

A normative self-understanding of the European Union “in practise”

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The question of a normative self-understanding of the European Union features strongly – albeit often implicitly – in the debates held under the notions of legitimacy and identity. This paper departs from these works by proposing to locate the articulation of such a self-understanding within the practises that constitute the EU polity and to analyse this self-understanding with the conceptual tools of a pragmatic sociology and concept analysis. Thus, the self-understanding is understood as a configuration of central “justifications” – namely democracy, security, prosperity, human rights and diversity. These justifications are evoked in situations that are interpreted as problematic and therefore in need of common action. It is in such situated political action that the concepts receive specific meanings, not the least through the relations between each other.

I Social theoretical languages and the study of the EU

The expansion and consolidation of EU studies is parallel by a steady import of different theories (that is: theoretical languages) from the wider field of the social sciences. Most prominent – and basic - are here economic and sociological approaches (which are somehow reflected in the opposition between ‘rationalist’ versus ‘(social)’ constructivism’), but also more specific ‘movements’ and ‘turns’ for which labels such as ‘new institutionalism’, ‘cultural(ist)/interpretative approaches’, ‘linguistic turn’ (here most prominently ‘discourse analysis’). If one wanted, one could take this presence of – often competing – theoretical languages as an indicator for the EU having become a ‘normal’ object of social scientific investigation. In the field of social theory, one could hear by now for some time voices advocating a ‘practice (or practical) turn.’ The aim of this paper is to offer some initial reflections on what the import to EU studies of this turn might entail and what might be gained from it in terms of new insights and understandings.

What then, is the “practise turn” about? This is not an easy task, as also proponents of the turn often eschew clear definitions. A very coarse – and at first sight possible trite – statement would be: that ‘observable human activities in the world’ (or one might say: practices) should be key unit of the social sciences. Some go so far as to declare that ‘all there is (in the social world)’ are practices.¹ A slightly more detailed – and also modest - definition is given by Barry Barnes, proposing that ‘practices [are] socially recognised forms of activity, done on the basis what members learn from others, and capable of being done well or badly, correctly or incorrectly.’ As this definition might still not be very illuminating, I propose to take the metaphor of the turn at face value and ask what those advocating a practise turn might (have been) turn(ing) *away* from (or: dissociates itself from.) This might be the more useful, as in many accounts on the practice turn great emphasis it paid on indicating what is it not,² and, more specially, which time-honoured dichotomies it aims to overcome, leave behind.

¹ Or, this claim is often enlarged by saying that “all there is are practices and discourses” – a point to which I will come back later.

² Thus Schatzki argues that practise theorists ‘thereby oppose numerous *current and recent paths* of thinking, including, intellectualism, representationalism, individualism (e.g. rational choice theory,

In an – admittedly – grossly simplifying way one might indicate three such steps of turning away: The initial one is a step away from individualist reasoning, which means that thinking about practices is part of a *social* theory: it takes as its basic unit *human interaction*. Yet, within the field of social theories, one can see a second, and probably more important turn, namely one away from conceiving of the social world in terms of systems, structures, ‘wholes’ and the – literally – determining force of these entities on human action. Instead, an emphasis is paid on the meanings that human beings attribute to their actions. Thus, as Reckwitz propose, one might understand practices theory as a kind of *cultural* theorising, that is theorising with meaning and believes; it is these entities that hold societies/ communities together and that are responsible for an intelligible order. Yet, within the wider field of such cultural theorising, a crucial question is, then, is where this meaning is located. Instead of focusing on the mind as that locus (mentalism) or on abstract systems (textualism), such meaning is located in practices. These practices takes place in the social world – and thus meaning (or more broadly said: ideas) are placed in reality.³

Even this negative delineation might leave the ‘identity’ of practise thought obscure – and thus also a possible impact for EU studies. In order to reach a level of higher concreteness (and thereby following one insight of practice thought to move away from overly abstract accounts), my proceeding will have two dimensions: first, I will focus on three concepts (or one might say: key assumptions) of the practise turn: these will be the concepts of the situation; activity; and embedded meaning. Second, I will explore what their ‘application’ to already established objects in EU studies can do: they might be labelled by short-hand as the normative and the polity turn.’ The normative turn will be interpreted as dealing with the question of ‘normative underpinnings, of ‘the key – or fundamental – normative assumptions (or, as is more commonly said: of values and principles’); the polity turn will be portrayed as the question of the constitution of the EU as a *polity*. The paper will thus proceed as follows: in a first step, I will portray the normative turn in EU studies. In a second step I will propose an alternative way to study the question of the ‘normativity’ in and of the EU, whereby I will structure my discussion through the three selected concepts that are of importance in the practices turn. In other words, what I have in mind is a selective retrieval of certain ideas that are propagated within the practices turn by having in mind their potential of increasing an understanding of the substantial issue at hand. [This implies that I give a very unequal treatment to the many ideas that might fall under the practices turn.⁴

methodological individualism, network analysis), structuralism, structure-functionalism, systems theory, *semiotics*, and many strains of humanism and *poststructuralism*. (2)

³ Such search for a realism –in contrast to intellectualism – is strongly evident in the emphasis on the body.

⁴ A crucial difference is: I am interested in the constitution of something. Practice theory, in contrast, is –

II. Revisiting the polity- and the normative turn

For about the last ten years, the discourses on the European Union are marked by two interconnected 'turns', which served as guiding ideas under which a significant part of the research was undertaken. With regard to the 'polity-turn', the European Union is less conceived of as an instance of an international organisation, nor merely as a process – as implicit in the term “European *integration*” - but as having reached a stage which justifies its nomination as a *polity*.⁵ This 'polity turn' went hand in hand with the “normative turn.”⁶ This latter turn operates in – diverse - languages that are principally derived from the registers of political philosophy (or normative political theory) and, even though to a lesser degree, social theory. The question of the viability, legitimacy and normativity of this new political order is posed;⁷ one asks about the social and cultural *underpinnings* of this new political order; inquiries are made as to the *political identity* or *normative self-understanding* of the European Union; finally, a political philosophy that “fits” this novel political order is searched for and developed. But slightly differently: the normative turn is concerned with the identification of ‘standards of evaluation (or, of goodness)’ which the EU as a polity has or ought to fulfil for it to be “viable” or “legitimate.”⁸

1. Cultural and social underpinnings

While I will come back to some features of the 'polity turn later on, I will focus here on a specific, and again selective, reading of the normative turn. A widely shared position within the normative discussions on the European Union is that for the political institutions to be *legitimate and/ or viable*, they can not be 'free-standing' (another expression would be: de-coupled), but have to be linked to, or *underpinned* by, something else. Divergences in the literature exist as to *what* this 'something else' is conceived of. Admittedly presented in a very (and maybe over-) schematic way, one might differentiate between two major positions: a first, which conceives of this

primarily – interested in the maintenance of a social order (in stability, continuities, regularities).

⁵ Similar terms that were and are still in usage are: political system and political order.

⁶ Bellamy & Castiglione (2001).

⁷ As one scholar speaks about an “intensive debate about the basis institutional structure of the emerging polity and *the kind of normativity that can or should be built into it.*” Rainer Schmalz-Bruns, 2004, 59, my emphasis).

⁸ The notions of 'legitimacy' and 'viability', do, in many instances of their usage, comprises a normative (or philosophical) and an empirical (or historical) dimension: They do refer to a criteria (or rather: a set of such criteria) of goodness, in view of which the polity is taken to be viable or legitimate. But they also refer to an observable condition of a polity: for instance, a disintegrating polity is taken as an indicator of its lacking viability or legitimacy.

something in terms of “the social” (or “socio-political”) opposed by a second, which takes it to be something “cultural.”

I shall start my discussion with the second position, which might be called a *cultural* one. The contributions to it assume that a *political order* needs to be based on a community conceived of in cultural terms. This cultural community is preceding the political order/ polity, so that one might speak of it being *pre-political*. This cultural perspective is concerned with common experiences and their interpretations (that is: a common European history). This interpreted experiences are to foster a sense of commonness in the first place (what often goes under the term ‘collective/ cultural identity’), and, more specifically, are to serve as the basis for *common orientations/ values* that might guide common political action. Differently put, one might also speak of a community constituted and held together by common *meanings* (for which the term ‘values’ is often evoked).⁹

The position that puts the idea of *social* underpinnings in the foreground seems, at first sight, to stand in direct opposition to such a cultural understanding: a significant proportion of these construction did – and some still do – emphasis the necessity of an uncoupling of the “political” from “the cultural.” Yet, as already mentioned, the European political realm is not conceived to be free-standing, but is – in order to be viable - linked to a space of communication/ deliberation. For this space, notions such as ‘public sphere’, ‘civil society’ and ‘citizenship’ are evoked. Despite the variety of conceptions, it might be argued that most of them have in common the idea of a space in which a *collective of Europeans* (often more specifically understood as “European citizens”) are “united” (irrespective of what is understood as their diverse cultural background) for the purpose of political discussion.

The differences between the two conceptions of necessary underpinnings could be further developed. What should, instead, be emphasised here is the both conceptions work with a notion of *coherence*, or, differently put, they are concerned with the question of “what holds the European polity together.” Such a demand for ‘coherence’ has two dimensions: first, it concerns the *link* between on the one hand (the conception of) a ‘political sphere proper’, understood in

⁹ Without going into any detail here, it should be noted that the contributions that might be subsumed under this heading have reached a high degree of differentiation and sophistication, in view of which the often forwarded critique of this perspective as being “essentialist”, exclusionary or relying in too unreflective a way on the – for both practical and normative reasons – unrepeatable experience of “the European nation state”, seems hardly justified. Cf. Biedenkopf et al. 2004.

narrow terms as the European institutions and, on the other hand, a collective of human beings that are seen as Europeans, for which the terms and (cultural) *community* or (civic/ political) *society* are evoked. They thereby use rely on key notions of social and political thought that conceive of 'social whole', wholes that cohere. Second, it concerns the 'glue' (force or substance) that holds together this 'collective of Europeans', and at the same time constitutes this group of human being as a *distinct*, that is: identifiable one. In the conception of a European cultural community, this 'glue' is made of interpretation and narratives of common experiences - and of 'European values' that derive from these common experiences. In the socio-political understanding of the polity, the glue is rather conceived of as shared principles and understandings on the basis of which common deliberation can take place – and not the least the communication itself (but which are, at the same time, conceived to be the outcome of the deliberation). One might thus say that in *both* conceptions thus share the idea that it is *common normative meanings* that ensure coherence – and thereby viability.

On the background of this brief discussion and in view of the following argument, the two main positions in the normative debate have a double concern¹⁰: first, the identification of key normative concepts which give the European Union as a polity its principled orientations and meanings. Here, the notions that are regularly evoked are many: human rights, peace, prosperity, the rule of law, democracy, solidarity, diversity, security, freedom, equality, to name a few. Second, the task to 'localise' these normative concepts in some 'reality', the latter being conceived in cultural *or* in social terms. The European polity is evaluated as legitimate and viable, if both conditions can be positively affirmed, or at least, their development in a foreseeable future not taken to be impossible. One might say that the justification and critique of the European polity is thus concerned with the identification of central meanings, and, secondly, with the identification of a carrier ("Träger") of these meanings, for which terms as society and culture, that is macro-phenomena are evoked.

However, with regard to these two dimensions a number of questions arise. Empirically, one might note that as to the actual identification of such a (collective) *Träger*, the findings are wanting: Neither a self-conscious "cultural community" (or "Erfahrungsgemeinschaft") nor a European public sphere, and even less a European society can (easily) be detected – for the time being. Yet also conceptually some doubts might be apposite: is it adequate to – still – think in terms of a society and a culture/ cultural community? In other

¹⁰ Again, I would like to emphasise that the actual debate is much more diversified and complex. The presentation here has the primary aim to serve for the following argument.

words, it seems as if large parts of the normative discussion did not take the criticism as to the usefulness of these concepts as it occurred over the last twenty to thirty years very seriously.¹¹ As to the shared meanings (in particular: values and principle), again two criticisms can be raised: first, they often seem to be taken to be simply present in the collectives (as something shared) – yet, how one should imagine this location and the sharing is not so clear. Second, when lists of these central normative concepts are evoked, their respective meanings seem to be taken for granted, to be apparent. Yet, the work on concepts that emphasises the ambiguity of meaning and historicity and openness of language is not taken seriously here either. In other words, their meaning is often de-contextualised.

2. The polity between political community and institutional structure

At this point, I would like to return to the ‘polity’ turn, presenting a similarly brief inquiry as to the concept ‘polity’. In the current usage of the term, at least two background meanings seem to be present, each of which is in a concrete usage differently weighted. The first meaning stems from the tradition of normative political – mostly Republican, but also “communitarian” – theory, whereby the polity denotes both the (institutional) space in which free and equal citizens deliberate on the things they hold in common as well as on the collective of these citizens themselves. One might say, in short, that here the polity refers to a political community. Only relatively few historical instances would qualify for this conception of the polity. The second meaning, roughly, understands by the term polity an institutional arrangement in which political authority is exercised. A related term here might be the one of political order, or, political system. As, at least for (Western) Europe, over the last 400 years the historical instance of this intentional version of such a polity was the – often called modern – state, many features that are associated with the notion of the polity are unsurprisingly derived from this historical phenomenon (, though it might be much more apt to speak of a diversity of phenomena).

However, one might cast doubt whether either a strong normative conception as the polity-qua-political community on the one or as the polity-qua-state on the other are still appropriate. If one still would like to hold on to this nomination in view of the present condition of the European Union, one possibility might be to opt for a very lean conception of the term, or, differently put, one that holds few (both normative and substantial) (pre-)assumptions, conceiving of “a polity”

¹¹ The problem is that the focus lies on an already given existence of a community (or society) - or, for the most part, its absence - and less on the common activities which they would then have in common - and which could *then* turn it into a community.

as a somehow ordered arrangement (or configuration) of the exercise of political authority, or: the production and application of binding rules. Or, and it is here that I would like to introduce the first key idea of the 'practise turn'; one might speak of the polity as a set of – institutionalised – political (and administrative) practises. The specificity of a polity in space and time derives then to a large degree from the *kind* of political practices that are exercised. Again very crudely put one might say that the question of the "nature" of the European polity (and in particular the question how alike or not alike to the phenomenon of nation-states – and its conceptualisation – which is familiar to us, namely the post-1945 western European national welfare-state, and thus a very *specific* historical phenomenon) might then be answered by the observation what configuration of what kind of practices (or one might say: policy areas) the EU polity is actually constituted of. Having hereby proposed to 'de-substantialised' understanding of the polity and conceived of it as a set of practices, these practices will in the following be understood as – in the literal sense – constitutive for the European polity, these practices will be analysed through a largely pragmatic understanding of political action (or, that is, human action in general). (European) action in common is a response to a situation that is interpreted as problematic and thus in need to be addressed by such common action, that is: politically.

3. The normativity of the EU in practise

At this point, the question of the polity turn is to be joined with the one of the normative turn – by introducing key elements of the practice turn. I thus translate the question of the 'normativity of the EU' as one of a normative self-understanding of the EU. However, I argue that this and can not merely be the occupation of political theory (especially in light of the above mentioned difficulties), but one of an empirical interpretative investigation. I thus think it is meaningful to conceive of a self-understanding of the European Union which is emerging and can be *observed* in those political actions that constitute the EU polity itself. The normative self-understanding is here taken to consist of a set of 'evaluative concepts' [that is ideas which give orientation of being in the world]. Three points follow from this: First, these concepts 'appear' in political *situations*: they serve both for the identification of the situation and as justifications for the action that is undertaken in response. Second, the site of the concepts is thus *actions*, actions that are constitutive for the EU polity. Third, it is a plurality of normative concepts which are mobilised in each situation and it is in these specific situations that the meaning of the concept is specified. In the remainder of this paper I want to discuss how these three aspects are key ideas of the practise thought and illustrate how they can illuminate the question of a normative self-understanding of the EU in 'practise.'

III. Situation, Action and Meaning and the question of a normative self-understanding

In this section, I want to explore how certain key notions of the practise turn might be 'applied' to the questions of the polity turn and the normativity of the EU. Thereby, I will for all three concepts first speak in general terms about the idea at stake and then, in a second step, sketch what it could mean for the analysis of a EU self-understanding.

1. A given and open situation: worldliness and specificity

In practise thinking, the concept of the situation takes a key position. Two dimension of it shall be highlighted, here, which might be called: world-liness and specificity. First, the notion 'situation' implies that it is a *given* situation in the world.¹² Such 'givenness' can be illustrated by the expression that one finds oneself in a situation and one is facing a situation. This worldliness consists of relating to human beings (that is the social) and to things in the world. It implies a strong move away from strong idealism (without, though, falling into materialism). It implies a move towards that which is apparent.¹³ Barnes notes that "In contrast, to insist that the bedrock of all order and agreement is agreement in practise is to cite something *public* and *visible*, something that is manifest in what members do."¹⁴ Thus, also meanings are taken to be apparent, and not, as it is often conceived, to be 'underlying' reality (and thus only articulated in it), or, to be merely the superstructure (Überbau) of actual social life, as it was conceived of in Marxism (and it still present in version on critique of ideology).¹⁵

Second, the notion of the situation, or: situatedness is one through which *specificity* is emphasised. Human social life (and thus also political life) takes place in specific situations; actions and meanings are thus situated. This emphasis is one that moves away from any versions of systemic or structuralist thinking about the social world. Moreover, the situated nature of human action is linked to the concept of contingency: the situation and the actors and

¹² Cf. Heideggers Being in the world.

¹³ Stern notes that "Wittgenstein is one of the greatest critics of the myth that the phenomena of our daily lives must be explained by something invisible that lies behind them." (Stern, 17)

¹⁴ Barnes, 2001, 17.

¹⁵ The concept of a situation implies a givenness, or, one might say: a being in the world (Heidegger). Ethnomethodology - Schütz.

meanings therein are not determined. Thus, thinking in terms of situatedness implies on the one hand a recourse to 'givenness' (which implies notions as reality and materiality), while, on the other hand, also emphasising the openness and indeterminacy of any situation (it is, literally, not 'given as such' – and thus the need to interpret it, to make sense of it (an aspect to which I will return to further below).

I suggest that the emergence of the EU as a polity should also be understood with regard to such situatedness: the practices that make up the European polity were responses to specific situation which again occurred in a specific situation: this is true throughout the history of institutionalised European integration. From the beginnings in the post-war years, the launch of the single market program in the early 1980s and the policies of the 1990s in the context of a post-cold war situation. Such a view makes general theories of regional integration a difficult undertaking, theories which are to a significant degree 'context blind.' At the same time, it puts questions on the assumption that the EU polity is a 'polity like any other' (Hix), which can then both analytically and normatively treated by an already given set of concepts and assumptions. In contrast, I take the practices that constitute the EU polity to be specific answers to specific situations.¹⁶ Moreover, it sheds strong doubts that one given and general political theory could simply be applied to the EU.

2. Active human beings and practices of justifications

A situation is, also, always a situation 'for someone.' It is this idea of human beings and their activities that shall be discussed. This leads to the concept of an actor - and this is the concept we will turn to now: In criticism of both strongly systemic reasoning (be they of socio-structural, be they of textual/ discourse kind), the practise turn can also be understood as 'bringing active human beings back in.' Thus Barnes states that "accounts of order and agreement that refer to practice presume not passive actors bus active members, members who reconstitute the system of shared practices by drawing upon it as a set of resources in the course of living their lives."¹⁷ This human engagement in and with the world, or, as one might say: this intervention into the situation is an exercise of *power*.¹⁸

¹⁶ Even while the problematique addressed might be a similar one as in previous/ other polities.

¹⁷ Barnes 18.

The kind of action that is of concern in the constitution of the EU as a polity is a specific one: it is in view of a situation that is identified as problematic that the different (national) actors find an agreement on common action – and thus to constitute themselves as a collective European actor. For example, the perception that immigration is a common concern of the different EU member states lead to the decision to engage in common action – and thus to constitute a practice that becomes one part of the EU polity. This implies that the emergence of the EU as a polity should not be seen as a self-perpetuating process, but as a deliberate construction in view of a problematic situations. And these are situations in need of justification, the aspect that I will turn to now.¹⁹

Secondly, the practise turn invites us to think in terms of *activities*.²⁰ This is most evident in the semantic conceptual switch from society to social practices, culture to cultural practices, the state to practices of authority. A similar transformation into an activity shall also be done with the key notion of the normative turn, that is legitimacy. Instead of thinking in terms of legitimacy as something given (or identifiable), a practise perspective would think of legitimation as an activity, or, in the term which I prefer, justification (, and, as its inverse, critique). In such justification and criticism the normative concepts are evoked which I take to be constitutive for the self-understanding of the EU.²¹ Here, two different instances can be differentiated: the first one is the identification of a situation as problematic. This is indeed a criticism of the situation, where it is interpreted as problematic in view of criteria of evaluation. What happens here is, in other words, to make sense of the situation, to identify, what is 'at stake'.²² If political action can be understood as problem solving, then what is identified is a problem. One could thus describe the activity at hand as 'problematization', or, indeed, a criticism of a situation.²³ Second, these same criteria of evaluation (normative concepts) are used in order to justify the action that is undertaken in response to the situation. The site of the normative meanings are thus activities of criticism and justifications – activities which are *one constitutive dimension* – and not just

¹⁸ Power over the flow of migrants; military interventions; who is allowed to enter the EU – and under what conditions.

¹⁹ It should be mentioned, here, that not all situations are situation of justification. Political action, as it is action in common, however, is a kind of situation in which the prerequisite for giving such justifications is rather high. These situations are public – and the EU wants them to be, more and more, public, visible, in order to be visible itself.

²⁰ One could speak of a move from ideas as foundations or underpinnings – as in much of political theory to the one of justifications (that is: linguistic practises – or, one might say: discursive practices).

²¹ It is evident that both activities are linguistic, or: discursive activities. On the relation of language, discourse, discursive practices and meanings much more could be said – maybe should be said.

²² Identification of a situation (what is at stake - and this statement of 'what is' is a *moral statement* – it is an evaluation). Often there is an uncertainty, what the situation is about.

²³ Cf. Other widely he notions like 'interpretative schemes', 'frames' ...

additional rhetoric - of the overall political action in the situation.

3. Normative concepts: plurality and interpretation

The practise theory can be seen as part of the 'cultural turn' in the social and human science, as has been remarked in the introduction. Any such cultural approaches are concerned with meanings. Yet, the specificity of a practise approach is to locate this meaning in activities. What these activities could be in the case of studying a self-understanding of the EU, namely criticism and justifications, I discussed in the preceding section. Here, I will be concerned with the kind of meanings that are at stake here.

What I would like to refer to by this notion appears under a number of different terms: values, principles, norms, ideas, ideals, registers of evaluation, normative standards. Not the least in order to avoid the debate that surround concepts such as "values" or "principles", I would like to propose the term "normative concepts" as the basic unit through which justification proceeds: *normative*, to denote that some standard/ criteria is evoked; *concept*, to emphasis the dimension of language that is constitutive for justifications. From here, the "unit of analysis" which the investigation of the normative self-understanding of the European Union is focused on are such normative concepts in their usage as justifications.

Two important issues arise here, though. The first concerns the issue of identifiability of such normative concepts in the case of the self-understanding of the EU. While - and hereby inspired by the idea of value pluralism - there is a *plurality* of justifications that can be applied in any one situation, it is not helpful to conceive of them as indefinite. Thus, with the aim to speak about a self-understanding of the European Union as constituted by a set of such normative concepts, I will look for a *limited* number – that is "a set" – of such justifications. *Second*, with respect to idea of "normative", a broad understanding of what counts as a normative concept, as a normative justification shall be followed here. Thereby, I try to depart from the familiar distinctions between interests (and maybe passions) on the one and ideals, values and principles on the other, between material or instrumental versus normative (and/ or moral) motivations/ rationalities. While in the conceptualisations "security" and "material well-being" are put in the former camp, notions of justice, human rights, democracy, equality and solidarity in the latter. In contrast, and here, as said, following Boltanski and Thévenot, I take the evocation of security or material well-being also as normative concepts, as justifications. Differently put, I suggest *symmetry* between

the different justifications should, for the purpose of observation, be assumed.

A closed set of concepts?

Which normative concepts be considered the constitutive to be constitutive for the (self-understanding of) the European Union polity? As alluded to above, any such nomination of a specific set is a matter of – disputable – interpretation (, and indeed not the least a political decision itself). The five normative concepts – or ‘orders of justification’ – that I identify derive from both theoretical and empirical grounds: *Theoretical*, in so far as I assume that key concepts/ issues in contemporary political theory are likely to be found also in the self-understanding of a contemporary polity: here, the three concepts of human rights, democracy and diversity seem hardly avoidable. *Empirically*, in so far as an observation of the justifications evoked in different areas of political action brought additional normative concepts to the fore: while the three normative concepts mentioned above were present, one could also observe a strong and recurrent usage of the concepts of “socio-economic welfare” and of “stability/ security.”

It might be easily – and justifiably – asked why not other normative concepts are included in this list – normative concepts to which the EU does resort. Here, for instance, the “rule of law”, “freedom” and “equality” could come to my mind. A first response to this was already given above, that is the necessary limitation of *any* such “list” (, in the awareness that it is just one possible set). The second answer is more important, though: while I take for my investigation *these* five concepts to be central (and for practical purposes the ones around which the investigation proceeds), it is not the case that other normative concept would disappear from sight. Rather, the meaning of the core concepts, in the context of the respective policy situation, is given not the least by their relation (of association or also dissociation) with these other concepts. Thus, the concept of “human rights” is heavily intertwined with notions of “the rule of law” and of “human dignity”; diversity with notions of “non-discrimination” and “cultural autonomy”. One might say that the meaning of each core concept *is* a configuration of such other concepts.

IV. Concluding remarks: specific inputs and the question of cohesion

I will conclude on two aspects: first, on the input of notions of the practical turn; second, on the

idea of cohesion. It became apparent that what goes under the practise turn is a set of rather disparate assumptions, which derive to a large degree from the fact that (what is taken under) practise thought derived from turns against a number of rather different other theoretical orientations. It might therefore be erroneous to think one could import a practise turn as one package into European studies. Rather, and this was the strategy that was very tentatively explored here, one might take certain assumptions that are central in practise thought (very broadly conceived) and see what they can bring in terms of new insight when applied to one phenomenon of the EU. Consequently, the aspects that are taken from the practise turn might then differ with respect to the issue that is studied. Here, I tried to apply the notions of the situation, actorness and activity, and plural meanings to the question of a self-understanding of the European Union. Whether these key notions that underlie the approach that was outlined here could not be derived from intellectual moves under different labels than the one of a 'practise turn' is a valid question, though.

As to the idea of cohesion that is so prevalent in the normative literature, the following might be remarked: First, it is through agreement found over the identification of a situation and the justification of action in response to that situation that common action – and in this sense – coherence and stability of one situation is brought about. Second, as to the coherence of the polity, one might speculate the following: a) the coherence of the polity might increase if the set of justifications used in different situations are similar, or rather: do not evoked strong contradictions. Such similarity of the justifications evoked will be strengthened if the situations themselves become more and more linked (e.g. in the fields of development aid and security and immigration). Lastly, as to the relation of those practices to the European citizens: while I bracketed this question – so dominant in the normative literature – for this paper, I can be assumed that the polity increased in stability (and viability), the registers of evaluation evoked in the practices of the of the EU citizens show similarities to those of in the more narrow political sphere – and if, most desirable, they do influence and shape these normative concepts that are used in practise.