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FRANCE'S SECURITY POLICY
TOWARDS GERMANY AFTER WWII
FROM A PRAGMATIST PERSPECTIVE

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Analyzing the Shift in France's Security Policy Towards Germany after WWII
from a Pragmatist Perspective*

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Abstract

From 1945 to 1949, France implemented a security policy towards Germany based on annexing border territories, dismantling German industry and impeding the reconstitution of German political institutions. On 9 May 1950, however, French Foreign minister Robert Schuman proposed that both countries create a “high authority” responsible for the production of coal and steel. This rapprochement policy has never since been called into question. In less than six years (1945-1950), the old foe had become a new friend. This paper investigates this spectacular policy change using the tools of “pragmatist” sociology and philosophy. The main idea I borrow from pragmatist philosophy and sociology is that we could reach a more comprehensive understanding of foreign policy-making by putting into question what Dewey calls “dualism” between “idea and action”: in everyday life we do not wait until our “mind” has identified the best solution to our “puzzles” before engaging in action. My point is that French policy makers did not have a clear understanding of the “German problem” either. They tried several policy instruments at the same time, abandoned those which failed, developed further the successful ones, and learned through action.

Keywords

Epistemology of International Relations, Sociology of International Relations, Foreign and security policy, Pragmatism, Franco-German rapprochement.

Introduction

In the immediate aftermath of the war, France implemented a « harsh » security policy towards their former enemy: a policy based on annexing border territories, dismantling the German economy and impeding the reconstitution of German political institutions. On May 9th 1950, however, French Foreign minister R. Schuman (1886-1963) proposed that “*Franco-German production of coal and steel as a whole be placed under a common High Authority, within the framework of an organization open to the participation of the other countries of Europe*”. In spite of some mood swings such as the European Defense Community crisis (1952-1954), this rapprochement policy has never been called into question. This means that in less than six years (1945-1950), France completely revised its policy towards Germany. This paper analyses how this spectacular policy change occurred, how the old foe became a new friend.

To begin with, I should highlight that I am indebted to the authors who have already shed some light on this complex issue. As I show in this paper, two explanations emerge from the current literature. A first group of scholars points out the role of the changing geopolitical context. The French, they argue, implemented a revanchist security policy until they understood that it was more rational, in the context of the Cold War, to reconcile with the former enemy. This realist account (in the sense of the realist theory in International Relations) has been completed by scholars who take a more “constructivist” or “cognitivist” stance. This second group of scholars does not challenge the idea that the changing material environment (the beginning of the Cold War) played a large role. They point out, however, that these material structural dynamics were not a driving force in themselves; these dynamics played a role only insofar as they were interpreted by policy actors. This is why social constructivists and cognitivists pay so much attention to the role of ideas: social actors rely on their identities, beliefs and world views in order to comprehend the world. As we shall see later, French policy actors relied on various symbolic elements (European ideas, new conceptions of national security...) in order to make sense of the changing geopolitical context. These elements illustrate that in the case under investigation here, cognitivist and constructivist approaches refine more than they challenge realist explanations.

My point is that one can reach an even more comprehensive understanding of this puzzle by taking a “pragmatist” approach. Pragmatist philosophy (Dewey 1973; Pierce 1997) or sociology (Boltanski and Thévenot 1991; Latour 2002) is not a school of thought providing a coherent set of ideas one could endorse (or not) as a block. Therefore, I pick out from this body of knowledge only some of the theoretical arguments which I find particularly relevant to the field of International Relations in general and the study of the turn in France’s policy towards Germany (1945-1950) in particular. The main idea I borrow from Pierce, James, Dewey and their followers (mostly Latour, Boltanski and Thévenot) is this: we could reach a more comprehensive understanding of the social world by putting into question what Dewey calls “dualism” between “idea and action” (Dewey 1973; James 1981; Pierce 1997). Social constructivists and cognitivists are right when they claim that social actors rely on “ideas” in order to make sense of the external material world. These “belief systems” and “world views” are, however, often more blurry than we usually assume (Dodier 1993). Meaning is therefore not constructed *prior to* but *through* action.

As Kratochwil writes, this holds especially true in a field like International Relations where uncertainty, incomplete information and pressure to act play a big role: “*Since, as historical beings placed in a specific situation, we do not have the luxury of deferring decisions until we have found the 'truth' we have to act and must do so always under time pressures and in the face of incomplete information*” (Kratochwil 2007: 20). Yet, little has been done in the field of International Relations in order to assess the heuristic value of this line of thought. Most of the time, pragmatism is seen as a philosophical tradition with resonance in the International Relations epistemological debate (Putnam 1995; Owen 2002; Hellmann 2008; Bauer and Brighi 2009). This understanding of the pragmatist paradigm is certainly welcome: pragmatist “anti-foundationalism” – the idea that the value of a theory depends on its ability to describe the world, not on the veracity of its axioms - appears as a potential route to overcome the positivist/constructivist aporetic debate. One should not forget, however, that

pragmatism is also a set of analytical tools and not only a theory of knowledge, it sheds light on the social world.

My general point is not that pragmatism provides an alternative explanation to “realism” or “social constructivism” (as new-institutionalists pretend enlightening the same reality from different points of view (Schneider and Aspinwall 2000)). Nor do I try to set up pragmatism as a “missing link” between both schools of thought. My point is that these three approaches are equally valid while operating at different scales of analysis (respectively the macro, mezzo, and micro). If I had to propose a metaphor, I would say that policy analysts are like astrophysicists who have at their disposal a telescope with different lenses. They would start by using the lens which gives them a general overview of the celestial body they want to describe, and then zoom in on the fragments of reality they find particularly relevant. Most of the time, IR scholars content themselves with the realist or constructivist lens. They are probably right to do so. In the case of the shift in France’s policy towards Germany (1945-1950), however, it seems worth going a step further.

The argument proceeds as follows. I first outline in more detail the empirical puzzle of this paper. I argue that we actually have to account for three questions: the aforementioned spectacular character of the policy change, its timing, and the ambivalences of the whole process. I then show in a second section that partisans of the realist theory in International Relations provide a first general explanation of these three puzzles when they conceive of France’s policy towards Germany as a rational adjustment to dynamics in the material environment. In the next section, I explain that social constructivists and cognitivists convincingly refine this argument by investigating how French foreign policy actors made sense of these material structural dynamics. In the last section, I elaborate on my main point, namely the idea that one can add more color and detail to this picture by taking a pragmatist stance.

France’s Policy Towards Germany (1945-1950): a Threefold Puzzle

After months of hesitation, the Allies decided at the San Francisco conference (April-June 1945) to include France in the winning coalition of the Second World War. France therefore obtained the administration of a small zone in Southwest Germany (and West Berlin) and a place (and formal veto power) on the Allied Control Council, an institution supposed to coordinate the policies of the four occupation powers. This decision had important consequences: France was to decide upon the future of Germany and, consequently, upon the future relations between both countries. I explain in the following paragraphs that France’s security policy towards Germany between 1945 and 1950 seems puzzling for at least three reasons:

1/ The first and main puzzle (which has already been sketched in the introduction to the paper) concerns the general policy change. It appears even more spectacular when recounted into more detail. In many of its aspects, France’s policy towards Germany after 1945 appears similar to the precedent of the First World War. In 1919, France made its demands on war reparations the cornerstone of its policy towards the former enemy. History seems to have been repeated 25 years later. At the Potsdam conference in July/August 1945 France demanded, and obtained, that Germany pay 600 million dollars in war reparations¹. The actual payment of this money proved to be a problem in the context of the immediate aftermath of war: most German cities had been devastated by air raids; one third of industrial capacity was obliterated; the transport network had been almost completely destroyed... The French, however, obliged the Germans to fulfil their commitments and took control of German coal, steel and wood production. When necessary, the French dismantled entire factories in order to bring them to France. Simultaneously, the French government tried to annex border territories or, at least, to take control of some strategic regions. In 1947, for example, Paris transformed the occupied territory of Saarland into a French economic protectorate. Had the British and the Americans given France free rein, the Ruhr area would have experienced the same. These “harsh” initiatives were part of what specialists of the period call a “material security policy”: by dismantling German military, political,

¹ Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtss, Europaabteilung-B24-354.

and economic institutions, France clearly aimed at depriving Germany of the actual possibility of invading France again.

In 1950, however, French Foreign Minister Schuman declared that France was ready to engage in cooperation with Germany through the creation of a “*High Authority, within the framework of an organization open to the participation of the other countries of Europe*”. This declaration found a deep resonance in the minds of the people. The decision to Europeanize the production of strategic resources such as coal and steel was a major symbolic and speech act. The *Mouvement Républicain Populaire* (MRP) and the French Socialist Party (*Section Française de l’Internationale Socialiste*) (SFIO) warmly welcomed Robert Schuman’s proposal². The fact that the Gaullists³ and the communists⁴ strongly rejected the project confirms the diagnosis: they did so because this proposal signified a major change in France’s policy towards Germany, the shift from a harsh stance aimed at material security to a cooperative one. I repeat, this new orientation has barely been put into question since.

Our first puzzle can therefore be stated as follows: what explains such a spectacular policy change? How could the French hold such a harsh stance in the aftermath of the war and, a couple of years later, start a policy of rapprochement which has never been called into question?

2/ The second question concerns timing. A consensus had emerged among the Allies during World War II that the best way to stop Germany attacking its neighbours in the future was to deprive it of the material possibility to do so. Henry Morgenthau’s plan (1944), for example, recommended the dismantling of political institutions and the transformation of the country into an agricultural power. Yet, the emergence of the Cold War rapidly led London and Washington to change their attitude towards Germany. After US Secretary of State J. F. Byrnes’ speech of 6 September 1946, they resolutely engaged in the construction of a new German state tied to the Western bloc.

The French, for their part, seem to have stuck to the aforementioned material security policy as much as they could. It may be excessive to say that France’s stance at the Allied Control Council was as obstructive as the Soviet Union’s. It is clear, however, that Paris did not understand that it should be indebted to the Americans and the British for its late status as a “victorious power”. The French refused to follow the Americans and the British when they merged their occupation zones in 1947 (a prelude to the creation of West Germany). They eventually accepted the creation of a West German state in 1949 only after obtaining several concessions: the Ruhr area would be administrated by an international authority; Saarland would remain a French protectorate; and the new German state would give up any ambitions in terms of international political power. Hence, scholars who work on France’s policy towards Germany have to deal with this second question: why did the French need more time than the Americans and the British before abandoning their material security policy towards Germany?

3/ Our third puzzle concerns the ambivalence of France’s policy towards Germany during the time span under investigation here (1945-1950). As I have already said, Schuman’s declaration of 9 May 1950 appears, at first glance, like a meteorite which came from nowhere. Yet, this picture of an absolute revengeful policy followed by a brutal change is only roughly true. Simultaneously to the material policy described above, the French occupation government based at Baden-Baden took some cooperative initiatives in particular policy areas. In the cultural and educational domain for instance, the French reformed the German school system in a democratic fashion (Mombert 1995); they reconstructed the university of Mainz; they organized several cultural exhibitions of a high standard such as the travelling exhibition “Goethe et la France” (HGBRD 1998)... Contrary to what one might

² CIMONT, Marcel, Le combinat franco-allemand, in : *Combat*. 10.05.1950, Nr. 1818; 9e année ; M. T., Une initiative révolutionnaire, in *Le Monde*. 11.05.1950, Nr. 1 645 ; ARON, Raymond, L’initiative française, in *Le Figaro*. 11.05.1950.

³ PALEWSKI, Gaston, "Une carte aventureuse à la légère. La fusion économique franco-allemande", in : *Le Rassemblement*. 20.05.1950.

⁴ GUILLON, Jean, "La France vendue pour la guerre", in : *L’Humanité*. 10.05.1950, Nr. 1 766; 47e année.

think, these initiatives were not epiphenomenal. The *Direction de l'Éducation Publique* (DEP) – the administration in charge of this cultural policy - was by far the biggest administrative department of the four occupation systems.

One aspect of this cultural policy in particular contrasts with the harsh policy described above: from 1946 on, the “Service Jeunesse et Sport” of the DEP organized and subsidized meetings which gave the opportunity to thousands⁵ of French and German young people to get to know each other. As noted by Monique Mombert, this policy of Franco-German youth exchanges was carefully prepared and implemented. An agenda had been set up by chief of the DEP R. Schmittlein (1904-1974): “*The Allied mission should mainly consist in training young educators who, once immunized against nationalist danger, could become the apostles of a civilization full of respect and love for humankind*”⁶ (Schmittlein 1949). As a matter of fact, the DEP succeeded in flushing out the future elites of both countries. Among the people who participated in these first cultural contacts one finds:

- politicians like Franz-Joseph Strauss (German defense minister from 1956 to 1963), Pierre Mauroy and Michel Rocard (both former French Prime minister),
- journalists of mainstream newspapers: André Fontaine and Alain Clément (*Le Monde*), Dieter Schröder (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*), Georg Schröder (*Die Welt*),
- managers of important manufactures like Fritz Berg (*Bundesverband der deutschen Industrie*) or Ulrich Doertenbach (*chambre de commerce franco-allemande*),
- intellectuals like Paul Ricœur, Roland Barthes, René Rémond, Raymond Aron, Walter Dirks, Eugen Kogon...

These empirical elements are sufficient to outline that scholars working on France’s policy towards Germany (1945-1950) face a threefold puzzle. First, they have to account for the intensity of the policy change: Schuman’s declaration of 9 May 1950 was a spectacular break with the material security policy implemented in the aftermath of the war. Second, they need to explain the timing: whereas the Americans and the British softened their policy towards Germany from 1946/1947 on, the French maintained their claims for war reparations and territories until 1950. Third, specialists of the period have to account for a peculiarity: during the years 1945-1949, while they were still trying to cut Germany into pieces, the French also took some initiatives in the cultural domain which seem to have paved the way for the future rapprochement. As I show in the next section, the realist theory of International Relations provides a first set of answers to these three questions.

A Rational Adjustment to Dynamics in the Material Environment

Realists hypothesize that states are unitary actors, that they are driven by a narrow (material) conception of their interest, and that they try to adapt rationally to the dynamics of their environment. These few hypotheses seem sufficient to shed some light on our three puzzles:

1/ Concerning the first part of our research question, namely the intensity of the policy change, realist thinkers and historians who follow this line of thought put forward that France’s material interests changed during the time span under investigation, and that the French rationally adjusted to these changes in their material environment. This interpretation relies on two more precise arguments.

The first deals with what IR scholars call “security interests”. With Russian troops stationed along the Oder-Neisse border, (West) Germany was no longer the problem. The threat had objectively moved to the East. The French may have taken time, but they eventually adjusted to this change in their material environment. This assertion can easily be connected to some of the empirical evidence. The idea that the threat had moved east progressively gained credibility in the French political debates of the late 1940s. French intellectual Emmanuel Mounier wrote for instance in 1948: “*There is no*

⁵ In spite of the material situation of the time, the DEP managed to bring together thousands of young people – more than 1000 in 1946, 1200 in 1947, 2500 in 1948, 5000 in 1949 and 7000 in 1950. Archives du MAE, Bureau des Archives de l’occupation française en Allemagne et Autriche, Colmar, Affaires culturelles, dossier n°7.

⁶ « *La mission des Alliés devait consister essentiellement à former des jeunes éducateurs qui, immunisés contre le danger nationaliste, seraient à leur tour les apôtres d’une civilisation amoureuse et respectueuse de l’homme* ».

longer a Franco-German problem. It is hard for the sick to give up their old illnesses and for peoples to change their anxieties. But it is a fact. Galileo has arrived. The centre of the world is now elsewhere. (...) Germany is nothing more than a secondary unknown in the USSR-USA equation, and France a mere coefficient."⁷ As showed by Hörber, this interpretation had become a common place in the French debate on the "German problem" when France resolutely engaged in cooperation with West Germany (Hörber 2006).

The second argument deals with so called "power" interests. Although the process had started before, the Second World War deeply affected France's economic and military capabilities. Realists therefore argue that it was France's objective interest, in the anarchic world of international politics, to cooperate with other European nations. The French first thought that they could build a special relationship with the UK and leave Germany out of the European integration process. When it emerged, however, that Britain would not follow its project of creating a (French) "Europe puissance", France engaged in rapprochement with its former "hereditary enemy". This explanation also appears consistent with empirical observations. As I stated above, Britain and the US asked France several times to soften its policy towards Germany. The French seem to have ignored these demands for as long as they could. After a while it nevertheless became clear that this independent material security policy came at a price the country could no longer afford. Although the deal was never made explicit, the Marshall plan helped persuade the French - whose economy seemed unable to recover from the war - that they would be better off moderating their German policy (Bossuat 2001). These few empirical elements prove that the realist theory of International Relations provides a convincing explanation of the shift in France's policy towards Germany.

2/ This theory may present more difficulty in accounting for the second part of our puzzle, namely the timing. If France's objective interest was to get along with Germany, why did it take so much time to realize it? Obviously, the hesitations of France's political leaders become understandable only if one relaxes the assumptions about rationality. This is a bit of a challenge for diehard realists who assume that political actors immediately identify their interests. Yet, as Rathbun puts it, a revised realist approach can deal with some "irrational behaviours" as long as they can be understood as consequences of "cognitive bias" (Rathbun 2007). Cognitive biases are then defined, in good positivist fashion, as inability to perceive what objective reality is⁸. As a matter of fact, the notion of historical "traumatism" can fall into this category. After four years of a humiliating German occupation, Willis argues, the French started to implement an "irrational" revanchist policy. After a while, however, they collected their wits, perceived what their actual interest was, and engaged in rapprochement with Germany (Willis 1965).

This interpretation is supported by the studies which highlight the "emotional" character of France's security stances towards Germany. To quote only a few examples, French MP Roger Gaborit declared in front of the French Assemblée Nationale on 12 June 1948 that "*Germany should not be denazified but de-germanized*" (Willis 1965). On 24 November 1949, his colleague Paul Reynaud stated, anticipating the debate on the European Defense Community, that "*a kind of sentimental veto on the French side prohibits the creation of any German military organisation; (...) when a*

⁷ « *Il n'y a plus de problème franco-allemand. Il est dur aux malades de renoncer à leurs vieilles maladies et aux peuples de changer d'angoisse. Mais c'est un fait. Galilée est passé. Le centre du monde est ailleurs. Nous sommes trompés parce que l'Allemagne vaincue est encore l'espace où campent et s'affrontent les maîtres du monde. Mais il n'est qu'à voir le ton de leurs conférences : l'Allemagne n'est plus qu'une inconnue auxiliaire de l'équation URSS-USA ; et la France, un coefficient d'appoint. S'il paraît à Paris audacieux de pousser jusqu'au Rhin nos ambitions historiques, le monde ne pense plus Rhin, mais Elbe, Danube, Mer Rouge, Nigeria, Mongolie.* ». MOUNIER (1948) « Allemagne : responsabilités France. » In : *Le Figaro Littéraire*, 21 août 1948.

⁸ It is important to highlight at this point that the "cognitive processes" this revised version of realism tries to deal with are very simple and impermeable to the question of "meaning": there is an objective world "out there" to be discovered or "learned" and, to quote Rathbun again, information is then only "a volume question, not an interpretive question" Rathbun (2007). "Uncertain about Uncertainty: Understanding the Multiple Meanings of a Crucial Concept in International Relations Theory." *International Studies Quarterly* 51: 533-557, p 537..

*Frenchman sees a German with a rifle, he encounters trouble seeing him as a European*⁹. Even nowadays, several hesitations in France's policy towards Germany seem to be motivated by what positivists would call "irrational fears of Germany". Besides, this fear is regularly confessed by politicians (Chevènement 1996) and policy advisers (Gallois 1997; Delmas 1999) who advocate, even today, a cautious policy towards Germany.

3/ At first sight, the last part of the puzzle seems more challenging for realist thinkers: how can one account for the existence of "constructive initiatives" from 1945 on if one assumes that political actors (states) only pursue material interests? As we shall see in the next section, most scholars who investigated France's cultural policy towards Germany take other theoretical stances. The few realist explanations of France's "constructive initiatives" which emerge from the literature generally conceive of the latter as a propaganda policy serving France's material (security and power) interests. This idea was put forward by K. D. Henke in the early 1980's: France's cultural and education policy in Germany (1945-1949) was a "Zuckerbrot" (sweet bread); it would have played the same role as German cultural policy in France during World War II; it was useful in order to cajole and tame the occupied population (Henke 1982).

Although it might sound very cynical, this interpretation does find some empirical support. Henke points out, for instance, that the French communicated a lot on their "achievements" in the cultural domain. Besides, we have known since Defrance's study on the funding of France's cultural policy in Germany that the French illegally obliged German tax payers to pay for this entire cultural policy. This was perfectly in keeping with the resolutions of the Allied Control Council when it dealt with the reconstruction of German schools or the organization of Franco-German youth exchanges. But as noted by Defrance, the French also discretely used German taxes to fund their propaganda about France's "generous" and "humane" mission in Germany (Defrance 1991). This does not mean that this cultural and education policy was only conceived as an instrument of domination. It does suggest, however, that realist scholars are right when they claim that this policy was not without calculation.

These elements prove that a realist approach sheds some light on our threefold puzzle. To sum up: 1/ it explains the spectacular policy change by pointing out the role of heavy geopolitical dynamics such as the emergence of the Cold War or the weakening of France's material power; 2/ it accounts for the (late) timing by arguing that the French needed time, after the Second World War, before being able to realize what their objective interest was (cooperating with Germany); 3/ finally, it highlights the "cynical part" of France's constructive initiatives in the cultural domain. The French (or at least some parts of the French political elite) did use their achievements in the cultural domain in order to appease criticisms concerning the harshest parts of their security policy towards Germany.

Bringing Interpretation Back In

As Schemel puts it, the realist theory in International Relations has something remarkable: it succeeds in accounting for complex phenomena using a small set of arguments (Schemel 2009). This theoretical parsimony, however, comes at the price of some simplifications. This is why it might be useful – to pick up the thread of my astrophysical metaphor – to zoom in on some of the regions of the celestial body under investigation. This is what cognitivists and (moderate¹⁰) social constructivists do when they open the "black box" of the state and observe that the latter is made up of individuals whose perceptions of the material environment are mediated by ideas. In the following paragraphs, I try to assess the added value of such a theoretical shift for our three puzzles.

⁹ « *Il ne peut pas y avoir d'armée allemande, pour deux raisons (...) [en raison] d'une sorte de veto sentimental de la France, car lorsqu'un Français voit un Allemand avec un fusil à la main, il hésite un peu à le prendre pour un Européen* ».

¹⁰ I make no big difference between « cognitivism » and « moderate social constructivism ». Both approaches assume that a material/objective world exists, that it is comprehensible, and that social actors need ideas in order to decode it.

1/ In order to account for the first question – the spectacular change in France’s policy towards Germany - cognitivists and (moderate) social constructivists do not challenge the very argument according to which some material structural dynamics affected the actors’ interests. They logically point out, however, that these dynamics were not a driving force in themselves; they influenced policy change only insofar as they were perceived and interpreted by policy actors. This focus on “meaning” leads them to identify the complementary role of (a) cognitive and (b) normative dynamics.

(a) Hudemann has analyzed the representations of the senior officials and civil servants of the French administration in Germany during the occupation period (1945-1949). He observes that “national security” remained the main watchword of France’s policy over this whole time span, but that the meaning of the term changed significantly over time. Little by little, a consensus emerged around the idea that a democratic and peaceful German state would be better at preventing a new German aggression than any harsh policy instrument (dismantling of the economy, occupying the border territories, etc) (Hudemann 1993; Hudemann 1994). I have myself argued in another article that this cognitive dynamic was carried by an “epistemic community” (Haas 1992) made of French intellectuals and policy experts such as E. Vermeil (1878-1964), Sarah Claire Boah de Jouvenel (1879-1967), Gérard Francis (1903-1992), Pierre Grappin (1915-1997), and others. They formulated a policy narrative (Radaelli 1999) which prophesied doom - in this case the arrival of a new Hitler – if France would repeat the mistakes of the precedent after War (when they implemented a material security policy towards Germany) (Delori 2006).

(b) Hudemann and Delori’s observations are consistent with Haas’ argument according to which policy actors change their “*perception about how to solve a problem*” (Haas 1991: 63) before (possibly) restating the problem in a more radical way. Yet, as stated above, French policy actors did not only learn that their fixed political problem – France’s security – would be better solved by other means; the norm of Franco-German cooperation progressively substituted the old claims concerning France’s security. In order to account for this normative (instead of cognitive) shift, some social constructivists point out another intellectual structural dynamic: Europeanization of France’s foreign policy identity. Risse has, for instance, convincingly argued that European ideas were pervasive in French public debate from 1945 on. He notes that there was no consensus about what the future Europe should look like. Some talked about an “Europe fédérale”, others about an “Europe des Nations” (not to quote the more peculiar models of the “socialist” or “Christian” Europe). But whatever their diversity, European ideas pushed the French in the direction of a more cooperative stance towards the former enemy (Risse 2001). They played the same role as the broadening of the notion of France’s security: they helped French policy makers to make sense of their changing material environment.

2/ Concerning the second part of our puzzle (the timing), cognitivists and social constructivists agree with realist thinkers that the historical trauma of World War Two affected the way the French political elite perceived its interests. Their main dissatisfaction with the realist argument is conceptual: they claim that memory – i. e. subjective representations of history (Assman 2006)-, not history itself, accounts for the French exception. Contrary to what one might think, this conceptual shift is not scholastic. The notion of memory tells us that some representations of the past are resistant to change because they are constitutive of the actors’ identities: they do not only tell people what happened in the past; they also and most of all tell them who they are (Heisler 2008: 17).

Strickmann has shown that this line of thought explains some of the difficulties encountered by the French when they tried to revise their policy towards Germany. In the aftermath of the Second World War, a specific memory of German history was particularly pervasive: the narrative of “eternal Germany” (Strickmann 2004). This narrative was a synecdoche of German history centred on the three last Franco-German wars (1870, 1914, and 1939). It therefore depicted Germany as a monstrous character always inclined to attack its Western neighbour. As Strickmann puts it, this memory was part of France’s representation of itself: it strengthened the idea that France was Germany’s antonym, a land of civilization. Giving up the narrative of eternal Germany would therefore have meant giving up the idea, which lies at the core of France’s foreign policy identity, that France has a civilizing mission to fulfil (Chuter 1996). One can thus easily account for “France’s delay”: the Americans and

the British could revise their image of Germany more rapidly because this country was not an essential part of their collective imagination.

3/ Can cognitivist and constructivist approaches also account for the third puzzling part of this historical episode: the existence of constructive initiatives from 1945 on? Their focus on identities and socially constructed structures of meaning leads them to put forward an interpretation which, again, complements the realist. We have seen in the previous section that some French political leaders and civil servants conceived of France's cultural policy in Germany as a symbolic policy aiming at appeasing criticisms. This does not mean however, that it was the only rationale or that every single actor had such a materialist frame in mind. This emerges, for instance, from a study of Schmittlein's world views (Venesson 2007). The chief of the *Direction de l'Education Publique* had a typical post-materialistic view of France's security. Anti-Semitism, pangermanism, and imperialism had taken root, Schmittlein believed, in the "German soul" and no material security policy would therefore ever impede Germany in picking up the thread of its natural compulsions. In order to impede a new German aggression, one had to socialize a whole new generation (Defrance 2001). According to M. Mombert, this "immaterial" concept of France's security was pervasive in the whole occupation administration, especially among the civil servants of the *Direction de l'Education Publique* (Mombert 1995).

Interestingly enough for my pragmatist argument, these studies which stress the role of ideas and social interpretation should not be understood as refutations of realist explanations. They do not really offer a different "perspective", to use a phrase partisans of methodological pluralism are particularly fond of. They rather claim that realist approaches lead to a too simplified representation of reality. Their general argument is that dynamics in the balance of power did affect policy outcomes, but only to the extent that they were perceived and interpreted in different ways over time and space by policy actors. In the following section, I try to assess if one can go further in this "zooming in" enterprise. I argue that a pragmatist sociology of this episode helps explain how the aforementioned structures of meaning were constituted.

When Meaning Becomes Clear After Experience

A pragmatist analysis of our puzzle does not challenge the broad outline of the story which has been told in the previous sections, i. e. the idea that changes in the material environment played a role and that several actors interpreted differently those structural dynamics. My pragmatist argument is basically that the actors' representations, world views or mental maps were more blurry than the existing literature suggests. French foreign policy actors did not have a clear view of what ought to be done: they were not only unable to identify the best way in order to achieve their ends (cognitive uncertainty); they were also uncertain about the purpose of their actions (normative uncertainty). Meaning, therefore, only became clear after experience. This emerges, for instance, from Schuman's private correspondence with Jean Monnet (Monnet 1986). In the letters or telegrams he sent daily to his collaborator, Schuman presented European integration alternatively as a means to establish peace on the Old Continent, as the best way to solve the "German problem", as part of a broader economic modernization plan, etc. Schuman did not switch from one "justification regime" (peace, security, economic modernization...) to another for strategic reasons. As a "multiple self" person (Mead 1934), he valued all these conceptions of the "common good" (Boltanski and Thévenot 1991: 33). In the following paragraphs, I argue that this pragmatist theory of action is not only closer to the way all French foreign policy actors thought and acted, and that it provides a more comprehensive understanding of our three puzzles.

1/ As I wrote in the introduction, the field of International Relations still lacks a clear pragmatist theory of policy change (Owen 2002; Bauer and Brighi 2009). One can find, however, the hint of such a theory in the work of Haas. Haas is known for his developments on "social learning" which he defines, in good cognitivist fashion, as a "*change in behaviour*" due to a "*change in perception about how to solve a problem*" (Haas 1991: 63). One therefore forgets that Haas also paved the way for a

pragmatist understanding of belief formation when he notes, in the course of his elaborations on “social learning”, that policy actors sometimes “adapt” more than they “learn”. He defines “adaptation” as a two step process. First, “[policy actors] *add new activities (or drop old ones) without examining the implicit theories underlying their programs. Underlying values are not questioned. Ultimate purpose of the organization is not questioned. Emphasis is on altering means of action, not ends. Technical rationality triumphs*” (Haas 1991: 72). A change in the “structures of meaning” or “belief systems” only occurs after experience (second step) when “*new ends (purposes) are added without worrying about their coherence with existing ends*” (Haas 1991: 72). As we shall see, these two ideas are very heuristic in the case under investigation here.

To begin with, it is clear that the “new activities” which led to policy change were added “*without examining the implicit theories underlying their programs*”. I mentioned above the case of Robert Schuman. The same holds true for his collaborator Jean Monnet. Until the mid 1950’s, it is not clear whether Monnet conceived Franco-German rapprochement as a political objective or as a means in order to achieve a more important goal, namely France’s security. On 14 September 1950, for instance, he refers to the European Coal and Steel Community as the “*best means in order to obtain a quick and efficient German contribution to the defense of the West and to avoid the emergence in the German soul of a feeling of power*”¹¹ (Monnet 1986: 56). More generally speaking, all initiatives which paved the way to Franco-German rapprochement were introduced in such a way that they did not directly challenge the main “frame” of the time, i. e. the narrative stating that Germany was a danger to France’s security and that this problem needed a solution. At this stage, to quote Haas, “*underlying values [were] not questioned. (...) Emphasis [was] on altering means of action, not ends. Technical rationality triumph[ed]*”.

Haas is curiously silent on how the implementation of a new instrument leads to the formulation of a new norm. As mentioned above, he only writes, on this issue, that “*new ends (purposes) are added without worrying about their coherence with existing ends*” (Haas 1991: 72). A pragmatist theory of policy change sheds some light on this blind spot by arguing that the actors’ “multiple selves” help them to reformulate the sense of their actions. Since they always believed that cooperation with Germany was a valuable objective, Schuman and Monnet did not have to “*question the underlying values*” (to use the language of Haas) of their actions. They only needed to switch from one dominant discourse of justification (Europe as a means for France’s security) to another (Europe as a means for Franco-German reconciliation).

This development proves that a pragmatist analysis of the change in France’s policy towards Germany (1945-1950) completes explanations in terms of instrumental rationality or social interpretation. Such an approach helps to point out that the actors tried several policies at the same time. They could do so because they valued, in principle, different kinds of objectives (France’s security, Franco-German rapprochement, etc.). Little by little, they adapted in the sense described by Haas: they abandoned the policies which failed (dismantling of the German economy and state, occupying the border territories, etc) and gave new impulses to those which appeared more successful (cultural cooperation, European integration). The sense of their actions changed along with practices. The norm of Franco-German rapprochement became institutionalized when it stopped being necessary to justify current practices referring to France’s security.

2/ We have seen above that a second element has to be explained: although all countries were observing the same changes in their geopolitical environment, the French softened their policy towards Germany in 1949-1950, that is three or four years after the British and the Americans. I have shown in the previous section that the most convincing explanation of “France’s delay” is put forward by the authors who revised the positivistic argument in terms of “historical traumatism”. The French, cognitivists argue, needed more time to “learn” that Germany was no longer a threat because memories of German aggression formed a pillar of their self-representation. Once again, a pragmatist approach does not challenge the core of this argument. It simply points out the role of action in policy change; a new paradigm (or belief system or frame) only institutionalizes along with new practices.

¹¹ « *éviter que le sentiment de puissance ne soit à nouveau éveillé dans l’âme allemande* »

This point emerges from a comparison between Bidault and Schuman's attempts to signify a change in the course of Franco-German relations. Bidault is often pictured as the exemplar of the French revanchist and security political leader. He was indeed foreign minister at the time (1944-1948) when France took the harshest security measures against its former enemy: he decided on the annexing of Saarland (1946), justified France's denial to merge its zone with the Anglo-American bizon (1947), endorsed the dismantling of German factories... However, this picture of "Bidault the Pharisee" (Grosser 1950) becomes less accurate if one looks more closely at the details. In his well documented biography, Bezias shows that Bidault also rapidly took several initiatives aiming to pave the way for a future rapprochement. On 16 July 1947 for instance he declared to US Secretary of commerce W. Averell Harriman (1891-1986) that "*it is perfectly clear that one must merge the zones, that we have to allow the Germans to live and produce, and that the categorical positions we defended at first have to be softened (...) The Germans are Europeans and I have never 'eaten' any German*"¹² (Bezias 2006: 282). In fall 1947, he supervised the discrete meeting of French and German Christian-Democrats in the village of Sankt Niklausen in Switzerland. In other words, Bidault was just like all his contemporaries (and all social agents): his preferences and mental maps were more blurry than what we tend to think with hindsight.

As a "multiple selves" person, Bidault proved able to understand that the start of the Cold War put France's policy towards Germany into test. As noted by Bezias, "*from Spring 1947 on, the flavour of Georges Bidault's discourse evolved significantly. He softened his demands concerning Germany. And while this had been a secondary aspect of his discourse until then, Bidault started speaking passionately about Europe*" (Bezias 2006: 379). On 13 February 1948, he even gave a grandiloquent speech on "the future of Europe" in which he stated that France should "*admit Germany in a European organization with a maximum of liberty and solidarity in terms of interest*" (Bezias 2006: 410). This speech, however, went completely unnoticed. Bidault, who hoped that he would leave a big mark on people's minds, felt bitter when he realized that "*this assembly [the French "Assemblée nationale"] does not understand anything*" (Bezias 2006: 410).

Bidault's inability to signify a change in France's policy towards Germany contrasts with Schuman on 9 May 1950. Except for the communists¹³ and to a lesser extent the Gaullists¹⁴, the whole political community welcomed positively Schuman's declaration. The Socialists and the Christian-Democrats paid tribute to the return of the "spirit of the Resistance". In *Le Figaro*, Raymond Aron noted with insight that France broke out of months of diplomatic isolation due to its firmness on the question of the Ruhr area¹⁵. The socialist newspaper *Le Populaire* put in its editorial that "*the idea of bringing together all industries which produce war materials is appealing; it will make any Franco-German war 'unthinkable and impossible'*"¹⁶. Even more enthusiastic, *Le Monde* saw in Schuman's proposal "a revolutionary initiative"¹⁷.

Schuman's genius alone does not explain the echo encountered by his declaration. This "declaration" was no more grandiloquent than Bidault's aforementioned speech. Besides, contrary to what *Le Monde's* editor wrote, the idea of placing the "*production of coal and steel under a common High Authority*" was not revolutionary. This had been formulated for the first time during the interwar

¹² "*Il est parfaitement clair qu'il faut fusionner les zones, qu'il faut permettre aux Allemands de vivre et de produire et que les positions catégoriques que nous avons défendues à l'origine devront être adoucies (...) Les Allemands sont des Européens et je n'ai jamais 'mangé' de l'Allemand* ».

¹³ Guillon, Jean, "La France vendue pour la guerre", dans *L'Humanité*. 10.05.1950, Nr. 1 766; 47e année, p. 1.

¹⁴ Palewski, Gaston, "Une carte aventureuse à la légère. La fusion économique franco-allemande", dans *Le Rassemblement*. 20.05.1950.

¹⁵ ARON, Raymond, L'initiative française, in *Le Figaro*. 11.05.1950

¹⁶ "Il y a en effet quelque chose de vraiment séduisant dans l'idée de rendre 'impensable et impossible' une guerre franco-allemande par la mise en commun des industries qui produisent les matériaux des fabrications de guerre". "Éditorial", in *Le Populaire*. 11.05.1950.

¹⁷ M. T., Une initiative révolutionnaire, in *Le Monde*. 11.05.1950, Nr. 1 645

period (Lorrain 1999). German MP Carlo Schmid had made the exact same proposal in 1949¹⁸. In 1950, the idea was commonly debated in Europeanist circles. Schuman's declaration encountered a strong symbolic success because it operated a meaningful change on three important concrete issues. First, it instituted a Franco-German institution open to other European countries (and not a European institution open to Germany). Second, it solved the thorny problem of the Ruhr area; after the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community, France would no longer impede Germany from increasing its production of German coal and steel. Finally, it seemed to pave the way for the resolution of Saarland's problem. These elements suggest that new norms institutionalize along with practices, more than discourses. And in the case under investigation here, change only occurred in the early 1950's.

3/ After what has been said, I may not need to elaborate much on the added value of this pragmatist approach concerning the third part of our puzzle. The French implemented, from 1945, an ambivalent policy – harsh in most areas, cooperative in others – because nobody had a clear idea about what ought to be done. In other words, one has to radicalize the constructivist argument according to which several “frames” competed to orient France's policy in Germany. These frames – say the “security” and the “cooperative” frames – were not “belief systems” in Sabatier's sense (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993); they were not ideological constructs carried by different “advocacy coalitions”. They were constitutive of everybody's “multiple selves”. I will proceed by analyzing the motivations of three key actors of the constructive initiatives taken in the cultural domain: Edmond Vermeil (1878-1964), André François-Poncet (1887-1978), and Joseph Rovin (1918-2004). I will show, as I have done with other actors, that they pursued several goals at the same time in the aftermath of war.

Vermeil – who was at that time the unchallenged master of German studies in France – was considered the best French expert of Germany after World War Two (Strickmann 2004). Vermeil published several books and articles which met with a significant response in the public debate (Vermeil 1945; Vermeil 1945; Vermeil 1946). Besides, the French government asked him to provide advice and training to the future civil servants of the French occupation administration in Germany. Vermeil therefore played an important role in shaping France's policy towards Germany after World War Two.

As pragmatist sociology presupposes, Vermeil did not have a clear representation of the sense of France's policy towards Germany. In the immediate aftermath of the war, Vermeil often endorsed the mainstream “security” frame. In a book published in 1944, he wrote for instance, as mentioned in the introduction, that “*apart from criminal violence, we will treat Germany as it treated us*”¹⁹ (Mombert 1995: 12). Two years later, he was still advocating the “*harsheset ordeal*” for the former enemy: “*Germany will have to understand that it has been militarily defeated by superior forces. A total occupation of its territory appears decisive in that respect. (...) Germany will know for ever that it has lost its military organization and its centralized police, all its civilian and military air force. May Germany than realize that if the Second World War did not pay off, the third won't either*”²⁰ (Vermeil 1946). In other words, Vermeil was in line with the dominant narrative of the immediate aftermath of the war: Germany was first and foremost a problem for France's security.

Yet, “France's security” is not the only objective Vermeil referred to at that time. In some texts published in 1945, he also alluded to the possibility of building a “*regenerated Europe*” based on the “*regeneration of Germany itself*”. He even mentioned, more than 5 years before Schuman's famous declaration, the possibility of normalizing Franco-German relations (“*settling of normal*

¹⁸ « *Am besten wäre es natürlich, (...) wenn man das Potential von Ruhr, Saar und Lothringen – Kohle, Erze, Eisen, Stahl – zu einem wirtschaftlichen Zweckverband vereinigen könnte* ». Discours de Carlo Schmid devant le Bundestag, in : WDP, WP I, 10, p185 AB.

¹⁹ « Les violences criminelles mises à part, nous traiterons l'Allemagne comme elle nous a traités »

²⁰ « *L'Allemagne devra constater qu'elle a été militairement vaincue, cela par des forces infiniment supérieures. De ce point de vue, l'occupation totale de son territoire présente un intérêt capital (...). L'Allemagne saura qu'elle a à jamais perdu son armée et sa police centralisée, toute son aviation civile et militaire. Alors en arrivera-t-elle à se dire que, si la seconde guerre mondiale n'a pas 'payé', la troisième ne paiera pas mieux* ».

relations between Germany and its continental periphery)²¹ (Vermeil 1945: 447). In 1949, he presented Franco-German youth meetings as “*a first rapprochement and a rich experience which will probably bear fruit in the future*”²² (Vermeil 1949). The same year, he became one of the founding fathers of Mounier and Grosser’s “Comité Français d’Echanges avec l’Allemagne Nouvelle”, a French private organization which advocated a genuine Franco-German dialogue and reconciliation. At that time, Vermeil probably did not even remember that he had advocated five years earlier the “harshesst ordeal” against the former enemy. This proves that Vermeil was like most other policy actors: he never had a clear representation of the sense of France’s policy towards Germany.

André François-Poncet (1887-1978) is considered in Franco-German circles one of the few personalities who engaged from 1945 onwards in Franco-German rapprochement (Rode 1955). While he was High Commissioner and then ambassador in Germany (1949-1955), François-Poncet encouraged the initiatives of private militants in Franco-German rapprochement. We know for instance that he used his position to fund, sometimes discretely, the associations of Jean du Rivau, a Jesuit father who, in 1945, funded two associations advocating Franco-German rapprochement (Wintzen 1990). In the 1950’s François-Poncet became the president of the French branch of the European Movement. Reading his earlier texts of the years 1945-1946, one understands that he glimpsed very early on the possibility of a Franco-German rapprochement (Bock 1987).

Yet, André François-Poncet never expressed any objection when France launched its harsh security policy towards Germany in 1945. He did not contest the narrative on “eternal Germany” (Strickmann 2004). In the preface of a book published in 1945, for instance, he portrayed the Germans and Germany in the following terms: “*Cologne’s population was preserved from its shames by its Celtic heredity. In the regions corresponding to the former Hernycian Forest, it was fanciful to expect that we could root out racism and anti-Semitism using conventional methods. One cannot change in a couple of years psychological forms which stem from pre-History*”²³ (Grosser 1962). More generally speaking, he believed that the Germans were “racist”, “anti-Semite” and naturally willing to invade their neighbours. By letting them rearm after World War I, France had paved the way for a new German aggression. Like Henry Morgenthau, he stated in 1945 that the only way to prevent a new German aggression was to cut the country into pieces. François-Poncet was therefore, as most of us, a “multiple self” person: he endorsed different roles, pursued simultaneously different objectives, and was able to justify them by referring to different objectives.

Rovan (1918-2004) is also considered as a hero of Franco-German rapprochement. This is not surprising if one considers his personal biography. Rovan (first called Adolph Rosenthal) was born German. After having emigrated to France in the 1930’s because of his Jewish origins, he participated actively in the French Resistance, was arrested and deported to Dachau in July 1944. On his return, Rovan published in *Esprit* (a French journal founded and edited by Emmanuel Mounier) a set of three articles which left a powerful mark on the public debate over the future of Germany. In these texts, Rovan advocated a “responsible” policy towards the former enemy (Rovan 1945; Rovan 1946; Rovan 1949). By “responsible”, he did not only mean that France was in charge of Germany as one can be in charge of his “pupil”; he also stated that France was to treat Germany with civility and dignity.

Yet, a careful reading of the aforementioned articles and of Rovan’s other writings of the time (Rovan 1946; Rovan 1949; Rovan 1950) reveals that his motivations were more complex. Like most actors, it is unclear whether he considered the initiatives taken in the cultural domain as a first step towards a future rapprochement or as an instrument of France’s security policy (Rovan 1949: 677). Most of the time, Rovan justifies these actions referring to a third objective: France’s civilizing mission. France, he wrote, is not a country like many others: it is a “soldier of humanity” (Chuter 1996); it offered to the World the (French) Revolution, the declaration of human rights, the

²¹ “*Ce qu’il faut construire, c’est une Europe régénérée par la régénération même de l’Allemagne, par des rapports normaux entre l’Allemagne et la périphérie continentale*”

²² “*Un premier rapprochement et (...) une précieuse expérience qui portera sans doute ses fruits ultérieurement*”

²³ “*La population de Cologne était gardée contre ses hontes par son hérédité celtique. Quand aux régions correspondant à peu près à l’ancienne forêt hernycienne, il était chimérique d’espérer extirper le racisme et l’antisémitisme par les méthodes envisagées jusqu’ici. On ne change pas en quelques années des formes psychologiques remontant à la préhistoire.*»

Resistance: “*French Occupation [in Germany] ought to leave a mark tantamount to the moral and spiritual mark left by the armies of the first Republic*”²⁴ (Rovan 1945).

These three examples complete the overall picture of this paper: France implemented an ambivalent policy towards Germany because the French political elite did not have a clear view of the German problem. Depending on the situation, each actor listened to the “*internal voices*” (Vandenbergue 2009) which told him or her to cut Germany into pieces, reeducate the Germans, reconcile with the former enemy...

Conclusion

This paper aims at assessing what a pragmatist approach tells us about an important episode of contemporary history: the shift in France’s security policy towards Germany (1945-1950). I have shown in the first section that this episode is puzzling for at least three reasons: 1/ the overall policy change is spectacular (in less than six years France switched from a harsh security to a cooperative stance towards the former enemy); 2/ the timing is particular (the French needed more time than the Americans and the British before softening their policy towards Germany); 3/ the whole process was complex and ambivalent (in the cultural domain, the French implemented, from 1945, a policy which paved the way to the reconstitution of a democratic German state).

I have argued in the second section that the realist theory of International Relations provides a first convincing explanation by pointing out on the one hand the unquestionable role of a changing material context and the rational calculations of French policy makers on the other. This approach therefore provides a first coherent explanation of our three puzzles: 1/ realists see the shift in France’s policy towards Germany as a rational adjustment to major geopolitical events such as the beginning of the Cold War. 2/ They state that the French did not realize immediately that their objective interest had changed because of the historical trauma caused by the Second World War. 3/ Finally, realists see no contradiction inside France’s policy towards Germany: France’s cultural policy was a “*zuckerbrot*” (sweetbread) which aimed at legitimizing the economic exploitation of the zone.

This analysis, I argued in the third section, was convincingly refined by cognitivists or moderate social constructivists. This group of scholars does not challenge the idea that the Cold War played a role in the policy change. They highlight, however, that this material dynamic would have had no effect if it had not been interpreted by the actors. Their explanation of our three puzzles can therefore be summarized as follows: 1/ cognitive and normative dynamics such as the broadening of the notion of “*security*” and the rise of European ideas helped the French to make sense of the geopolitical upheaval they were observing; 2/ the French had difficulties in revising their security policy towards Germany because negative representations of Germany were part of their political identity and self-representation; 3/ the whole process was ambivalent because the state is not a unitary actor; several advocacy coalitions competed in order to orient France’s policy towards Germany in several directions.

In the fourth section, I made the point that a pragmatist approach provides a more comprehensive explanation of our three puzzles. Such an approach does not challenge the broad outline of the story told by the realists and cognitivists. A pragmatist approach points out, however, that the actors’ rationality and ideas were never as clear as realists and cognitivists assume. In the immediate aftermath of the war, French policy actors did not have a clear representation of what they wanted to do with Germany. This means that: 1/ they “*adapted*” in the sense of Haas: they tried several policies at the same time, abandoned the policies which had failed, and developed further those which seemed successful; 2/ the norm of Franco-German rapprochement only became institutionalized in the early 1950’s along with the development of cooperative practices; 3/ finally, the French never had to wonder whether their initiatives in the cultural domain were consistent with the rest of their policy towards Germany because they pursued several goals at the same time.

These elements are sufficient to rephrase the broader methodological or epistemological argument of the paper. My point is that these three approaches – realism, (moderate) social

²⁴ « *Il faut que [l’Occupation française] laisse une trace morale et spirituelle aussi profonde que celle qu’inscrivirent dans les traités de l’Europe, d’Illyrie au Danemark, les armées de la 1^{ère} République* ».

constructivism, and pragmatism – describe reality at different scales of analysis and precision. Realists, who like making sense of the world using few theoretical arguments, provide a general description of reality in which all individuals (subsumed in what they call “the State”) pursue the same objectives. At this macro level of analysis, it is satisfactory to hypothesize that actors have material interests and that they are more or less able to identify the best means in order to achieve their goals. Moderate constructivists and cognitivists consider that one can represent the world with more colours and details by opening the black box of the state and investigating how social actors perceive their material environment. It then appears that material interests are not a driving force in themselves; social actors rely on ideas and identities in order to understand and signify the world. Pragmatist sociologists go a step further in this de-constructivist agenda. They open the black box of cognitivists’ main category of analysis - “meaning” - and observe, at a micro level, that the actors “belief systems” or “world views” are not always consistent enough to play the role of “guides for action”. In many cases, meaning is therefore not constructed prior to, but through action.

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