Adler, E. (1997). "Seizing the middle ground: Constructivism in world politics." <u>European Journal of International Relations</u> 3(3): 319-363.

Adler attempts to take the middle ground by juxtaposing rationalist and relativist perspectives and claiming that constructivist perspectives fall in the middle between them. He goes through the epistemology of constructivism, explaining how its intersubjective position is intermediate between objectivism and complete subjectivism. He suggests how constructivism can offer a theory of change through cognitive evolution, then goes on to define a five-point constructivist research agenda: change in IR as cognitive evolution, epistemic communities and the construction of social facts, emergent political actors, social construction of strategy, and social construction of the democratic peace.

Constructivism: The Middle Ground
Adler contrasts positivist, materialist realism and interpretive, idealist relativist (post-modern, post-positivist, post-structural) perspectives. Neoliberals claim to be somewhere in between by adopting a Weberian "switchmen" perspective on ideas, but really aren't. Adler defines constructivism as (p.322) "the view that *the manner in which the material world shapes and is shaped by human action and interaction depends on dynamic normative and epistemic interpretations of the material world*." All institutions are reified social constructs; i.e. social facts; constructivism deals with the implications of this proposition. Constructivism is a social theory, not a theory of politics. It offers a synthesis between "material, subjective, and intersubjective dimensions of the world." (p.323)

Social Epistemology and International Relations
Materialism and Idealism
A cites Woolgar as describing three ontological/epistemological approaches. They are:
1. Reflective: reality independent of cognition, accurately described. Materialism/Positivism. (Realists/Liberals)
2. Constitutive: reality exists, cannot be known outside language. Idealism/Interpretivism (Posties)
3. Mediative: reality exists independent of accounts, but doesn't determine accounts. ?/? (Constructivists)

Individual vs Social Origins of Human Action: Elster, Durkheim and Giddens
1.Elster advocates methodological, ontological, and epistemological individualism.
2.Durkheim advocates methodological, ontological, and epistemological holism (social facts require social expln.)
3.Giddens advocates pluralism; agents and structures are relevant to explanations of social behavior.

Verstehen *as Epistemology and as Reality*
Verstehen means that action must be understood from within.
1.Rationalists believe that *Verstehen* is an epistemological problem, since observers must judge their observations based on systematic standards.
2.Relativists are condemned to interpret discourses. There is no objective reality.
3.Constructivists believe that *Verstehen* is social reality.

Intersubjectivity
Adler uses Popper's three worlds approach.
1.Material *objects*
2.*Subjective* thoughts by individuals
3.Culture, or *intersubjective* concepts, i.e. social facts, which can't exist without 1 or 2.

Constructivism's Approach to Science
Is pragmatic, rejecting the Cartesian objective/relative divide. Constructivists study what agents themselves consider to be rational; these beliefs are affected by social facts. Reasons are causes. "Norms and rules structure and therefore socially constitute -- 'cause' -- the things people do." (p.329)

Constructivism's Middle Ground between Rationalist and Relativist International Relations Theories
Adler places constructivism in the middle of Alex Wendt's map of IR theory (p.331 Adler, p.32 Wendt's book - note that the final version of Wendt is somewhat, although not essentially, different.) and argues that (based on the above) that constructivism falls into the middle ground between all of these other theories. He divides constructivism into four camps:
1.'Modernist',arguing that traditional methods can be used once a materialist ontology is dumped (Wendt);
2.Scholars that argue about the impact on IR of reasoning, persuasion, rule-guided behavior (Kratochwil);
3.Scholars that emphasize narrative knowing (Ruggie)
4.Scholars that use post-modernist methods like deconstruction and genealogy (Price)

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Constructivist Dynamics: Cognitive Evolution
Neither rationalists or relativists can give an account of evolution. Adler critiques neorealist and neoliberal attempts as insufficient or incomplete. Cognitive evolution is "the process of innovation, domestic and international diffusion, political selection and effective institutionalization that creates the intersubjective understanding on which the interests, practices and behavior of governments are based." (p.339) For ideas to succeed, they must:
1)gain legitimacy by being grounded in nature and reason,
2)provide needed balance,
3)be backed by power, and
4)are continually rationalized and institutionalized,
5)are driven by political leaders' notions of progress,
6)acquire prominence when needed to solve a problem, and
7)emerge from socialization and from political and diplomatic processes, notably persuasion.

A Constructivist Research Agenda

1)Change in International Relations as Cognitive Evolution
As above, it can explain change in IR.

2)Epistemic Communities and the Construction of Social Facts
Episemic communities don't make sense outside constructivism, since social knowledge is blended with technical knowledge. Look at science as a constitutive norm. Most interesting effects are the transformation of identities and interests.

3)The Emergent Nature of Political Actors: Security Communities
Some practices require that states will not settle differences through war; security communities exist to assure this.

4)National Security and the Social Construction of 'the Strategy of Conflict'
Constructivists should focus on the role played by social communication in Schelling's book.

5)The Social Construction of the 'Democratic Peace'
Democratic peace looks normative, and should be explained by collective beliefs, not structures or individual beliefs.