essays on*

International Institutionalization (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 172-97, especially pp. 188-89.

[48]. Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 284.

[49]. *Ibid.*, 284-85.

[50]. For a constructivist definition of "security dilemma," see Alexander Wendt, "Constructing International Politics," in *Theories of War and Peace*, ed. Michael E. Brown and others (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1998), 418.

[51]. Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 285.

[52]. *Ibid.*, 237.

[53]. *Ibid.*, 291-92; Also see Stefano Guzzini, "Structural Power: The Limits of Neorealist Analysis," *International Organization* 47 (1993): 443-78; Nicholas Onuf and Frank Klink, "Anarchy, Authority, Rule," *International Studies Quarterly* 33 (1989): 149-74.

[54]. Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 292-93; For a detailed study of the contemporary norms of legitimate type identity, see Samuel Barkin and Bruce Cronin, "The State and the Nation: Changing Norms and the Rules of Sovereignty in International Relations," *International Organization* 48 (1994): p 107-130; Rodney B. Hall, *National Collective Identity: Social Constructs and International Systems* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Connie McNeely, *Constructing the Nation-State* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1995).

[55]. Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 293.

[56]. Crawford B. MacPherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: From Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), 3; Cited in *Ibid.*, 294.

[57]. Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 295.

[58]. *Ibid.*

[59]. *Ibid.*, 298-99.

[60]. *Ibid.*, 299.

[61]. *Ibid.*, 299-300; For an extensive analysis of "security communities" from different perspectives, see Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett, eds. *Security Communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[62]. Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 300; For further analysis, see Michael Taylor, *Community, Anarchy and Liberty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 29; and Robert Keohane, "Reciprocity in International Relations," *International Organization* 40 (1986): 1-27.

[63]. Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 300; For an extensive study, see John G. Ruggie, ed. *Multilateralism Matters* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

[64]. Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 301.

[65]. Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 246.

[66]. *Ibid.*

[67]. Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics," *International Organization* 46, no. 2 (1992): 410.

[68]. Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 193.

[69]. For a concise and adequate explanation of how norms and normative structures exert regulative as well as constitutive impacts upon state behaviour and identity, see Thomas Risse, "Let's Argue: Communicative Action in World Politics," *International Organization* 54, no. 1 (2000): 1-39. Risse explains this in the light of "rule-guided behavior," "normative rationality," and in broad terms, the "logic of appropriateness" as introduced by James March and Johan Olsen. See James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, *Rediscovering Institutions: The Organizational Basis of Politics* (New York: Free Press, 1989); as well as James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, "The Institutional Dynamics of International Political Orders," *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (1998): 943-69. Following Jürgen Habermas's theory of communicative action, Risse also suggests that the "logic of arguing" or "argumentative rationality" transcends the rational choice-based "logic of consequentialism" and sociological institutionalism-oriented "logic of appropriateness" in international relations (p. 4, Figure 1) and, once employed and adhered to, can change their ideational terms, assumptions and foundations (p. 7).

Tags: [Constructivism](#), [Social Constructivism](#), [Wendt](#)