

Andreas Hasenclever, Peter Mayer, and Volker Rittberger, “Knowledge-based Theories: Ideas, Arguments, and Social Identities,” in *Theories of International Regimes* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 136-210.

- I. Proponents of knowledge-based regime theories can be divided into weak and strong cognitivists – both groups share the conviction that rationalists ignore a great deal of significant behavior on the part of states by treating identities and interests as given.
- II. Weak cognitivists complement rationalist theories by examining how changes in knowledge allow interests to change; weak cognitivists are still comfortable with the idea of the state as a rational utility-maximizer provided that the conception of utility is made dependent on knowledge and that the latter is not seen as reducible to material factors.
  - A. Three assumptions of weak cognitivists
    1. Interests are not given but need to be treated analytically as a function of how decision-makers understand the world.
    2. Decision-makers need to reduce uncertainty through access to high-quality information and expert advice
    3. States need some minimum consensus of understanding concerning the issue in question before a system of shared rules can be developed.
  - B. Weak cognitivist explanatory variables
    1. Goldstein and Keohane (see week 5 readings) have identified three causal pathways for ideas: as road maps, focal points, and underlying principles in institutional frameworks.
    2. Learning cooperation – two forms of “learning” have been identified by Ernst Haas (similar ideas have been developed by Nye) that are particularly relevant to regime theory (note: these can lead to either greater or less interstate cooperation through regimes, depending on the circumstances)
      - a. Adaptation – a new understanding of the environment leads to new strategies for achieving unchanged interests
      - b. Learning – a state not only changes its strategies but also changes its basic conception of interests (if a state became involved in an arms control regime because it came to believe that cooperative security approaches were more productive than realpolitik approaches, for example)
    3. Epistemic communities – Peter Haas (again, see week 5) argues that epistemic communities can promote regime formation, and that such groups will be influential if:
      - a. There is a high degree of uncertainty among policymakers
      - b. There is a high degree of consensus among the experts
      - c. The expert advice has a strong institutional base
- III. Strong cognitivists want to supplant rationalist regime theories with theories that emphasize how regimes constitute state identities – states thus do not comply with regimes because of rational calculations of interest but rather because non-compliance would be inconsistent with the state’s conception of itself.

- A. This school argues that states should not be seen as creating regimes to maximize some utility but rather as role-players whose identities depend upon international institutions – states and institutions imply each other. In this way, strong cognitivists are emphasizing institutions that define states as the central actors in international politics. Rationalists could respond that they are concerned with more issue-specific regimes, so the strong cognitivists need to establish a connection between fundamental institutions and issue-specific ones.
- B. Strong cognitivists also argue that rationalists preoccupation with positivism leads them to ignore critical intersubjective issues and shared meanings. For example, to understand the effectiveness of regimes (i.e. the rate of compliance), it is important not just to understand states' material interests but also the normative validity of the regime.

#### IV. Four Strong Cognitivist Approaches:

- A. The power of legitimacy – this approach argues that the question of legitimacy is critical for regimes: regimes that are perceived as illegitimate can only be upheld coercively, while legitimate ones are complied with more voluntarily. Regime legitimacy is in turn a function of determinacy (the clarity of the rules), symbolic validation (rituals that show how deeply a given rule has take root in a given society), adherence (the extent to which the rule is related to broader understandings of how rules are made and applied), and coherence (the extent to which the rule fits logically with a larger network of rules governing interstate interaction).
- B. The power of arguments – theorists such as Ruggie and Kratochwil see the discourses that surround regimes as key. Since interpretation of any regime is often (always?) in flux, the success with which states reach consensus on interpretation and implementation through discussion of the regime is important. These discussions will be successful when a basic set of norms concerning argumentation is accepted and respected by the various parties and when the arguments made are embedded in uncontested background that can serve to legitimize them.
- C. The power of identity – Wendt stresses how the development of a collective sense of identity among actors can promote cooperation and regime formation. While he acknowledges that rationalists have much to say about cooperation among states lacking such a collective identity, he notes that such cooperation can lead to the development of a more collective sense of identity. As the collective sense of identity increases, one should see increasing regime resilience.
- D. The power of history – Robert Cox in particular stresses the role of history in shaping the fundamentally capitalist nature of current international regimes. These regimes reflect the pro-capitalist nature of American hegemony, and constitute a process through which elites in developed capitalist countries can socialize elites from other countries into the capitalist world. National elites and ruling classes thus come to share a common identity and ideology. Cox even condemns regime theory itself as part of the capitalist project and as serving to legitimize an inequitable international status quo.