Praxis as a Perspective on International Politics

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Practising Theorizing in Theorizing Praxis: Friedrich Kratochwil and Social Inquiry

Gunther Hellmann

[N]o one can pretend to be practically versed in a science and yet scorn theory without declaring that he is an ignoramus in his field, inasmuch as he believes that by groping about in experiments and experiences, without putting together certain principles (which really constitute what is called theory) and without having thought out some whole relevant to his business (which, if one proceeds methodically in it, is called a system), he can get further than theory could take him.

(Kant 1999 [1793], p 279)

After theory had once arisen life does not go on just the same.
(Dewey 2015 [1919], p 2; emphasis in original)

Concepts are, as Wittgenstein taught us, uses of words. Philosophers have long wanted to understand concepts, but the point is to change them so as to make them serve our purposes better.

(Rorty 2000, p 25)

Introduction

The concepts of 'theory' and 'practice' may not figure as centrally in everyday life as they figure in academic life. Yet, as the title of Kant's essay from which the introductory quote has been taken indicates,

'common sayings' such as that something 'may be true in theory, but is of no use in practice' also reveal that the duality of theory *versus* practice shapes our most fundamental ways of sense-making in everyday life. It also goes without saying that the practice of theorizing is nothing that practitioners beyond the 'sciences' worry too much about because their praxis is usually defined in terms of some practical choices which do not, at least in the first instance, relate to thinking about thinking. Academics, however, have to come to terms with 'theory' one way or another – or risk being spurned as an 'ignoramus' if they don't. This is especially true for International Relations (IR), which, 'even in the West ... did not become a predominantly academic, formally theoretical discipline until after 1945' (Buzan, 2018: 393) and has defined itself in 'theoretical' terms ever since (Wæver, 2013).

Since practising theory is at the heart of any academic practice, one should not be surprised that one can observe a very broad spectrum of practices in doing theory. The key impulse for writing this chapter was that Fritz Kratochwil's *Praxis* (Kratochwil, 2018) provides more than one reason to reflect anew about what it means to do or practise theory, that is, to *theorize*. His important book serves as a backdrop because it is a fascinating and exemplary exercise in practising theory while leaving most students initiated into the classical rituals of doing 'IR theory' perplexed. These students are told right at the start that problems of praxis cannot be 'subjected to "theoretical treatment"' or 'theory building' (Kratochwil, 2018: prelims). After completing the book and its many illuminating and learned excursions across disciplinary boundaries and back into 'the origins' of society, law and (international) politics, these students will wonder what else, if not a thoroughly *theoretical treatise*, they have been reading. It may not be what is typically called 'theory' in IR, but it is certainly not its opposite – whatever that may be. As a matter of fact, one way to read the book is as a 'practical guide' to *practising theorizing* differently – to *change* our practice of theorizing in Rorty's sense rather than to merely *understand* 'theory' better.

This is what I will argue in this chapter. I will indeed claim that Kratochwil is providing a model to emulate of what it means to theorize. As so often with his scholarly writings, he is not providing us with 'easy reading'. As a matter of fact, he is making it fairly difficult for readers to figure out what his core messages are. My own puzzlement was initially stirred in particular by – what seemed at least to me to be – a strange, even awkward way of using the words 'theory' or 'theoretical'. The very fact that chapter 1 of *Praxis* breaks with the aesthetic strategy of all remaining chapter titles by dodging the obvious title 'Theorizing' made me wonder what was gained by prominently associating the Kratochwilian approach to theorizing *praxis* with Hume and 'constructivism' instead of calling it simply 'Theorizing'. Using the gerund as the fitting grammatical form

for what English grammar books call 'action verbs' made impressive sense throughout the book in getting a new 'interdisciplinary' grip on the origins and histories of society, law and (international) politics in terms of 'constituting', 'changing', 'sanctioning' and so forth. The same seemed obvious to me as far as 'theorizing' is concerned – precisely because it emphasized some *doing* in contrast to a *thing*, 'theory', that we might 'treat', 'build' or 'test'. Moreover, Kratochwil himself explicitly (if rather late) states that we have to accept 'that *"theorizing" is itself a practice*' (Kratochwil, 2018: 426, emphasis in original).

R e-reading *Praxis* as a 'practical guide' to practising theorizing differently would, therefore, be my suggestion as to how one might resolve the tensions between Kratochwil's advocacy of a constructivist 'meta-theoretical stance' (Kratochwil, 2018: 18) on the one hand and his harsh criticism of social science scholarship on the other. The chapter is organized in three cuts of 'theorizing' – 'cuts' because the perspective on theorizing changes only slightly if one highlights different angles. The ordinary uses and combinations of the verbs *to practise* and *to theorize* with the noun or gerund of *theory* and *practice* already provide some important openings and delimitations. Four combinations are possible in principle, but only three make sense: to say that one theorizes practice, practises theorizing or theorizes theorizing all make sense because these combinations refer to doings which we do observe in one way or another in IR. To say that one practises practice is 'senseless' in Wittgenstein's understanding of a combination of words which has been 'excluded from the language, withdrawn from circulation' (Wittgenstein, 2009 [1953]: PI §500) because the sense of combining verb and noun in this fashion does not refer in any meaningful sense to an observable praxis.

Theorizing praxis

To theorize the subject matter of international politics properly starts with clarifying what praxis is all about, because an adequate understanding of praxis – in terms of 'individual and collective choices' – has significant consequences for practices of theorizing. Importantly, Kratochwil here joins Aristotle, Marx, Wittgenstein and the pragmatists in arguing that *praxis* must not be reduced to the mere 'practices' which are at the centre of the 'practice turn' (Kratochwil, 2018: 425–6). As Jens Steffek and I have argued in the 'Introduction', the much broader notion of praxis ought to be understood in terms of social action as interaction here and now, individually and collectively. Praxis happens or unfolds as interaction in time. It is unique and rule-following at the same time; it entails conscious (reflective) acting – what Dewey calls 'intelligent action' in solving complex 'problematic situations' – as well as subconscious, more instinctive or 'habitual' doing (Dewey, 1938). As *social* action it is significantly linguistic practice which, in turn, implies

that the inherent rule-following of competent language users also entails that 'practitioners'[1] constantly form novel sentences and, thus, also novel aims. Chomsky's theory that the 'finite grammars' of all natural languages 'can generate an infinite number of sentences' (Chomsky, 2002 [1957]: 24) and the 'empirical proof' of his theory which in the meantime has been furnished from different angles might even convince sceptics. This is another way of saying that complexity and contingency are *constitutive* of praxis (see also Kessler, Chapter 10, this volume).

I am reading Kratochwil as saying that we ought to conceive of international political praxis as creative social practice and that we, therefore, also ought to trace it to human choices. Here we are already entering the 'theorizing' stage of praxis. In Kratochwil's account these human choices manifest themselves in a very broad range of different forms: the formation or 'constituting' of society and law, the evolution or transformational change of sovereignty, the function and impact of norms in shaping social action and practical choices, rulings of international courts, the justification and critique of foreign policy decisions and so on. *Theorizing* this praxis (as a form of *making sense* of it) is necessarily post hoc and usually distanced in space and time from the actual interaction. To speak of praxis as 'manifesting itself' in particular forms is an indirect acknowledgement that *naming* what *constitutes* praxis and how these constitutive things hang together conceptually, sequentially or causally is already a form of theorizing. Praxis does not 'speak', only practitioners do – and their ways of 'speaking' or making sense of what has been done takes place *after* (inter)acting (with 'speech acts' being a special case).

This is one of the crucial differences, but at the same time also one of the important connections, between theory and praxis, illustrating why they belong to the same semantic field. The process of understanding and explaining praxis (here collectively summarized under the heading of 'theorizing') ought to be separated from the actual doing and (inter)acting. Of course, this is *not* to say that actors don't 'know' what they are doing when acting. However, it does mean that what Wittgenstein calls 'rule-following' *in* acting refers to something that we do 'blindly'.[2] In a strict sense, therefore,

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[1] In this chapter I use the word 'practitioner' to refer to any individual or collective agent engaged in some praxis, be it politics or IR theorizing.

[2] Wittgenstein (2009 [1953]: PI §§ 201–19) (the 4th edition of Wittgenstein's 'Investigations' separates what has long been regarded as two parts as 'Philosophical Investigations' (PI) and 'Philosophy of Psychology' (PP); I will signal the distinction accordingly). Importantly, in the German original Wittgenstein's claim (§ 202) that ' "following a rule" is a practice' translates as 'Darum ist "der Regel folgen" *eine Praxis*' (emphasis added). The English 'a practice' can be translated as both 'Praxis' and '*Handlungsweise*', where '*Handlungsweise*' allows for *patterned action* whereas 'Praxis' accentuates the *uniqueness of acting here and now*. I am reading Wittgenstein here as *intending* to emphasize the difference between 'Praxis' and 'practice(s)' or '*Handlungsweise(n)*'.

theorizing praxis necessarily takes place after 'praxis' has 'happened'. This is one reason why we, as human beings, have come to distinguish between theory and practice in our ordinary linguistic practice after sapience complemented mere sentience in the evolution of the human species. But the very fact that 'thinking' and 'acting' are inextricably connected *in* praxis via language also means that theory and praxis are also mutually constitutive and thus form 'a unity' (Gadamer, 1983: 49) as well.

In preparing the ground for the next section, a final distinction needs to be highlighted. There is an important difference between what might be called the 'internal theoretical' perspective of the political practitioner as far as her praxis is concerned and the 'external theoretical' perspective of an outside observer, say, an academic theoretician. If theorizing praxis refers to making sense of how the things we do and observe hang together conceptually, sequentially or causally, practitioners of politics are likely to content themselves in using a vocabulary in describing and explaining their praxis *and* practices which meets their practical needs in a double sense. They must, in contrast to the academic theoretician, come to an end of merely *thinking* about what they have been doing and will, therefore, choose vocabularies which meet the practical needs of sufficiently explaining their practice(s) vis-à-vis an imagined community of practitioners. Moreover, since they are responsible for what has been done, their theorizing will most likely also draw on reasons which help to *justify* their praxis. In doing so, however, they cannot avoid drawing on the collective conceptual reservoir developed by theoreticians and practitioners alike in constituting their very practices which had to be acquired by them in becoming competent performers of political praxis in the first place.

The external theoretical perspective, in addition, depends on, and actually only gains the aspired academic premium for, descriptions of praxis which meet William James's 'simple test of tracing a concrete consequence', that is, that they '*make* a difference' (James, 1922: 49–50, emphasis in original) in our ways of making sense of praxis in contrast to the perspective of political practitioners. In making that difference the external perspective has to succeed in walking a tightrope which Giddens and Adorno described from two different angles: on the one hand, it has to recognize the 'double hermeneutics' (Giddens, 1984: xxxii-xxxv) of the subject matter of the social sciences in contrast to the natural sciences, that is, that their descriptions are merely re-marking an already 'marked state', to paraphrase George Spencer-Brown (1972: 4; see also Friedrichs, chapter 12, this volume). On the other hand, 'external' theorizing must not be reduced to the mere 'affirmation and mental doubling of that which exists anyhow', a criticism which Adorno raised likewise vis-à-vis 'positivism' and what he called 'half-education' (Adorno, 1959: 186, my translation). To the extent that social science theorizing is, therefore, part and parcel of the constitution of society,

it is, inevitably, also a form of 'critique' – in the sense of an obligation, 'not an *option*' (Giddens, 1984: xxxv, emphasis in original). Taking the 'internal perspective' of the political practitioners seriously does not imply 'that somebody's *own* vocabulary is always the best vocabulary for understanding what he is doing'. Rather than according it an epistemically privileged position, it merely means that we owe it to him or her *morally* to take the respective view into account when we theorize it from the outside (Rorty, 1982: 200–3, quote at 202, emphasis in original).

Hans-Georg Gadamer is making a similar point about engaging with praxis when he argues that 'the root of what we can call theory' is

> seeing what is. This does not mean the triviality of determining factual presence. Even in the sciences, a 'fact' is not defined as the merely present which one fixes by measuring, weighing, and counting; 'fact' is rather a hermeneutic concept, which always refers to *a context of conjecture and expectation*, to *a complicated context of inquiry*. What is not quite so complicated, but all the more difficult to perform, is *for any individual in her or his practical life to see what is*, instead of what she or he would like to be. The *general elimination of prejudices* that methodized science requires of its researchers may well be a laborious process – yet it is still easier than overcoming the illusions that constantly arise from one's own ego. (Gadamer, 1983: 43–4; my translation, emphasis added)

This is not the way Kratochwil would put it – even though he shares a common appreciation of Aristotle with Gadamer. However, if I am not reading too much between the lines of *Praxis*, his *inherently normative* understanding of the complexity and contingency of power-infused political praxis similarly leads him to infer a moral obligation on us as theorizing external observers that our theorizing has to *do justice to* these complexities.

Practising theorizing

Theories as reified things, things we 'build' in order to 'test' them 'against the world "out there"' (Kratochwil, 2018: 32) or with which we 'treat' social practice via 'application', is Kratochwil's horror image of theorizing. Whereas his reading of Wittgenstein had taught him that the meaning of a concept *is* its use, and whereas this realization could have made it easier for him to simply follow Feyerabend's shrugging acknowledgement that academic theorizing actually *is* 'an essentially anarchic enterprise' (in the sense that the history of science shows that 'anything' does indeed 'go' [Feyerabend, 1993 (1975): 9]), Kratochwil has always found it hard to just

stand by. His Wittgenstein-inspired appreciation of the 'linguistic turn' and his classical education, which had taught him 'above all … the respect for the "word"' (Kratochwil, 2011b: 4), combined to yield a radically different understanding of (academic) theorizing to what was overwhelmingly taught in IR departments as 'theory'.

A rough summary of his alternative understanding might go as follows: theorizing comprises all the creative things we do with words – things which help us in making sense of and doing justice to what we conceive to be our subject matter, here international politics. This is a rough summary only because the 'we' and the limits of what we should *properly* do with words need to be more cautiously circumscribed in Kratochwil's understanding. Even if the notion of 'one right answer' is a self-destructive illusion in Kratochwil's view, he does believe that we – that is, those of us who consider theorizing international politics as our profession and are recognized as professionals – at a minimum *wrestle* with the 'virtually impossible' Herculean task of 'getting it right' (Kratochwil, 2018: 121, 156–65, 350–3). This disposition finds one expression in his view that we need to 'establish "criteria" for the "right" or problematic use of concepts and their embeddedness in the semantic field informing the practices of the actors' (Kratochwil, 2018: 7). Yet when it comes to the concept of 'theory' he rightly hesitates to engage in what the sociologist Gabriel Abend recommends as 'semantic therapy in order to clarify … conceptual confusions' regarding the *proper* 'meaning of "theory"' (Abend, 2008: 192; see also Bueger, Chapter 4, this volume). Here I take Kratochwil to join Rorty's Wittgenstein in simply resting 'content to let a thousand language-games be played without suggesting the need for philosophical supervision' (Rorty, 2020: 230) of what 'theory' 'really' means. Better than explicating 'criteria' for the 'right' use of 'theory' is to actually show how *practising* theorizing differently makes a practical difference.

For instance, Kratochwil's 'genealogy', 'conceptual history' or 'archeology' of sovereignty (Kratochwil, 2018: 75–103) is one illustration of theorizing which traces a constitutive practice of inter-state interaction in a grand historical narrative of transformative change. It is much less interested in 'defining' the 'nature' of sovereignty than exploring its origins and historical transformation. Another example of his preferred theorizing practices is the use of analogies and analogous reasoning in the emergence of a global public sphere. Analogous reasoning here helps in highlighting similarities and differences while at the same time leaving space for unique shapes and understandings of 'public sphere' in different historical periods (Kratochwil, 2018: 134–48). Similarly, 'cases' (Kratochwil, 2018: 24–32) or thought experiments (Kratochwil, 2018: 258–9) are as useful in Kratochwil's view as are 'histories' as 'proto-theories' (Kratochwil, 2018: 336 and 338–48 for illustrations). In applying all these tools, he is not only shedding light on

political practice from different angles, he is also exemplifying *via use*, that is, pragmatically, what genealogies, archaeologies, metaphors, analogies and histories actually 'are'. He is not trying to clear up 'semantic confusions' about 'genealogy', 'analogy' or 'history' via definitions, he is working pragmatically by giving examples – or, to paraphrase Wittgenstein: Kratochwil is 'teaching' us theorizing 'by means of *examples* and by *exercises*' in how we might work with these words (Wittgenstein 2009 [1953], § 208, emphasis in original; see also Savickey, 2012).

The important Wittgensteinian point about 'giving examples' is a double one here. Examples are immensely useful theorizing tools because they are meant to *open up* thinking space, not close it down as in *necessarily determinate* causal 'explanations' which connect 'some definite thing taken as cause and some definite thing taken as effect' (Kuhn, 1990: 309). In the same way, *closing* thinking space is the very aim of the type of 'theories' in IR which rely on if–then generalizations based on *ceteris paribus* conditioning or 'causal mechanisms'. In contrast, giving examples in a Wittgensteinian and Kratochwilian sense expresses an attitude vis-à-vis theorizing which respects that social action always unfolds against a horizon of possibilities which we know we *cannot* 'know' in full. This is why examples have a tremendously important 'heuristic' function: they '*point beyond*' themselves, as Wittgenstein emphasizes, at least if we take care in our 'teaching' of not 'getting stuck with' the examples we actually choose (Wittgenstein, 2009 [1953]: PI § 208, emphasis in original, my translation based on the German original on p 89). Examples *are* a form theorizing praxis and they have theoretical significance precisely because they point beyond themselves into an open horizon of creative human possibility.

Since aiming for 'completeness' (Wittgenstein 2009 [1953]: PP § 202) cannot and must not be our aim, examples are a useful and cautionary theorizing tool in understanding praxis. They are even *necessary* because 'rules' do 'not suffice for establishing a practice'. Since rules leave 'back-doors open, praxis has to speak for itself' (Wittgenstein, 1997: § 139, my translation) – and it does so via examples. In this sense examples enable us to 'go on' – a phrase which both Wittgenstein and Kratochwil often use – because they provide the 'know how' to 'go on'. Both Wittgenstein and Kratochwil are critical of limiting forms of knowledge about social action (or praxis) to what Gilbert Ryle captured under the heading of 'knowing-that' (in contrast to 'knowing-how', Ryle [1945]) – knowledge that is framed in 'factual' or in causally 'explanatory' (and related generalizing 'predictive') terms. Yet knowing-that can *never exhaust* the possibilities of human agency (Hawthorn, 1991). Therefore, to the extent that theorizing praxis reflects the 'knowing-how' to 'go on' it does so in terms of what Charles Sanders Peirce called the necessarily *transitory* stage of 'thought at rest' *after* the 'irritation of doubt' has come to an end in the course of 'inquiry' – knowing full well

that doubt will reassert itself and become 'a new starting point for thought' (Peirce, 1878 [1997]: 33).

At first glance, looking at 'examples' does not look too different compared with the widespread appreciation of 'case study' methodology in the social sciences. Yet the typical 'realist' or 'nominalist' take on what a 'case' is usually boils down to using them in either 'single' or 'comparative' case studies in order to '*overwhelm* the uniqueness inherent in the objects and events in the social world' and realize 'the goal of generalization' (Ragin, 1992: 2–8; emphasis in quote on p 2 added). Thus, the underlying 'ontology' here is of a *closed* universe of social action which is decipherable via studying cases which, in turn, are amenable, at least in principle, to generalization in an 'if–then' pattern of *ceteris paribus* conditioning.

This is fundamentally at odds with the Wittgensteinian view shared by Kratochwil, which stresses contingency and novelty and, therefore, also indeterminacy as inherent in social action. Precisely because political practice and linguistic practice are two sides of one coin and precisely because we constantly come up with novel sentences, words and political aims, our creative theorizing habits are as much oriented backward (as in Kratochwil's 'histories' or 'genealogies') as they are oriented forward (as in Kratochwil's sympathy with Hume's appreciation of 'imagination'). Who we are and where we find ourselves at any point in time involves ever changing backward–looking *and* forward–looking processes of sense–making (Hellmann, 2020). If these theorizing habits were to merely correctly 'represent' some 'givens' in the past or present, we would neither have constantly rewritten histories and reproduced historical controversies, nor would we continuously get rid of outmoded words and concepts (such as 'race') or invent new ones (such as 'Anthropocene') to get a better grip on international politics and humanity's future. Just imagine what an 'IR' dictionary of key concepts would have looked like 30 or 100 years ago compared with today. Rorty's introductory plea to switch from too heavy a focus on semantics to pragmatics, that is, from (merely) trying to better 'understand' our concepts to actually 'changing' them so that they serve our practical purposes better, is another way of emphasizing the creative and practical potential of theorizing.

In staking out his 'metatheoretical stance' along these lines, it is fairly obvious why alternative theorizing practices cannot 'get it right' in Kratochwil's view. Although he is not putting it this way, I take him to believe (and would myself argue) that most of the prevailing theorizing habits in IR commit a similar and fundamental mistake: they basically believe (a) that *describing* 'the world' of international politics *accurately* is fairly straightforward and also sufficiently determinate in terms of coming to an agreement on what is the case, (b) that theories are things which can and ought to be 'developed' in order to be 'applied' to this 'world' and (c) that language can

at a minimum be relegated to the status of a residual category in the process of theorizing if it cannot be ignored altogether. I take Kratochwil to think that these defects are similarly visible in a fairly diverse set of typical IR scholarship. Let's take a quick look at some of them.

It shows, for instance, in Kenneth Waltz's plea to move beyond 'mere description' by 'constructing' theories which, above all, yield 'explanatory power'. In Waltz's understanding, the construction process entails theorizing steps such as 'arrang(ing) phenomena so that they are seen as mutually dependent' or 'envisioning a pattern where none is visible to the naked eye'. Yet, interestingly, when Waltz writes that 'explanation through simplification' has to replace 'accurate reproduction through exhaustive description' (Waltz, 1979: 1–10), he, at a minimum, sounds as if the latter is possible in principle even though it is 'merely' descriptive rather than 'explanatory'.

Two other realists, John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, who recently also joined the camp of 'scientific realism' officially, largely agree with Waltz that 'developing' and 'employing' theories is key. In their view, prevailing theorizing habits in IR have degenerated into 'simplistic hypothesis testing' due to the deleterious impact of books such as King et al's (1994) *Designing Social Inquiry* (Mearsheimer and Walt, 2013: 445–6). Like Waltz, they define theories as 'simplified pictures of reality' which 'explain how the world works in particular domains'. They also rely on a strong distinction between 'theory' and 'empirics' and emphasize 'explanatory power'. Yet unlike Waltz, who stresses the difficulties of stating a theory with 'enough precision and plausibility' (Waltz, 1979: 14), Mearsheimer and Walt do not see insurmountable problems in 'clearly' defining key assumptions and concepts and how they relate to each other, in assuring 'falsifiability' or in coming up with 'unambiguous predictions'. Whereas all three place a premium on 'developing' theories, Waltz is much less concerned about 'entities and processes that exist in the real world'. Moreover, he does not place as much emphasis as Mearsheimer and Walt do on 'accurately reflect(ing) how the world operates' (all quotes Mearsheimer and Walt 2013: 433).

'Accuracy' and the orientation along 'scientific' methods are critical categories for other 'scientific realists'. Wendt, for instance, deploys this vocabulary in a similar fashion in his early 'constructivist' work as he does in his subsequent 'quantum' work (e.g. Wendt, 1999: 56; 2015: 50, 290). In his view, accuracy is important because representing the world correctly is key to 'scientific' validity or fruitfulness. Since things in the world, such as 'the states system', are taken to be 'real' in a 'deep', 'ontological' sense and since they are 'found in international life' or 'given' in the form of 'self-organizing, mind-independent structures', 'interaction with that *reality* should *regulate* [our] theorizing about it' (Wendt 1999: 5, 36, 63–4, emphasis in passage at p 63 added). In this understanding, 'states' are as 'real' as agents

as individual human beings are, and sentences such as 'states are people too' are explicitly meant to be *non*-metaphorical since they are referring to things like 'states' – and the meanings of such things are, at least in part, '*also regulated by a mind-independent, extra-linguistic world*' (Wendt, 1999: 215–24, 53; emphasis added). This is the strange idea that 'the causal arrows run … from "the world" to our understanding' (Kratochwil, 2018: 325), the strange idea that 'the world' *co-causes* language. Yet 'the world does not speak. Only we do. The world can, once we have programmed ourselves with a language, cause us to hold certain beliefs. But it cannot propose a language for us to speak' (Rorty, 1989: 6).

A differently grounded, if equally representationalist, approach to theorizing politics comes in the form of King et al's 'logic of scientific inference', which Mearsheimer and Walt are critical of, even though all of them share a representationalist view (King et al, 1994). The vocabulary of simplification, precision, accuracy and 'scientific generalization' about 'reality' is equally present here, although the burden lies less with 'depth ontology' or 'theory building' than with proper 'data', 'methods', 'models' and 'inferences'. While King et al would never put it the way Wendt's fellow 'scientific realist', Colin Wight, does – that 'the world does in a very real and important sense talk to us' and that 'language-independent reality … resists' our way of interacting with it (Wight, 2007: 45, 48) – they would and do insist that 'accurate description' is an important and achievable, if insufficient, prerequisite of proper theorizing (King et al, 1994: 18). Getting 'it' right is not too difficult. 'Good historical writing' and 'good models' here are key in accomplishing adequate 'descriptive inference', in their take. 'Good historians understand which events were crucial', especially as far as the critical distinction between 'systematic' and 'nonsystematic' factors in history are concerned. They do so by constructing 'accounts that emphasize essentials rather than digressions' (King et al, 1994: 53). Similarly, even though it is granted that models simplify by necessity and only 'approximate' some aspect of the world, creating 'good models' seems to be not too difficult since the good ones 'abstract only the "right" features of the reality they represent' (King et al, 1994: 49) – a pretty vague specification for an understanding of 'scientific research' which normally prefers the rhetoric of 'precision'.

A final example closer to 'home' comes in the form of an alternative 'practice theory'. In a broad-ranging survey of a broad variety of 'practice-theoretical approaches', Christian Bueger and Frank Gadinger (2018) spell out commonalities and differences among them as far as intellectual sources, theoretical grounding and methodological applications are concerned. Since 'practices' are at the centre and since some intellectual reference points are unsurprisingly identical to Kratochwil's, there is more common ground than with the representationalist theorizing practices discussed previously. Yet some critical differences remain due to foundational choices

in this variant of 'practice theory', such as the emphasis on repetition, routinization and 'materiality' and the marginal role 'linguistic practice' plays (see also Kratochwil, 2011a). While some 'approaches' explicitly draw on Wittgenstein and the inherent normativity of practice(s), Bueger and Gadinger's identification of the 'main weaknesses' of some of the practice approaches they highlight signal where their own preferences in 'practice theory' lie. Foucault's weakness is said to be that he 'tends towards linguistic and discursive practices', a weakness that is also associated with 'narrative approaches' as far as the 'linguistic dimension' is concerned; 'Bourdieusian praxeology', in contrast, is charged with 'downplaying materiality', while Schatzki's Wittgensteinian take is said to be 'difficult (to translate) into empirical research' (Bueger and Gadinger, 2018: 31–2). In other words, in stressing that practice theory 'is an empirical project rather than a theoretical one' and in calling for a corresponding 'readjustment of the relation between theory and practice' (Bueger and Gadinger, 2018: 165, 29), the basic approach to theorizing sounds not too dissimilar from the representationalist approaches discussed previously. To be sure, there are repeated warnings to 'overcome the dualism of theory and empirics' or to 'destabilize' the separation of theory and empirical research, yet the praxeographical vocabulary which calls for 'generat(ing) empirical data about practices' or recommends 'generalizing' about 'how practices achieve overarching regularity across time and space' (all quotes Bueger and Gadinger, 2018: 135–7) leaves a lot of ambiguity as to how theorizing actually ought to be practised. What seems clear, though, is that Bueger and Gadinger would hesitate to subscribe to the view shared by Goethe, Wittgenstein, Gadamer, Rorty and Kratochwil that theorizing *is* observing and that it does not *depend* on 'empirics' or 'data'. They would most likely have a hard time saying with Goethe (see initial quote) that we do not 'seek for something behind the phenomena' because 'they themselves are the theory' or to follow Wittgenstein when he writes that 'our mistake is to look for an explanation where we ought to regard the facts as "proto-phenomena". That is, where we ought to say: *this is the language-game that is being played*' (Wittgenstein 2009 [1953]: PI § 654, emphasis added). I take Kratochwil to make a similar point when he says that 'the causal arrows run from "understanding" to the world, and not from "the world" to our understanding or to our theory' (Kratochwil, 2018: 325) – that is, that our understandings constitute 'the empirical' as much as they constitute 'the theoretical'.

These diverse examples of IR theorizing highlight a few common problematic features which I think Kratochwil would rightly criticize as manifestations of 'both classical and modern (Cartesian) epistemology' which continues to rely 'on the mirror quality of language … . As soon as meaning was, however, no longer determined merely through representation, but was seen as part of the constitutive function of language itself, a new paradigm

emerges' (Kratochwil, 2018: 46). Kratochwil calls this 'constructivism', Rorty 'anti–representationalism' (Rorty, 1999).

Theorizing theorizing

Practitioners of IR theory usually provide reasons why they practise theorizing in a certain fashion. All of the aforementioned scholars do so in one form or another – and they at least implicitly agree that theorizing theory (doing 'meta-theory') unfolds less in the realm of 'the empirical' than 'the normative' – to use this problematic distinction for once. Kratochwil's formula for theorizing theory boils down to the 'critical' and 'systematic reflection on the observations' of other theorizing observers from various academic disciplines, a form of 'translation' based on 'certain "ontological" assumptions concerning human action – or *praxis*'. Moreover, I read Kratochwil as saying that 'the linguistic turn' provides all the necessary 'ontological' assumptions to elaborate how his 'thick constructivism' will be put to work (all quotes in this paragraph Kratochwil, 2018: 18–19, emphasis in original). In this final section I will offer a third cut at 'theorizing' in meta-theoretical terms which draws in particular on Wittgenstein and Rorty, two praxis theoreticians of the 20th century who stand for 'the linguistic turn' like few others. I will offer what Rorty calls a 'redescription' of theorizing theorizing in the light of 'the linguistic turn' which I think Kratochwil might be able to subscribe to.

Theorizing theorizing thoroughly in the light of the linguistic turn starts with marking what 'representationalist' forms of theorizing get wrong by relegating linguistic practice to residual category status (in the best of cases) and by treating mind or language 'as containing representations of reality' (Rorty, 1991: 2). In the previous section I have argued that the chosen samples of alternative theorizing practices in IR build in various ways and with different degrees of rigidity on such a representational understanding where 'the world out there', 'reality' or 'data' function as non-linguistic items which 'make' theory x 'true' – that is, 'that the world splits itself up, on its own initiative, into sentence-shaped chunks called "facts"' (Rorty, 1989: 5), which then serve as authoritative and truth-making 'representeds' in our 'representings'. As Rorty suggested already around 1970, this highly problematic view was a legacy of Descartes's key invention, the 'mind–body problem', which 'called ontology into being' in the first place, leaving us afterwards with 'three hundred years of ontologizing' (Rorty, 2014 [1970]: 213, 5). In Robert Brandom's words, 'cogito, ergo sum' functioned as a 'regress–stopper' in the following way:

> If the reality I know is known by being represented by my representings
> of it, then I must know my representings themselves in some other way

than just by representing them in turn. For the alternative would launch a semantic regress, of representings of representings of representings … in which no terminal knowledge is ever finally achieved. (Brandom, 2021: xv)

Immediate knowledge of this type, therefore, simply had to be 'immune to error' or 'incorrigible' (Rorty, 1970; Brandom, 2021). In Rorty's telling (Rorty, 1979: 165–212), the resulting Cartesian-cum-'neo-Kantian' idea of incorrigible 'privileged representations' had already been debunked by analytical philosophy in the 1950s and 1960s. In Brandom's reconstruction of Rorty's intellectual trajectory, it took a few more decades for him to develop the 'vocabulary vocabulary' into a full-fledged 'anti-authoritarian' (Rorty, 1999) replacement for Cartesian 'semantic representationalism' (Brandom, 2019, 2020, 2021).[3]

As so often when IR wanted to get on top of 'philosophy of science' theorizing, full-blown 'Cartesian mindedness' (Brandom, 2019: 16–18) infected the discipline rather late. In a sense Wendt was to IR what Descartes was to modern-day philosophy. Waltz could still write his *Theory of International Politics* (Waltz, 1979) without ever once mentioning the words ontology or epistemology. Yet a few years later Wendt in particular had succeeded in gradually convincing an astounding number of IR theoreticians that one could not choose a serious 'scientific approach to social inquiry' without actually conceiving of 'international *theory*' in terms of 'the *ontology* of the states system' (Wendt, 1999: 1, 6; emphasis in original).[4] Accordingly, 'social theory' was rightly conducted in Wendt's view as 'Cartesian science' (Wendt, 2006).[5] Patrick Jackson's recovery of the 'largely unnoticed

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[3] See also Brandom's 2020 online seminar 'Two Forms of Contemporary Antirepresentationalism: Pragmatism and Expressivism', available at: http://www.pitt.edu/~rbrandom/Courses/Antirepresentationalism%20(2020)/AR%202020%20a.html, accessed 26 November 2020.

[4] It should be acknowledged that Kratochwil had also prominently applied the 'ontology versus epistemology' vocabulary in the 1980s (see Kratochwil and Ruggie, 1986). Yet in terms of popularizing ontology talk, Wendt unquestionably deserves the first prize.

[5] For Kratochwil's critique, see Kratochwil (2000). Rorty formulated a much broader critique of what Brandom later termed 'Cartesian mindedness' from the late 1960s onwards (Rorty, 1970, 2014 [1970]; see also Brandom, 2011: 107–15). From his first articles in the 1980s onwards Wendt affirmatively accepted 'Cartesian dualism' (Wendt, 2006: 185–6), if, in his most recent work, 'only epistemic(ally)' (Wendt, 2015: 93). Yet in doing so he has provided proof for Rorty's central anti-representationalist charge that the 'things' themselves somehow 'authorize' how they ought to be described or explained. 'Quantum theory' is Wendt's most recent 'proof' that humans are able to 'adequately represent the deep structure of reality' and, what is more, that we can for the first time 'test scientifically' what he calls the ill-conceived 'classical worldview'. Quantum theory

and largely uncriticized' Cartesian 'mind–world dualism' came in here subsequently in a supporting role – despite Jackson's fundamental critique of 'Cartesian science'. Yet by explicitly 'foreground(ing) ontological concerns' (Jackson, 2011: 31, 38), Jackson at least indirectly joined forces with Wendt by underlining the purported need to face up to 'an ideal-typical choice between *mind–world dualism* and its opposite, which I will call *mind–world monism*' (Jackson, 2011: 35, emphasis in original).

I read Kratochwil's work for the last decades as saying that we would be better off today had we stopped 'the game of ontology' (Rorty, 2014 [1970]: 214) long ago by *dissolving* it, rather than by trying to 'solve' it. 'Dissolving' here does not mean, as Jackson puts it, 'to make the problem simply go away … by demonstrating that it is, in some sense, a false problem' (Jackson, 2011: 116). Rather, to dissolve here means to simply recognize it in passing as a 'problem' we shouldn't even have started to think to *have* in the first place (Rorty, 1991: 93–110). In this sense I also read Kratochwil to say that practising theorizing as he does in chapters 2–11 of *Praxis* is more useful than wasting time on theorizing theorizing. He agrees that we cannot do without completely, which is why he at least sketches his own 'metatheoretical stance' in a 'constructivist' vein and largely in terms of a *fully* taken 'linguistic turn'. Yet, compared with Jackson, I see him more on Rorty's side. Rather than wanting to entice IR theorizers to place themselves in an ideal-typical two-by-two matrix which locates four possible solutions on an axis 'mind' versus 'world' and an axis 'knowledge' versus 'observation' (Jackson, 2011: 37), Kratochwil emphasizes that we should simply rest satisfied in having 'debunked the idea of the primacy of the epistemological project' some time ago, that we should similarly abandon ontological anxiety and that we should focus instead on 'the importance (of the power) of judgment … that provides the validation of "reflective" choices' which should, in turn, be buttressed by 'persuasive reasons' (Kratochwil, 2018: 10). Moreover, he explicitly embraces 'Rorty's method' of 'therapeutic re-description' because he takes it to provide us 'with the possibility of seeing the old in a new way and creating new opportunities for practices and experiences that sidestep the old vocabulary which is getting in the way' (Kratochwil, 2018: 159).

The latter is complementary to the theorizing virtues discussed previously about opening horizons of possibility rather than closing them. To the extent that Rorty's 'ironist' is not carried away by 'the final vocabulary she

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fills in that function of authorization since it is 'giving us access to that deep structure for the first time' (Wendt, 2015: 58). In this reading Rorty's anti-authoritarian critique of representationalists submitting to 'God' or 'Nature' would simply be extended to 'Quantum'. See also Der Derian and Wendt (2020).

currently uses' and accepts that 'the choice between vocabularies' is 'made neither within a neutral and universal metavocabulary nor by an attempt to fight one's way past appearances to the real, but simply by playing the new off against the old' (Rorty, 1989: 73), she will not spend too much time on getting this or that author 'right' but rather think about what it might take to persuade others to learn her preferred new vocabulary. The combination of both moves – the attitude of being open to reprogramming ourselves with new vocabularies in the light of novel ('internal' as well as 'external') theorizing about political praxis *and* the attitude of being committed to giving (and asking for) reasons why (and whether) the proposed new vocabulary might be an improvement over the previous one – is a sensible redescription of meta-theorizing in terms of a *discursive practice* because it clarifies what it takes *pragmatically* 'to go on' with theorizing while justifying the particular theorizing move not in terms of a closing argument but in the form of an invitation for a continuing conversation.

This is how I would translate Brandom's more elaborate summary of Rorty's major achievements. Since Brandom has been Rorty's most prominent PhD student and since he is by now globally recognized as a highly sophisticated philosopher in his own right, it might be best to quote him here at some length. His target here is, among others, the charge levelled at Rorty that he had abandoned 'reason': Brandom, in contrast, thinks that,

> far from rejecting the notion of *reason*, Rorty seeks a broader, deeper conception of it. To that end, his pragmatism follows … Dewey in thematizing the radical transformation wrought by engaging in specifically *discursive* social practices: practices of giving, seeking, and assessing reasons. Rather than jettisoning reason, Rorty argues that the Enlightenment needs to be brought to completion by rejecting the semantic representationalism at the core of its epistemology precisely because that strand of its thought is not compatible with the critical, anti–authoritarian conception of reason and the role of reasoning in the normative life of human beings that he takes to be the principal glory of that movement of thought. Indeed, like his hero Hegel before him, Rorty is, inter alia, the prophet of a particular kind of emancipatory reflective reason. For he practices, preaches, and theorizes about the sort of self–consciousness that consists in redescription: in deploying new vocabularies that alter what we take to be a reason for what, and so what we can mean and think. (Brandom, 2021: xxvi; emphasis in original)

If my reading of Kratochwil's 'meta–theoretical stance' is correct, he should be able to fully endorse this understanding of theorizing.

Conclusion

Theorizing *praxis* starts with respect for what our fellow human beings did, do and will (or might) do *and* what 'we all' – as practical or academic theoreticians – said, say and will (or might) say, among others, about such doings and sayings. It means to practise theorizing based on the regulative idea that we engage in never ending processes of giving and asking for reasons why our current descriptions of how things hang together *should* be 'acknowledged' as 'knowledge' in Wittgenstein's sense (Wittgenstein, 1997: § 378). These are descriptions of 'how *things* in the broadest possible sense of the term *hang together* in the broadest possible sense of the term' (Sellars, 1963 [1962]: 1, emphasis in original) – that is, how they hang together *conceptually* (how we name, distinguish and relate things semantically), *sequentially* or *systematically* (how we order things in narration or 'mere description') or *causally* (how we hang things together in terms of cause and effect).

Theorizing in this sense is an ongoing discursive process of exchanging arguments about these hangings together where we never know which 'truth' will obtain eventually. It would certainly be normatively preferable that the Habermasian 'better argument' will have its way. However, I see Kratochwil here siding again with Wittgenstein and Rorty – against Habermas (Kratochwil, 2018: 428). Habermas wants to stick with a strong notion of 'context-independent truth' of 'justified belief' because we might, in his view, otherwise lose 'the conceptual means for doing justice to the intuitive distinctions between convincing and persuading, between motivation through reasons and causal exertion of influence, between learning and indoctrination', thereby losing 'the critical standards operating in everyday life' (Habermas, 1998: 371, 377; 1996: 18–19). With Wittgenstein,[6] Rorty argues against the view 'that there is a non-context-dependent distinction between real and apparent justification, or that the *überzeugen–überreden* distinction is not just in the ear of the audience'. In Rorty's (and what I take similarly to be Kratochwil's) view, Habermas's argument of the force of the 'better argument' cannot rescue the distinction between '*Überreden*' and '*Überzeugen*' because

> all reasons are reasons for particular people, restrained (as people always are) by spatial, temporal, and social conditions. To think otherwise is to presuppose the existence of a natural order of reasons to which

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[6]   'At the end of reasons comes persuasion ['*Überredung*' in the German original, my translation]. (Think what happens when missionaries convert natives.)' (Wittgenstein, 1997: § 612).

our arguments will, with luck, better and better approximate. The idea of such an order is one more relic of the idea that truth consists in correspondence to the intrinsic nature of things, a nature which somehow precedes and underlies all descriptive vocabularies. The natural order of reasons is for arguments what the intrinsic nature of reality is for sentences. But if beliefs are habits of action the one regulative ideal is as unnecessary as the other. (All quotes Rorty, 2000: 60; emphasis in original)

In Kratochwil's reading, 'winning the argument' in Habermas's view boils down to 'factually achieved assent, which silences opposition. Thus oddly enough the ideal speech situation has again a suspiciously Hobbesian ring in that a unique solution is postulated' (Kratochwil, 2018: 428). This is certainly not how theorizing as discursive practice *ought* to be organized – and, unfortunately, it is also not how Wittgensteinian 'knowledge' as 'acknowledgement' *is* achieved in political practice and theorizing. Just look at Donald Trump's claim about the election results in Georgia in 2020 that 'the real truth is' that he 'won by 400,000 votes' (Gardner and Firozi, 2021) – certainly a far cry from an *ideal* speech situation, yet one cannot ignore that the claim uttered in the *real* speech situation was soon forcefully *acknowledged* by Trump's supporters. In theorizing political praxis, we should therefore acknowledge Peirce's early observation that 'the sole object of inquiry' – where 'inquiry' relates to *any* type of problem-solving inquiry – 'is the settlement of opinion. We may fancy that this is not enough for us, and what we seek, not merely an opinion, but a true opinion. But put this fancy to the test, and it proves groundless; for as soon as a firm belief is reached we are entirely satisfied, whether the belief be true or false' (Peirce, 1997[1877]: 13–14).

Gadamerian 'seeing what is' will not always be pleasant and, if anything, Kratochwil has always been ready to deliver unpleasant truths while setting the benchmark for demanding theorizing higher than most. At the same time he has always been ready to live up to the Weberian ideal of 'scientific "fulfilment"' in this context, that is that science '*wants* to be "surpassed" and become obsolete' (Weber, 1973: 316; my translation, emphasis in original). The sociology of science tells us that this ideal is hard to live up to under the realities of academic competition and practical social theorizing. Still, actually achieving it here and there in individual cases should be easier than realizing the Cartesian 'quest for certainty'. While the sometimes harsh anti-theoreticist rhetoric of Kratochwil's *Praxis* may irritate some readers, reading the book closely and empathetically shows that it is certainly one of few candidates in IR theorizing which are eligible for Weber's prize.

Acknowledgements

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