Praxis as a Perspective on International Politics

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Introduction:
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Gunther Hellmann and Jens Steffek

The theory of International Relations (IR) is in a state of soul-searching, if not disorientation.[1] The great 'inter-paradigm debates' that still marked the discipline in the 1990s and early 2000s have all but disappeared. Proliferation of ever new approaches and increasing fragmentation of debates dominate the disciplinary landscape today. IR theory discussions are now clustering within specific academic schools and subfields that revolve around their preferred 'ism' and hardly speak to each other, while much of the mainstream of the discipline is turning its attention to questions of methodology rather than theory. Practitioners of international politics, all the while, find it increasingly difficult to see the relevance of these academic debates for their own work and the pressing political (as well as theoretical) challenges posed by the rise of authoritarianism and populism, escalating climate change and the return of global pandemics.

There is, however, a family of theoretical approaches that hold the twin promise to alleviate the current state of parochialism and fragmentation and to reach out to those who practice international politics and not just study IR. These approaches ground their theorizing in the 'praxis', or practice, of international relations. Since much of this interaction is performed in the language of law, this turn to praxis and practice also facilitates much needed cooperation between IR and international legal scholarship.

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[1]   For an overview informing the take by one of the two editors, see Hellmann (2020).

Situating praxis theorizing

To speak of praxis theorizing instantly raises a few terminological questions, at least from an IR theory perspective, since major segments of IR usually figure under the label 'practice theory' in the aftermath of a 'practice turn' (Neumann, 2002; Bueger and Gadinger, 2018). Accordingly, the concepts of 'practice' and 'practices' are much more prevalent than 'praxis'. The latter, however, played an important role already in an early phase of pragmatist and Wittgenstein-inspired social theory (Bernstein, 1971; Bloor, 1983), and a small segment of IR theory (Kratochwil, 1989: 210; 2018: 410–40; Onuf, 1989: 35–65), well before 'constructivism' assumed its prominent role as a new IR 'ism' in the 1990s. Following this strand and the clues that these social theorists and IR scholars, in turn, took from Aristotle, Hume, Marx, Wittgenstein and Dewey, we believe it is helpful to explore some of the different uses and meanings associated with 'praxis' in contrast to prevalent understandings of 'practice' and 'practices' in IR.

The traditions of praxis theorizing just mentioned basically conceptualize praxis as *social action here and now*. The Aristotelian and Marxian understandings both add a teleological twist in the sense of a liberating activity aimed at achieving a 'happy life' (Aristotle) or 'emancipation' (Marx). Yet in a Wittgensteinian and pragmatist tradition, such distinctly normative connotations remain in the background. Rather, in identifying with Goethe's famous line from *Faust* ('In the beginning was the *Deed*'),[2] these social philosophers emphasize not only that praxis is the basis of everything else that necessarily follows (in a temporal sense) but also that it is unique *and* rule-following at the same time; that it entails both conscious (reflective) action and unconscious (instinctive) doing; and that it is inevitably transitory. In this conceptualization of praxis, the distinction between theory and practice turns on a notion of 'theory' which is, by necessity, not only post hoc but also pattern-*seeking* for very practical cognitive needs. Theorizing relates to sense-*making* after the fact (or 'deed'), whereas praxis relates to coping here and now – or simply: our ability of 'going on' (Kratochwil, 2018: 151, 416–17). In this understanding theorizing is, of course, a form of praxis, but the same does not apply vice versa.

The English word 'practice' usually, if implicitly, also covers this dimension of the meaning of praxis as coping. Yet in the context of the so-called practice

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2   Goethe (2014 [1808]: 33, emphasis in original); in contrast to the translation provided by Stuart Atkins of the German 'Tat' as 'Act' we have preferred the more forceful 'Deed'; see also Marx's 8rd thesis in his *Theses on Feuerbach* (Marx, 1969 [1888]: 15). On the primacy of praxis in pragmatism, see Putnam (1995: 52); on its priority in Wittgenstein's work, see Bloor (2001).

turn in the social sciences in general (Schatzki et al, 2001) and in IR in particular (see Cornut, 2017 for a recent overview), the focus has more often been on 'a' practice as something that needed to be placed in the context of a dualistic distinction between materiality and discursiveness, where practice was relegated more to the 'material' than the 'discursive' side of things (Neumann, 2002: 629–30; Bueger, 2017: 329). Alternatively, 'practices' have also been prominently defined as 'competent performances' or 'socially meaningful *patterns* of action' (Adler and Pouliot, 2011: 4, emphasis added).

To be sure, no serious IR practice turn theorist would claim that *all* social action is shaped by *competent* performances. For far too long too much research in the field has pointed to utter *in*competence in the practice of international politics and foreign policy (Jervis, 1976; Janis, 1982). Yet the bias towards 'competence' and 'patterned' action of significant portions of 'practice turn' research has decidedly ignored the emphasis on what the pragmatists have termed the *genuine creativity* of social action (Dewey, 1938: 101–19; Joas, 1992), as well as the fact that patterns are not 'things' out there in the world but are created by us in the process of sense-making in order to be able to 'go on'.

Conceiving of practice and practices as competent and patterned performances which express a 'logic of habit' (Hopf, 2010), therefore, significantly delimits what falls into the focus of practice turn scholarship. To be sure, practices as *typical ways of acting* − or '*Handlungsweisen*', as Wittgenstein's notion of 'practices' is usually translated from his original writing in German (Wittgenstein, 2009 [1953]) – do cover a significant part of social action in general and of the politics of international relations praxis in particular. Yet many of the most interesting subjects in IR scholarship (i.e. international politics) relate to phenomena which are either recognized for their 'uniqueness' or are rendered into objects of study for the purposes of 'scientific generalization' via 'simplification' or the ascription of 'case' status in a particular 'universe of cases' (King et al, 1994: 42–6, 125). However, when we theorize international politics in this generalizing fashion and, for instance, 'see … durable relationships of enmity and amity between and among states, or any patterns of enduring practices between and among them' (Hopf, 2010: 547), this type of 'seeing' is as much based on attribution (due to a certain way of our conditioning as observers) as it is based on revelation. This is what Wittgenstein refers to, among others, in his 'duck–rabbit' example of 'aspect seeing' (Wittgenstein, 2009 [1953]: 203–4; Day and Krebs, 2010) and the arbitrariness of attributing 'likeness' or patterns in 'seeing' something.

Some positivists even acknowledge this. In their influential book *Designing Social Inquiry*, King, Keohane and Verba emphasize the importance of distinguishing between 'systematic' and 'non-systematic' factors in the process of 'scientific generalization'. Yet they also concede that the unambiguousness of this distinction depends on human cognition and the reliability of

distinguishing between patterns and 'nonpatterns' – and that humans 'are not very good at recognizing nonpatterns. (Most of us see patterns in random ink blots!)' (King et al, 1994: 21). Therefore, relationships of enmity and amity do not reveal *themselves* to us. Rather, it is we who try to make *practical sense* of such relationships by *describing* them in such terms, and it is also we who *ascribe patterns* to them as a result of comparison.

Drawing this out is important because the notions of praxis which inform the chapters in this volume do not restrict social action in international relations to repetitive or patterned agency in the more restrictive understanding of 'practice turn' scholarship. When we theorize the praxis of international politics, we are as much interested in understanding what we have come to identify as *typical* ways of conducting relations among states (e.g. practices of negotiating, threatening or punishing) as we are in 'seeing' and describing in novel ways how individual human beings and societies make choices in 'problematic situations' under conditions of uncertainty and how they interact across borders.

Praxis theorizing in this understanding may take the form of more detached description expressed in more or less familiar vocabularies; it may focus on exploring concepts and how they are used; or it may choose a more explicitly normative form of 'redescription' (Rorty, 1989: chapters 1–3) that entices readers to look at things differently and act differently as a result. Yet in all these cases the attitude accompanying this type of praxis theorizing downplays or outrightly rejects implicit dualistic framings of empirical social science *versus* normative political theory or the opposition of history (and uniqueness) *versus* theory (and generalization), which so often mark IR discourse. Instead, it emphasizes that habit and patterned agency *as well as* conceptual explication/innovation and creative problem-solving form a continuum in praxis – irrespective of whether this praxis relates to everyday practical life, international politics or the theorization of either.

In this understanding the contributors to this volume locate themselves in a broadly conceived tradition of theorizing international politics and international law which is – despite all the drawbacks of premature intellectual closure and a detrimental narrowing of theoretical horizons associated with typical IR 'isms' – probably still best captured by the label 'constructivism', at least if we conceive constructivism's 'original promise' in terms of 'restructuring the way of inquiry by taking on the pragmatists' criticism of orthodox theorizing seriously', as Fritz Kratochwil put it recently (Kratochwil, 2019).[3]

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[3]   See also Kratochwil (2018, chapter 1). On similar understandings of constructivism, see also Kessler and Steele (2016) (which introduces a 'special issue' of the *European Review of International Studies* on the theme of 'third generation' IR constructivism) and Nexon et al (2017).

Fritz Kratochwil and praxis theorizing

While sticking (somewhat uneasily) with the label 'constructivism', Fritz Kratochwil has in recent years elaborated his own take on praxis in one of the most ambitious, persistent and transdisciplinary attempts in IR to reconcile theory and practice. *Praxis*, the tome that Kratochwil published in 2018, builds on a line of work that has been unfolding since the 1980s and is a major provocation to mainstream theorizing in academic IR (Kratochwil, 2018). His approach rejects the popular strategy of deductive theory-building and hypothesis-testing to discover eternal laws of politics. For Kratochwil, such an endeavour is simply chimeric. In terms of method, it rejects the mathematical abstraction and formal modelling that make social science look so alluringly professional, and it also rejects 'ideal theory'. Not least, the concept of praxis defies the conventional distinction between theory and practice (Kratochwil, 2019).

With the explicit turn to praxis as a guiding concept in the 2000s, Kratochwil's scholarship transcended its earlier focus on norms, rules and principles that had gained him the reputation of being a leading IR constructivist (Kratochwil, 1989). Although it never fit in comfortably, Kratochwil's earlier work needs to be seen in the context of the inter-paradigm debates that dominated mainstream IR from the 1970s to the 1990s. In his attacks on the intellectual poverty of neo-realism and rational choice, Kratochwil underlined the 'force of prescriptions'. The point was to show that social and legal norms, and not just considerations of power or economic self-interest, have a considerable influence on international politics. That norm-centred framing of his contribution allowed Kratochwil to hook up to the ongoing debates about the causes of international conflict and the chances of cooperation.

At the same time, Kratochwil was unwilling to play the positivist game and use norms as 'variables' in research designs aimed at establishing causal mechanisms and law-like regularities. 'While it is true that rules and norms often function like causes, in many contexts they work differently', he wrote. 'Norms are used to make demands, rally support, justify action, ascribe responsibility, and assess the praiseworthy or blameworthy character of an action' (Kratochwil, 1984: 686). That definition of what norms can do defied the mainstream conceptualization of norms as triggers of action but promised to accommodate the complexity and historical situatedness of decisions. With the notion of praxis as an overarching conceptual frame, Kratochwil cast the net even wider and abandoned 'the sterile debate' about norms and ideas in mainstream IR (Kratochwil, 2000: 77). Since law and social norms inform practical judgements, they remain in the picture of *Praxis*, even though they lose pride of place when compared with Kratochwil's earlier writings.

Other dimensions of praxis have become more important, such as the broader connection between knowledge and action. For Kratochwil, knowledge as *knowing how* resides in the competent performance of an act. His praxis perspective centres on what actors, including academic observers, do when they act in making choices here and now. To act means to engage others as social actors, where 'the crucial "social" element' highlights that '*actions of agents are meaningfully oriented toward each other*' (Kratochwil, 2010: 447, emphasis in original). To act also means to *judge*, and in placing the notion of judgement at the centre of praxis (Kratochwil, 2018: 427–40), Kratochwil here joins forces with pragmatists such as Dewey (1938, Part II: 101–280) who have insisted all along, if via different intellectual routes, that judgements are always made in *specific* contexts (or 'problematic situations') and that they are made for *specific* purposes (or 'ends-in-view', as Dewey (1938: 167–80) put it). 'Inquiry' in this sense is creative problem-solving which applies in equal fashion to everyday social action (*praxis*) *here and now* as it applies to problem-solving in the social sciences – or 'social inquiry' as both Dewey (1938: 487–512) and Kratochwil (2018: 45) put it – as necessarily post hoc observation, description, explanation and rationalization. Neither 'trans-historical truths that are tested against the world "out there"' (Kratochwil, 2018: 32) nor eternal laws of politics are possible or even necessary because sound *judgement* is all we need and all we can get. Such judgements are always *made*, and in competently making them we equally need to properly grasp the context of social action here and now *in acting* (praxis), as we need to re-enact the judgements of others in *theorizing* social action post hoc when we reconstruct their perspective on and acting in the social world. As social scientists this requires us to engage with the whole spectrum of social action – culture and history, norms and ideas, values and aspirations.

Unlike newer versions of 'practice theory', Kratochwil's praxis perspective stands in the broad tradition of humanism that suggests a holistic perspective on human beings and social action. Humans judge, choose and act under the impression of their emotions, their backward-looking experience and their forward-looking expectations, with an urge to make sense of the world and attach meaning to their own role in it. Even when we observe the social world, we remain situated in it. This is why 'praxis' is at odds with the textbook ideal of a detached, disinterested and 'objective' observer. Its ideal is not the 'discovery' of objective facts about international politics but to better understand what is required in political action to arrive at competent judgement in specific historical situations.

Since Kratochwil's book *Praxis* epitomizes the necessary breadth and depth of praxis theorizing, it will serve as a major point of reference for all the chapters in this volume. However, the overarching purpose of this volume is not to celebrate Kratochwil's accomplishments but to critically engage with

his ideas and proposals in the context of the broader debate about praxis, practice and practices and to pursue multiple avenues in order to explore where praxis theorizing might head in broadening its scope. The contributors to this book accept the premise that competent judgement matters in international affairs, no matter what our precise role in them is. They also accept the premise that this is easier said than done and that proper praxis theorizing needs to do justice to the complexities of practical judgement (in contrast to academic idealizations of parsimonious theorization). Hence, they are eager to explore to what extent praxis theorizing can be a viable guide to academic investigations and interventions. And interventions they are, since our words committed to paper are altering the social world they describe. As Giddens pointed out with his 'double hermeneutics', our own, social scientific vocabulary becomes part of the actions and institutions of those that we study, just as their vocabulary becomes part of our descriptions of the social world (Giddens, 1987: 30–1).

Outline of the volume

This book consists of four parts. The first section contains different explorations and illustrations of praxis theorizing in terms of what it might mean, how it is practised and how it relates to other qualitative approaches in the field of IR. In the second section, contributors focus on one essential dimension of the engagement with praxis theorizing, that is, the role of law in constituting praxis. The third section focuses on the biological 'hard-wiring' of human beings as agents, the fundamental contingency of sociality and the historicity of social and cultural transformation. The fourth section is dedicated to the relationship between praxis and academic analysis, performance and observation.

The first section kicks off with two illustrations of praxis theorizing based on backward-looking remembering and forward-looking imagination and 'prophesizing'. In Chapter 2, K.M. Fierke alerts us to how Kratochwil's notion of praxis, understood as acting here and now, relates past and future to present situations. History, she argues, is remembering, and as such is always part of a future project. What stitches together past and future are our present concerns. From this point of departure, Fierke problematizes the 'we' that constitutes David Hume's common world of 'commerce and conversation' and wonders how we can see those who have been written out of history. She takes the issue of slavery as her example, beginning with Hume's own troubling silence on the transatlantic slave trade in which his native Scotland was heavily involved. She then moves on to the 'eerie and troubling silence' surrounding Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address and his inability to 'see' the real victims of slavery when constituting the 'we' of the union rejoining North and South after the American Civil War. Her

chapter ends with reflections on the importance of redefining a global 'we' as the subject of conversation.

In Chapter 3, Cecelia Lynch assesses Kratochwil's conceptions of 'prophecy' and religion to highlight insights and tensions vis-à-vis time, history, community of meaning and certainty for praxis. What fascinates her in particular is the question of how one might think about 'immanence' in the theological/philosophical matrix within which Kratochwil theorizes. In putting Kratochwil in conversation on issues of praxis and prophecy with interlocutors such as Ian Shapiro and Michael Walzer, but also with selected theologians and social theorists such as Walter Brueggemann and Cornel West, or scholars in the tradition of pragmatism such as Jason Springs and Molly Cochran, Lynch hopes to probe forms of accompaniment with, rather than a complete U-turn from, Kratochwil's Humean analysis. These contrasts also put into sharper relief demands for action that might differ from Kratochwil's, especially with regard to multiple precarities that Lynch sees in the contemporary time.

Chapters 4 and 5 approach praxis theorizing from different angles. Christian Bueger examines what it implies to consider theorizing as a practice. He argues that the shift to the verb and the valuation of the actual work of theorizing has substantial consequences. Four are highlighted: the need for a reconceptualization of theorizing, which shifts from looking at it in terms of an achievement by an individual scholar to an understanding that sees theory as a collective achievement situated in a distinct milieu and locale; the need to focus on process and actions, rather than the object ('the theory'); the need to grasp the practical knowledge, various skills, material resources and objects that are assembled in the production of theory; and the need to recognize that there is a multiplicity of styles of theorizing. Against this background, different understandings of 'theory' and styles of theorizing come to the fore. Bueger illustrates these with examples he calls 'mechanism', 'meditation', 'method' and 'experimentation', each of which is said to ground theorizing differently in practice.

In Chapter 5, Gunther Hellmann reconstructs Kratochwil's understanding of theorizing in a tradition of linguistic turn-inspired critical reflection of praxis, which emphasizes the inherent contingency and radical openness of social action. He sides with what he redescribes, in a Rortyan vocabulary, as Kratochwil's anti-representationalist attack on typical practices of IR theorizing which range over a broad spectrum from Waltz, Keohane and Wendt all the way to contemporary forms of theorizing in the wake of the 'practice turn'. Instead of authorizing (presumably 'ontologically real') things in 'the world out there' to 'make' our theories true – irrespective of whether these 'really real' things come in the form of 'pictures of reality', 'empirical data' or 'quantum minds' – Hellmann argues that we should side with Wittgenstein's, Rorty's and Kratochwil's emphasis on the inherent

contingency of our currently used, presumably 'final' vocabulary and rest content with translating 'theorizing' with Wittgenstein as regarding 'the facts as "proto-phenomena" – that is, simply to say: this is the language-game that is being played' (Wittgenstein, 2009 [1953]: 654).

Chris Brown opens the second section of the book on praxis and law in Chapter 6 with reflections on sanctions and punishment in international relations. He critically reviews the capacity of Kratochwil's *Praxis* to guide us in situations when international law is broken. Brown contends that praxis is not action-guiding in the direct sense of being able to help us decide what to do in particular situations, even if it is able to tell us broadly how we should go on in the world. To illustrate this tension, he discusses Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the international responses to it. Brown argues that Kratochwil's thinking can tell us why neither the International Criminal Court nor the International Court of Justice are going to be helpful in this case, but it fails to give us an alternative answer. He concludes that producing such answers simply isn't what the practice turn as elaborated in *Praxis* is all about, and that, accordingly, this approach is of limited help to those who have a commitment to engaging more directly with the world of international politics.

In Chapter 7, Anthony F. Lang, Jr. explores the role that Aristotle plays – and could be playing – in a praxis approach. He first shows that Kratochwil invokes Aristotle a number of times but critiques him for having an overly theoretical focus. Lang argues that Aristotle is more beneficial than Kratochwil makes him out to be for understanding the practical dimensions of international law and politics. In particular, Aristotle provides an alternative understanding of the rule of law and how it relates to the wider international political order, one that differs both from Kratochwil and from contemporary international law. By highlighting these aspects of Aristotle's work, Lang suggests that Kratochwil is overly focused on Aristotle's theoretical side and misses the very practical dimensions of his work. As ancient constitutionalism relied more heavily on the social and the political than the narrowly legal, Lang suggests the phrase 'practical constitutionalism' to bring this dimension of Aristotle's work to the fore.

Jan Klabbers in Chapter 8 seeks to start a conversation on the role that international rules, institutions and decisions play in achieving, channelling, promoting or facilitating particular distributive results. His inquiry is inspired by the observation that in the almost 500 pages of *Praxis*, Kratochwil pays little attention to distributive questions. Klabbers claims that getting to the distributive effect of rules, institutions and decisions requires a dual intellectual operation. It will require, firstly, relaxing the strongly state-centric approach prevailing in the study of international affairs, in combination with, secondly, a realization that law, politics and economics should not be neatly separated but rather should be treated as single decision-making moments or

units. He illustrates his theoretical discussion with the case of the venerable Universal Postal Union to show how concrete (non-state) interests combine with the role of a concrete (non-state) institution.

The third section of the volume focuses on the nexus between human biology, social contingency and historical transformation on the one hand and praxis on the other. In Chapter 9, James W. Davis discusses the perspective of the first-person plural in Kratochwil's conception of praxis, examining links and tensions between Kratochwil's constructivism and current behavioural research in the fields of psychology and neuroscience. He argues that without a conception of 'we', there is no language or discourse, no possibility for authority or justice, and perhaps more controversially, no feelings or sentiments. Davis wonders how the so constructed 'we' relates to the psychological and biological agent 'I' who is engaged in praxis. He contends that the thick constructivism that underpins Kratochwil's notion of praxis at once is too radical and too conservative. It is too radical because it neglects how biology constrains what human beings in social settings can construct. Yet in ignoring how culture affects biology, it is simultaneously too conservative.

Oliver Kessler takes Kratochwil's notion of acting as vantage point to explore the problem of intersubjectivity and contingency in Chapter 10. He seeks to clarify the difference between positive and constructivist approaches in relation to expectations, common sense and 'how to go on' as central to praxis. To unpack his argument, he takes Kratochwil's discussion on game theory as vantage point to highlight the problem of intersubjectivity. He distinguishes a 'thin' version that operates in-between existing actors and a 'thick' version where intersubjectivity actually constitutes the actors in the first place. He then explores the contours of this 'thick' version of intersubjectivity by exploring the use of the concept 'society' in *Praxis*, in terms of what he calls 'triple contingency'. In the final section, he explores the different mechanisms of sense-making in dyadic and triadic constellations and argues that questions of knowledge, expertise and power are differently constituted in these two settings.

In Chapter 11, Mathias Albert prompts a conversation between Kratochwil's praxis approach and theories of social differentiation that are both concerned with the evolution of societies, domestically and internationally. He contends that Kratochwil's uses of 'theory' are rather ambivalent, lacking a distinction between 'IR theory' and other uses and concepts of 'theory'. He then enquires into Kratochwil's account of social constitution, particularly with a view to social differentiation as a defining characteristic of social systems. Albert argues that while Kratochwil's account is quite clear in this respect, it is biased towards the legal system as an integrative force under the condition of functional differentiation. While such a privileging of the legal system might not necessarily be legitimate from a view of 'pure' functional

differentiation, it could be upheld as an empirical argument about social evolution. However, for that purpose Kratochwil, as well as other practice theorists, would need to twist their account of social change in the direction of a theory of social evolution.

In Chapter 12, Jörg Friedrichs explores how discursive practices in social science can sustain, subvert and transform social realities. Taking Anthony Giddens's original framework of 'double hermeneutics' as a starting point, he develops an extended framework of 'triple hermeneutics' to show how reflexive approaches can serve sustaining, subversive and transformative purposes. He argues that Max Weber's interpretive social science is inherently conservative and geared towards stabilization. Friedrichs contrasts it with critical genealogy, developed in different versions by Nietzsche and Foucault, as inherently radical and geared towards subversion. Finally, he shows how the young Nietzsche's 'history for life' and Hume's dialectics of history were inherently reformist and geared towards transformation. Overall, Friedrichs concludes, reflexive approaches turn out to be far more relevant to social order and change than conventional wisdom suggests.

Friedrichs's musings on the purposes of social science build a bridge to the fourth section, which reflects upon the role of theorists and the practice of theorizing as a type of political intervention. In Chapter 13, Antje Wiener considers Kratochwil's praxis approach to international studies as a series of academic interventions with two lasting effects. The first consists in the project of studying human action and its effect on the transformation of norms, rules and orders through redrawing disciplinary boundaries of international studies. Second, she argues that Kratochwil's work enabled subsequent generations to engage in critical questions about international studies and advance knowledge building on these interdisciplinary strands of theoretical engagement. *Praxis* is used here as a foil to discuss effects of academic intervention, taking into account the positions of privilege and responsibility. Wiener reads *Praxis* as a 'most compellingly expressed urge to act through theory'. This is done, she argues, by engaging interdisciplinary knowledge through contesting the work of others and holding their claims to account. The purpose of intervention consists in bringing knowledge to bear in order to identify transformations within the fundamentally contested Western narrative of world order.

The last two chapters discuss the tension between a 'scientific' approach to social and political life emphasizing contemplative study, and a 'political' approach that emphasizes enacting concrete courses of action. In Chapter 14 Patrick Thaddeus Jackson argues that Kratochwil is able to produce an account of the relationship between contemplating and enacting that avoids the errors of reification. He appreciates that there is neither an analysis of 'the political' nor a doctrinaire pronouncement of the (uniquely) 'scientific method' in Kratochwil's work. To elucidate these points, Jackson places

Kratochwil in dialogue first with Max Weber, whose celebrated but often misunderstood 'vocation' lectures gesture at the road that Kratochwil ultimately takes. Jackson then suggests that it is useful to read *Praxis* alongside works of the pragmatist tradition, especially John Dewey's, to properly tease out the implications of treating both scholarly knowledge production and the responsible exercise of coercive authority as practices. Kratochwil's analysis of law as a living tradition of sense-making, rather than as a formal or rationalist alternative to political contestation, serves as an exemplary account of how the relationship between contemplating and enacting might be figured.

In Chapter 15, Jens Steffek places the praxis approach in the humanist tradition of social and political thought, interpreting it as a quest for wholeness in a modern world full of reductionism and fragmentation. He finds the humanist legacy of praxis in Kratochwil's epistemological position, which suggests that we can, and should, grasp human agency in all its facets by studying complex, historically situated situations of decision-making. Having outlined this perspective on praxis, Steffek highlights the inherent tension between the desire for wholeness and the scholarly habit of distancing and detachment. The central question for him is how world-observing scholars can adequately understand a real-world praxis that they do not enact. Kratochwil deploys an Aristotelian concept of praxis, in combination with American pragmatism, to argue that there is continuity between scientific inquiry and real-world practices. Taking issue with this continuity thesis, Steffek argues that the reflexive-critical stance of the social scientist who dissects real-world practices to gain knowledge about them is hard to reconcile with the habitual conduct of actors who rely on tacit and unquestioned knowledge.

In the last chapter, Fritz Kratochwil replies to his critics. His concluding commentary is organized around some core themes that emerged in the previous chapters. The first cluster of problems pivots around the notion of 'theory' and the relation between practising theory and going on in situations, individually and collectively. Kratochwil rejects the view that theorizing – related as it is to our time and our purposes as researchers and citizens – could provide us with something like a pure and unadulterated 'view from nowhere' or produce eternal truths that end all further questioning. He explains that if we act in order to achieve something, we are not simply observers of the world. The common academic ideal of theorizing as seeing 'how things really are' just distracts us from what is really at stake when we intervene into the world and try to realize the good life through our actions in time. Theorizing, properly conceived, is a form of critical intervention. Kratochwil then addresses another group of problems that revolve around the conception of the 'we' in social, political and legal practices. How can a 'we' as an aggregate of individuals turn into a 'we' of the first-person plural?

He concedes that repeated interaction, role-taking and communication are necessary parts of both individuation and socialization but insists that for the reproduction of a society and a body politic, more needs to happen. Beyond communication and cooperation on practical tasks, the members also need to make a commitment to the 'project' of remaining a group and, importantly, accept the transgenerational nature of an ongoing concern that requires them to act together.

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