

CONSTRUCTIVISM, CONSTITUTIVISM...OR BOTH?

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One can identify at least two accounts of moral constructivism in the literature. The first, and broader, one claims that “the central idea behind constructivism is that values and moral norms are not discovered, or revealed to us by the gods, but rather *constructed* by human agents for specific [practical] purposes” (Bagnoli 2013, p. 1; emphasis in original). This broad definition of constructivism, however, makes no mention of the most well-known feature of many forms of moral constructivism: their reliance on specific *constructive procedures*. We might thus say that, according to a narrower understanding, constructivism is the view according to which the principles we ought to accept are those which are derived “via appropriate selection procedures” (Ronzoni and Valentini 2008, p. 404). A second, crucial distinction concerns whether a given approach is a form of “limited” or “complete” constructivism (Barry 2013). Theories which aspire to construct normative truths out of non-moral, purportedly uncontroversial features of agency and rationality are more radically constructivist than those which identify a specific construction as appropriate because it best embodies certain very broad moral starting points – such as the value of freedom or equal concern and respect.

The most radical attempt to build a form of constructivism all the way down is offered by moral *constitutivism*. Constitutivists about morality seeks to show that, given certain features that are constitutive of either rational agency, interaction between agents, or a combination of the two, agents cannot but be committed to morality. Constitutivism is clearly a constructivist strategy in the former, broader sense; it does not, however, necessarily imply that, in order to find out which substantive norms we are to follow, we must devise and follow this or that specific constructive procedure. Indeed, most constitutivists aim to derive substantive moral commitments from the constitutivist argument *directly*. Constitutivist arguments have also, predictably, been the target of much scepticism – mainly on grounds that they surreptitiously introduce substantive moral commitments either in their very assumptions or at some stage of their argumentative chain.

My aim is to argue that it is possible to put forward a revised, constitutivist argument which can survive the most important criticisms levied against constitutivism *and* which turns out to vindicate, not a set of substantive moral commitments directly, but a commitment to constructivism in the narrow sense (i.e. to some form of intersubjective justification) instead.