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Praxis, Humanism and the Quest for Wholeness

Jens Steffek

Introduction

This chapter suggests that we should read Fritz Kratochwil's praxis approach to the study of international relations (IR) and law as a humanist's quest for wholeness in a world full of reductionism and fragmentation. The humanist desire for wholeness that is present in Kratochwil's academic work remains largely disguised in the cloak of an epistemological stance. It underpins his concept of praxis and the related strategy of inquiry, an attempt to grasp human agency in all its facets. Kratochwil's recent book *Praxis* (Kratochwil, 2018) emerges from his long wrestling with the question of how we can obtain useful knowledge of the social world, and how we can make competent judgements on matters of IR. I read the book as a largely philosophical exercise in which IR and law furnish most of the examples that illustrate more general problems of generating and applying knowledge. In that respect the book follows the plot of *Rules, Norms, and Decisions* (Kratochwil, 1989).

For decades, Kratochwil's critical inquiries and polemics targeted mainly mainstream IR theory, although their implications were by no means limited to that field. He challenged the positivist American mainstream of the discipline on two grounds. Firstly, mainstream IR promotes reductionist conceptions of actors and situations of choice that paint a distorted picture of the social world. Secondly, due to their flawed ideal of parsimony, positivist theories and methods are unfit to explain (let alone understand) the social world adequately. Positivists just paper over the ambiguities and internal contradictions of human agency that are the real conundrums for us to address.

Praxis, then, suggests an alternative conceptualization of the social phenomena that international relations are made of, such as diplomacy, treaty-making, adjudication or warfare. This alternative approach does not have a name in the book. For convenience I call it the praxis approach. The praxis approach can be understood as a plea for strong contextualization. It requires us to consider the historical situatedness, contingencies and multiple constraints under which human beings act. It recommends a qualitative methodology that is sensitive to language use and the subjective world view of social actors. The goal is *nachvollziehendes Verstehen*, as proponents of a Weberian qualitative sociology would probably call it.¹ In this chapter, I explore Kratochwil's move from constructivism to praxis from a sympathetic but ultimately unconvinced perspective. I am sympathetic to it because I share Kratochwil's misgivings about the hubris and dogmatism of social scientists who pretend they can uncover eternal, law-like truths about the inner workings of politics and society. At the same time, I am struggling with what I perceive as an internal tension, if not contradiction, in the praxis approach that Kratochwil suggests as an alternative.

The praxis approach rests on the assumption that knowledge is not abstract but performative. Knowledge here resides in the act and is, in some way, part of it. At the same time, Kratochwil seems to suggest that social scientists can acquire solid knowledge about practices that they do not enact. If a concept of praxis is to be our guide, the question arises of how academic scholarship as an essentially world-observing activity can function. How can we gather knowledge *about* action when knowledge resides somehow *in* action? How can we understand human practices that we are not able to perform competently? This hermeneutic problem gestures to epistemological debates about the nature of qualitative inquiry and the logic of understanding that James Davis (Chapter 9) and Jörg Friedrichs (Chapter 12) address in this volume. In this chapter I take a slightly different route. I try to shed more light on the limitations of Kratochwil's praxis approach by focusing on the unresolved tension between the quest for wholeness and what I call the habit of distancing. Distancing occurs when scholars problematize and dissect the very words and concepts that actors engaged in their practices take for granted.

In the first part of the chapter, I discuss wholeness as a humanist ideal that Kratochwil endorses. It is visible in the canon of literature that Kratochwil cites, from Aristotle to Hume to 20th-century pragmatism. In its epistemic, world-disclosing variety, humanism suggests that human agency must be appreciated in all its facets and contradictions. It finds human wholeness

¹ It is not easy to translate '*nachvollziehendes Verstehen*' into English; 'understanding through re-enacting' is probably the most appropriate choice.

threatened by the imperialism of scientific and instrumental rationality and the impoverished notion of human agency that it produces. My foil to develop this argument is George W. Morgan's book *The Human Predicament*, a scathing humanist critique of industrial modernity and the 'prosaic mentality' that underpins it (Morgan, 1968). In that book we find gloomy diagnoses of the late modern condition that are strikingly similar to Kratochwil's list of ills (Kratochwil, 2018: 452–68). It is an ethics of humanism that Morgan makes transparent here and that anticipates Kratochwil's calls for a 'vivere civile' and the old virtues of 'persuasion and friendship' (Kratochwil 2018: 474). Those virtues stand 'in lieu of a conclusion' (Kratochwil, 2018: 468) in *Praxis* but, in my reading, they do not follow neatly from the rest of the argument. In Kratochwil's final but still somewhat shy shift to ethics, his desire for wholeness (of the individual and the *body politic*) returns without the epistemological cloak.

In the second section of the chapter I explore the tensions between Kratochwil's desire for wholeness and his habit of scholarly detachment. Putting a plethora of words in inverted commas, Kratochwil prompts us to question all concepts that we usually take for granted, detaching ourselves from them in order to reflect upon them. I contend that this distancing from the language of action and its vocabulary inevitably removes us from the actors and their intuitive understanding of what it is they are doing. It puts limits on the 'conversation' that is Kratochwil's ideal because it catches scholars in the position of teachers and commentators. I conclude that the relentless distancing from the practices in the end prevents, rather than facilitates, the conversation that Kratochwil seeks. It also testifies to a manifest discontinuity between scholarly and everyday practices of 'going about a situation'. Social science, even at its most qualitative, is a distinctly modern way of dissecting and de-mystifying phenomena, in this case societies and their practices.

Humanism and the quest for wholeness

The central question in Kratochwil's book *Praxis* is how we can obtain useful knowledge, in the sense of a 'map that would enable us to orient ourselves more successfully in this turbulent world' (Kratochwil, 2018: 17). Much of his earlier writing spelled out how we will definitely not get there. As the arguments should be familiar, I can keep this discussion brief. At the most general level there is Kratochwil's rejection of a 'conception of science as a set of "true", a-temporal, and universal statements' (Kratochwil, 2000: 75). Kratochwil attacks the deductive Cartesian model of scientific inquiry and the logic of inference enshrined in modern-day manuals of how to do valid social research (see, e.g., King et al, 1994). In their conceptualization of actors and social action, American IR theories such as structural realism or

rational institutionalism disfigure the *zoon politicon* to such an extent that cooperation morphs from a natural predisposition into a puzzle in need of explanation (Kratochwil, 2007: 2). Related to this is the failure of rationalism to acknowledge how rules and norms actually work in society (Kratochwil, 1984). Kratochwil's emphasis on norms and rules also hints to the importance of language as a world-disclosing and orienting device. Language has many uses and functions beyond representing objects and signalling preferences, as Kratochwil often explains with resort to Wittgenstein and speech-act theory (Kratochwil, 1989).

Not least, Kratochwil insists that human agency (and thus political change) can only be understood in relation to its specific historical context, a situatedness that 'the timeless wisdom of realism' stubbornly wants to ignore (Hall and Kratochwil, 1993; Koslowski and Kratochwil, 1994). Few colleagues made him as angry as the zealous world improvers (*Weltverbesserer*), that is, charlatans who claim they have discovered simple recipes to address wicked problems, or social engineers who pretend they could rebuild societies from scratch to make everyone happy. For Kratochwil, the organism of human society is incredibly complex and our interventions, even if high-minded, may have unforeseeable and unfortunate consequences.

I argue that a desire for wholeness inspires Kratochwil's attacks on IR realism, rationalism and other reductionist approaches to human agency. This desire finds its expression, strangely perhaps, at the level of epistemology. It is reflected in the canon of references that recur in Kratochwil's writings. They range from the Greek classics, in particular Homer and Aristotle, to David Hume, to 20th-century pragmatists. What stitches this rather unlikely canon together is humanism when we conceive it as an attitude that existed *avant la lettre*. The concept of humanism is a bit elusive, as it gestures vaguely to the value and unique qualities of human beings and, as an ethical stance, suggests kindness and benevolence towards them.² Regarding the philosophy of science, humanist ideals forbid reducing a human being to its parts, such as bodily functions, physical needs or intellect. The human being must be appreciated as a whole, mindful of its predetermined life in association where it can realize its full potential. This is what I mean by wholeness here. The concept bridges the individual and the societal levels, as only an intact society enables human beings to thrive.

A humanism thus conceived can be found in Aristotle's conceptions of humans as *zoon logon echon* and *zoon politicon*, along with his organic views of politics and the state, which Kratochwil likes to cite (Kratochwil,

² Given Kratochwil's habit of citing the classics, we may be reminded of the German notion of *Humanismus*, which suggests that a solid knowledge of European antiquity is still key to understanding the modern world.

2018: 23–4). Praxis in the Aristotelian sense is the striving for a happy life (*eudaimonia*), which Kratochwil interprets as an art of making the right choices. This striving for a happy life has its own corresponding type of knowledge (Kratochwil, 2018: 393, 432). Aristotle’s sweeping conception of praxis allows Kratochwil to introduce the ‘big we’ of humanity as a reference point for further epistemological discussions. The choice of the ‘big we’ implies that, whatever our differences, we all strive for the good life and happiness.

The epistemological implications of the ideal of wholeness come to the foreground more clearly in the work of David Hume, whose influence on Kratochwil’s ideas can hardly be overstated (Kratochwil, 2010: 15–37; 2018: chapter 9). Hume rejected the rationalist and reductionist explanations of human action that many of his contemporaries fancied.³ He famously attacked John Locke’s suggestion that just two factors, pleasure (which is sought) and pain (which is avoided), could sufficiently explain human action. Hume pointed instead to the interplay of emotions and reasoning and thus suggested a more holistic understanding of human beings and their deeds (Kratochwil, 2018: 384). As a humanist, Hume believed that reason, and not any particular method, was the best means we have for discovering truth, but he conceded, with characteristic humility, that it was a very imperfect tool. Not least, Hume wanted to (re-)integrate scientists and laypeople in the quest for knowledge. As Kratochwil reads him, ‘philosophy had to recognize its responsibility by not reflecting from the outside, taking social life as an object, but by realizing its purpose and potential as a critical voice *within* the institutionalized interactions and the discourses of a society on problems of common concern’ (Kratochwil, 2018: 352, emphasis in original).

Kratochwil’s more recent turn to pragmatism can be interpreted as a further episode of his humanist quest for wholeness. Leading pragmatists such as William James (1907: 254–8) and F.C.S. Schiller emphasized their connection to the humanist tradition. Schiller defined his own version of humanism as ‘the perception that the philosophical problem concerns human beings striving to comprehend a world of human experience by the resources of human minds’ (Schiller, 1907: 12). The fusion of pragmatism (originally a theory of science) and humanism here defines, first of all, an epistemological stance that seems to be very close to Kratochwil’s own position. Pragmatism developed in opposition to world views and scientific practices that came

³ It is true that Hume and Aristotle can be associated with fragmenting tendencies as well. Hume contributed the fact/value distinction to the rise of modern science, and Aristotle paved the way for the distinction between the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa*. But when Kratochwil cites these two authors, a holistic approach to the social world usually is the point.

with the disenchantment and subsequent rationalization of the Western world since the Renaissance. Pragmatists, and also Kratochwil's praxis approach, in an important sense defy the idea that great 'ruptures' came with the modern age (Onuf, 2018: 33). They rather underline the enduring features of human reasoning. William James argued 'that our fundamental ways of thinking about things are discoveries of exceedingly remote ancestors, which have been able to preserve themselves throughout the experience of all subsequent time. They form one great stage of equilibrium in the human mind's development, the stage of common sense' (James, 1907: 170, emphasis in original).

Modernity, in contrast, dissolves the wholeness of humans and their society through an incessant specialization of activities and fragmentation of social domains. Modern science, as well, splintered into ever more disciplines and specialisms. The result is what Marx called alienation (*Entfremdung*). Men and women become strangers to themselves when they are reduced to a means of capitalist economic production (Kratochwil, 2018: 434). In a similar way, Max Weber feared that the increasing specialization of human beings in industrial modernity would leave them disfigured and soulless, mere levers in the machinery of the bureaucratic state (Weber, 1924: 413–14). Marx and Weber drew quite different conclusions from their findings, which Karl Löwith contrasted as follows:

Marx wanted to find a way to abolish the specific human existence (i.e. existence as a specialist) characteristic of the rationalised world, and also to abolish the division of labour itself. Weber asked rather how man as such, within his inevitably 'fragmented' human existence, could nevertheless preserve the freedom for the self-responsibility of the individual. (Löwith, 1993: 78)

What Marx, Weber and the pragmatists share is a diagnosis of fragmentation and loss of wholeness. In response, Marx plotted a proletarian revolution, Weber sought refuge in heroism and the pragmatists called for a new science. The pragmatic approach also promised to bridge the boundaries of scientific disciplines with their limited purview. Kratochwil, who insisted time and again on the necessity of interdisciplinary research, certainly seconds this view (Kratochwil, 2018: 17). With its emphasis on experience as a world-disclosing activity, pragmatism erodes the distinction between scientific and non-scientific approaches to knowledge creation and, along the way, also the schism between the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa*. The influence of pragmatism is visible in Kratochwil's more recent work, which has edged away from the old focus on norms and rules as it has shifted more towards practices. A good example to illustrate this shift is the driving of a car as practice, where the 'decisive stage is getting acquainted with the practice

of navigating through traffic' (Friedrichs and Kratochwil, 2009: 702). The abstract rules of the street code may be reasonably clear but still they are only a very imperfect guide. It is their local interpretation that matters. Learning the practice of driving is thus, at least beyond the mechanics of pressing the brake and turning the wheel, a highly context-dependent activity. Driving lessons learned in one place cannot be transferred easily to another. The constant interaction with other drivers and the anticipation of their actions give rise to quite different driving routines in the city of Naples and rural Nebraska (Friedrichs and Kratochwil, 2009).

What Kratochwil adopted from pragmatism is its fusion of acting and knowing, the idea 'that most of us have to act most of the time without having the privilege of basing our decisions on secure universally valid knowledge' (Kratochwil, 2007a: 11). We therefore develop the relevant knowledge as we go forward. Mary Follett put it nicely:

We cannot assume that we possess a body of achieved ideas stamped in some mysterious way with the authority of reason and justice, but even were it true, the reason and justice of the past must give way to the reason and justice of the present. You cannot bottle up wisdom – it won't keep – but through our associated life it may be distilled afresh at every instant. (Follett, 1998 [1918]: 130)

The problem of bottling up wisdom seems to echo Kratochwil's concern that scientific questions are always time-bound and that scientific progress does not consist in a discovery of things out there. If there is progress at all in social science, it resides in our ability to reframe issues, to ask new and unprecedented questions.

Kratochwil also cites pragmatism because it 'recognizes that science as a process of knowledge production is a social practice determined by rules' (Kratochwil, 2007a: 12). Participation in that process, however, is not confined to scientists. Many pragmatists, probably most of all John Dewey, downplayed the distinction between scientific and practical deliberations. Dewey 'proposed a conception of science that not only placed it at the disposal of democracy but emphasized the intellectual affinities, even the continuities, between scientific method and everyday practices' (Wolin, 2004: 505; see also Evans, 2000: 314–15). Inquiry, as Dewey preferred to call it, was a method not for discovering truth but for making sense of situations. Experience is key here, and it is never just passively made but lived through (Dewey, 1981[1917]). Experience takes place in a 'community of inquiry' that stretches beyond professional inquirers in universities and research institutes.

Again, a desire for wholeness in an age of fragmentation stands in the background. 'The problem of modern society, as both Dewey and Jane

Addams diagnosed it, was the fragmentation of individuals. Because they were divorced from any participation in society as a whole, most members of society had no perception of how society functioned as an operating entity' (Stabile, 1984: 64). For Addams and Dewey, citizen education was the best remedy to that evil. It should enable citizens to participate more effectively and competently in the political process; to break down the barriers between governors, experts and lay people; and to bring practical knowledge to bear on political problems.

Pragmatists contend that there is no significant distinction between the 'big we' of human problem-solvers and the 'small we' of the scientific community. Social science, then, is not a peculiar and sectarian practice that must remain unfamiliar, in method and purpose, to most members of the 'big we'. Professionals and laypeople all take part in the enterprise of social progress. Consequently, the American pragmatists of the progressive age were avid world-improvers who conceived many reform projects. Jane Addams dedicated much of her life to campaigns for international peace, women's rights and social justice, and we cannot understand her seminal contributions to IR without that context (Addams, 1907). John Dewey, as a public intellectual, called for social progress, modernized education and the democratization of society.

In sharp contrast, Kratochwil's humanism is not connected to any political, world-changing project but remains in a philosophical, world-observing position (Kratochwil, 2018: 4). He would rather stick to individual virtues so old that they are best expressed in ancient Greek letters. A fellow traveller on that route was George W. Morgan, an American philosopher and pioneer of interdisciplinary studies at Brown University. His work is largely forgotten (and was probably never quite influential) but of interest here because his critique of industrial modernity, science and the project of the Enlightenment resembles Kratochwil's on many counts.

In his book *The Human Predicament*, Morgan finds a common denominator among the many features of modern decay. He calls it the 'prosaic mentality' (Morgan, 1968). The concept covers many, if not all, items on the long list of misgivings that Kratochwil has about the late modern world, most conspicuously the 'apparent loss of cultural resources for coping with our predicament' (Kratochwil, 2018: 469). The prosaic mentality that Morgan describes has engulfed all areas of modern social life, but the main culprit is the advance of the scientific method, its obsession with facts, objectivity, efficiency and neatly prescribed procedures. 'For the prosaic man', Morgan writes, 'each individual thing is basically another instance of something he has met already. ... When he finds an unfamiliar situation, it is at once assigned to a compartment or category that provides a standard explanation of it. Stock phrases and routine methods are instantly applied, and the thing is done with' (Morgan, 1968: 99).

Morgan expounds an alternative with the example of a historiography that is less concerned with establishing laws than with understanding unique events in the course of time. There is no manual for how to make such understanding work.

When we say we understand something, we mean that in some way it makes sense to us. ... We have varied experiences of making sense of something, of accepting it as intelligible, of feeling that we understand it, of giving it our assent – and many of these, indeed most, cannot be cast into an explicit and adequate set of rules that we can follow step by step on other occasions. ... To be educated means, among other things, to be able to bring the proper mode of understanding to each occasion. (Morgan, 1968: 141–2)

The humanist epistemology of Morgan's approach is manifest, not least, in his insistence that we must encounter others with imagination and sympathy, a process he calls self-extension. 'Drawing on all our resources, all our actual experience, and on understanding previously gained from whatever sources, we try to present to ourselves and to apprehend others' being in the world: their life situations, their perspectives, their pressures and opportunities, and their desires and purposes' (Morgan, 1968: 149–50). This exercise in empathy is of use in everyday situations, and also in what we call social science, because Morgan does not see any categorical difference between the two endeavours.

Morgan's humanist epistemology does not seem far afield from Kratochwil's idea of praxis, although Morgan does not use that term. His humanism extends beyond the epistemological questions of how we gain knowledge of the outside world. Morgan outlines a way of making human beings whole again, and that is to familiarize them with all their mental faculties and, not least, emotions. Wholeness of individuals and of society are connected in that only whole individuals can re-establish rich and meaningful relations with others. 'The balance required for wholeness', Morgan writes in his concluding remarks, 'is one that is lived in the here and now of concrete occasions with their multifarious and often opposing claims, values and demands on the self' (Morgan, 1968: 330). Compared with Kratochwil's approach, Morgan's humanism more confidently steps beyond epistemological questions and is not shy about suggesting ways of healing, or redemption.

As a critique of industrial and scientific modernity, the quest for wholeness often seems to have something nostalgic about it. It implies that there must have been a point in time when conditions were better and when humans were still whole, even if it remains usually opaque when exactly that was. We may therefore be tempted to compare it to the romantic counter-movements

in the arts and literature that refuted the rationalism and disenchantment that industrial and scientific modernity had brought about. Kratochwil is aware of this possible reading and is quick to assert that he is neither indulging in ‘*Schwärmerei*’ nor in an ‘antiquarian interest for an idyllic past’ (Kratochwil, 2018: 469, 474).

In any event, characteristic of pragmatism and the praxis approach is a desire to link up to the experiences and the common sense of ‘normal people’ who try to be effective in the world and to make good choices. The ambition is to reconcile (social) science with the ‘big we’ of humanity, and to reconcile the intellectual and more worldly purposes of human agency. The allure of pragmatism is that this difference should not matter much because, at the end of the day, we are all in the same boat of sense-making and problem-solving. Kratochwil and the pragmatists do not marshal much empirical evidence to show that there really is continuity in how scientists and more practically minded people go about their business. It rather comes as an assumption about human nature. The academic quest for knowledge of the world by definition is a practice like any other because it serves as orientation in the world that we (the ‘big we’) urgently need.

In the next section, I will question this assumption of continuity. I will start from my observation that the ‘small we’ of social scientists is a sectarian bunch of people, often enthralled by quite parochial problems that to outsiders may seem obscure. Kratochwil’s writings always addressed primarily this group (or its IR theory sub-group) and its efforts to explain or understand the world. As far as I know, he never cared much for reaching out to the general public through op-eds in newspapers or television appearances. His scholarly books and articles – as we, as his keen readers, know – are no easy read for the uninitiated.

The habit of distancing

One of the remarkable features of Kratochwil’s writing is his excessive use of inverted commas. From the linguistic point of view, inverted commas have different functions. One is to mark in a text what persons other than the author say or ask. When signalling direct speech in this way, they introduce a second voice to a text that the reader can distinguish from the author’s. Inverted commas are also put around single words. In this function they warn the reader that a word is problematic or that its meaning in the text may deviate from familiar everyday parlance. Inverted commas could, for instance, flag a technical term that most people cannot be expected to know. A manual for engineers might not put the feeder tube of a machine in inverted commas, while it may well be a ‘feeder tube’ in a manual for consumers. Inverted commas can historicize when they are put around anachronistic expressions, especially when these words are used with a

different meaning today. They can also indicate irony or that an author does not accept a given term or concept as valid. A liberal economist would probably put ‘exploitation’ in inverted commas when discussing a Marxist treatise, while a fellow Marxist would not.

The goal of the exercise is to problematize, and subsequently reflect upon, the meaning of a word or concept. Inverted commas break our reading routines as they *create a distance* between the author, the reader and the normal usage of a word. When using inverted commas in the distancing function, dosage matters a lot. ‘The “normal” usage of the word’ indicates a healthy dose of scepticism about the normality of that usage; ‘the “normal” usage of the “word”’ in one phrase may signal the beginning of a stylistic obsession but may be justifiable with due explanation; to write about ‘the “normal” “usage” of the “word”’ is whacky. We cannot distance ourselves from everything at the same time, it seems, but need to sow the seeds of doubt parsimoniously.

Even when not used to quote anybody directly, inverted commas still introduce a second voice to the text (Carduff, 2009: 157). It is a disciplining voice that comments, alerts and annotates from a distance. In contrast to scientific prose, where inverted commas in the distancing function are common, literary texts rarely ever use them. A poem with words in inverted commas is a strange idea. ‘Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day? Thou art more lovely and more “temperate”’ (William Shakespeare, Sonnet 18, my inverted commas). I got it, an annoyed reader may despair, that Shakespeare is not referring to a woman’s body temperature here but to her character – no need to point that out with inverted commas. In poetry, it seems, there is no room for a didactic second voice that interferes with the intimate conversation between the reader and the work. The presence of a second voice ruins poetry in much the same way as an explanation ruins a joke. It spoils the communicative practice in action by pointing out, and reflecting upon, the tacit understandings on which that very practice rests.

The distinction between a first and a second voice restates, in a way, the familiar dualism of an internal and external perspective, between actor and observer. That dualism is frequently interpreted as a problem of language use. ‘Internalism, in brief, holds that the language of observation must match the language of action used inside the domain of a practice; externalism denies this’ (Frost and Lechner, 2016: 301). The first voice speaks the language of action, the language of praxis. If knowledge resides in action, it must be inherent in this language and its use. The second voice is the observer’s interpretative and sense-making voice, the voice of a controlling *Über-ich*. I do not think the second voice is necessarily using a different vocabulary, even if that may often be the case in today’s jargon-ridden social sciences. The key difference is in the purpose of language use. While the first voice performs a practice in ‘the language of action’, the second voice is busy dissecting

this practice for purposes of correction, clarification or explanation. It is not engaged in the original practice but commenting on it from a distance.

In the social sciences, the second voice is ubiquitous where words or concepts as used by the speakers in the real world are put to critical scrutiny. A classical social theorist who used inverted commas excessively was Max Weber. I do not think he did this to place some emphasis in his often rushed and breathless prose; he mostly used spaced print for that. Rather, he marked the distance between his language use as the author and the language of the subjects of his social analysis. The phenomenon has elicited quite some scholarly interest, even if it was largely restricted to the question of why he put the term 'objectivity' in inverted commas (McFalls, 2007; Palonen, 2010). With no prejudice to the question of what Weber really meant by objectivity, it seems safe to say that he put it in inverted commas when referring to 'that thing commonly called objectivity in the community of practice called science'. It seems also safe to conjecture that Weber did not fully share this common understanding of objectivity, for if he did, why the inverted commas?

In the social sciences, the use of inverted commas creates and maintains distance between the observer and the object of inquiry and its language use. Social science puts common words and concepts under the bright light of the dissecting table and takes them apart, thus inevitably breaking the bond with the community of practice and its implicit understandings. Kratochwil puts his inverted commas around technical terms of the social sciences that he does not (fully) accept, such as 'best practice', 'output legitimacy', 'global governance' or 'relative gains'. But on virtually every page of *Praxis* also basic words such as 'solution', 'failure', 'program', 'aggression', 'planning', 'novelty', 'enemy', 'morality', 'justice', 'history', 'victory', 'economics', 'law', 'public', 'approval', 'labor', 'exit', 'is' and 'ought', 'right' and 'wrong', 'soft' and 'hard' end up in inverted commas. Kratochwil's commentary on the language of international practices is a permanent distancing from what the actors, the practitioners, think they are doing with words. This commentary on language use often has disapproving undertones, denouncing a lack of reflection among those who employ those words carelessly.

The problem seems to be that practices work precisely because the practitioners have a tacit understanding of their words and concepts (their knowledge in action). In making the case for a practice perspective in IR, Vincent Pouliot pointed out that 'practices are the result of inarticulate, practical knowledge that makes what is to be done appear "self-evident" or commonsensical' (Pouliot, 2008: 258). Such practical knowledge is 'unreflexive and inarticulate through and through' (Pouliot, 2008: 265). I share Pouliot's view that practices only run smoothly when the knowledge in use remains tacit and unproblematic. Tacit here does not imply non-verbalized. Most social practices are to a large extent made of conversations.

Pouliot even draws on Kratochwil's earlier work on classic rhetoric to make that point, citing *topoi* and commonplaces as a typical feature of unquestioned practical language use. '[C]ommonplaces are tacit in nature: one discusses or acts with them but not about them' (Pouliot, 2008: 266).

To illustrate this point, let us imagine a lawyer who, in the midst of a treaty drafting process, says: 'Hang on, guys! Couldn't it be that what we call "law" here is just an instrument of the powerful to oppress the subaltern?' That lawyer would be reminded quickly that what was going on was treaty drafting, with its crystal-clear purpose and problem-solving orientation, and not David Kennedy's critical legal seminar. He could then either follow the advice and continue using law as unproblematic, thus staying in line with the requirements of accepted practice, or put law in inverted commas and, changing practice and habitus, leave the room for academia. The example shows how the appearance of a critical second voice, as I called it, disrupts the practice. This seems to confirm the common intuition that there is a practical and an academic way of using language, inspired and defined by very different purposes that are clear to the respective participants. How can Kratochwil claim that there is continuity between these activities?

Kratochwil's line of argument seems to run as follows and unfold again on the plane of epistemology. Social scientific inquiry, he argues, follows a mode of reasoning that Charles Sanders Peirce called 'abduction', which is 'a link of transmission between the empirical and the logical, between events and theory' (Bertilsson, 2004: 383). Abduction does not aim to establish a general theory (as through induction or deduction) but to determine what is the case in a given situation. It is amenable to the epistemology of praxis, because 'abduction is fundamentally based on a holistic understanding of the cases' (Friedrichs and Kratochwil, 2009: 719). Abduction, Friedrichs and Kratochwil suggest, is 'above all a more conscious and systematic version of the way by which humans have learned to solve problems and generate knowledge in their everyday lives' (Friedrichs and Kratochwil, 2009: 710). This is a strong claim of continuity between the practice of social science and the practices of the everyday. The members of the 'big we' and the 'small we' are both engaged in a world-disclosing enterprise and remain united by their practice of abduction.

That communality, if it exists, is a formal one, however. It is not substantial knowledge we share but a procedure, a way of going about things. Note that the pragmatists expected something more when they posited continuity between the expertise of scientists and lay people. Their expectation was that they would engage in joint problem-solving exercises and to that extent share a purpose. As IR scholars, however, we are writing about the behaviour of politicians, diplomats, soldiers, lawyers or economists without ever having performed their practices and shared their purposes. We never ran for election; we never conducted diplomatic negotiations; we (hopefully)

never fought a battle in war; we never represented a plaintiff at court; and we never tried to predict next year's economic growth. In other words, we do not experience the practices we write about.

Let me illustrate the difference further with the example of driving a car that was mentioned earlier. As members of the 'small we' community of scholars, our purpose is not driving a car. What we want is to understand the patterns of car traffic, and we try to do that without a licence and without a clue about the technicalities involved in driving a car. We do not even plan to be driving in the future. We are making theories, or judging traffic situations without the hands-on experience and competences that derive from driving. We are specialists in explaining, interpreting and criticizing traffic, recognizing its patterns from afar, and this is our job. Kratochwil is right when he insists that this very peculiar business follows its own rules and negotiates its own truths. Paul Diesing put it beautifully:

Social science produces a multiple, contradictory truth for our time—that is, a set of diversified perspectives and diagnoses of our changing, tangled, and contradictory society. These truths live in the practices and understandings of a research community, not in particular laws, and when that community peters out, its truth passes into history along with the society it tried to understand. (Diesing, 1991: 364)

Diesing offers here a good description of how social science works and what it can deliver. However, when discussing praxis or practices we need to differentiate between the practice of social science and the practices that social science studies. Abraham and Abramson do this when they distinguish an 'inward looking' and 'outward looking' perspective of practice theory (Abraham and Abramson, 2015: 28). Scholars who adopt the inward-looking perspective study their own profession with the help of practice theory, while the outward-looking perspective applies it to other realms of the social world.

Kratochwil's continuity thesis also sits uneasily with the idea that the ultimate goal of knowledge creation is not truth but usefulness. If this is correct, a wide gap opens between the actors' perspective on usefulness and the researcher's. Professionals want to succeed in their specific game and social scientists in theirs. As the two games are different, there is no common scale on which the usefulness of the generated knowledge could be measured. There are, to be sure, zones of overlap between what we would call professional and scientific activity – international law would be a case in point. But on the whole, there should be a reason why so few professionals of international relations take social science classes to enhance their problem-solving capacity and why so many go for an MBA or LLM degree instead. They look for the 'how to' kind of knowledge that helps them get on with their professional tasks.

Conclusion

In this chapter I took issue with the desire for wholeness that seems to animate Kratochwil's humanism. Kratochwil deploys the Aristotelian concept of praxis to reclaim a holistic type of knowledge for academic reflection. Drawing on Hume and American pragmatism, he tries to overcome the distinction between theory and practice, between knowing and acting, between the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa*. Such a holistic approach to the social world requires 'enlarging the self', as in Kratochwil (2018: 367), or 'self-extension', as Morgan (1968) calls it. While it is easy to accept empathy as a moral ideal for which to strive, it seems more difficult to understand how exactly 'enlarging the self' can help us make sense of the world and solve our problems. The idea seems to gesture at qualitative social research aimed at understanding, or the 'thick constructivism' found in Kratochwil's earlier writings (see Davis, [Chapter 9](#), this volume). In *Praxis*, however, Kratochwil seems to go further, as he now emphasizes continuities between scholarly and practical reasoning.

In this chapter I presented a critique of this continuity assumption, prompted by the suspicion that it is a normative position in epistemological disguise. The humanist ideal of wholeness suggests that there *should be* no difference between how average people make their inquiries and how social scientists do. To show that this is really the case, Kratochwil cites Peirce's method of abduction, arguing that this is how the community of scientists (the 'small we') and human beings in general (the 'big we') tend to reason. There is not only an alleged continuity in method, but also a continuity in purpose, because 'we all' need to make sense of the situations we are in. Acting is knowing, and knowledge is (re-)produced in our practical experience. It is 'working together' on practical tasks that makes for meaningful community, engaging jointly in a practice and developing a tangible '*inter-esse*' (Kratochwil, 2018: 367).

While we may argue that, at a fundamental level, practices of inquiry and judgement follow similar patterns in everyday life and social science, I have my doubts about Kratochwil's strong claims about shared purposes and joint problem-solving. The same Peirce also argued that '[t]rue science is distinctively the study of useless things. For the useful things will get studied without the aid of scientific men' (Peirce, 1932: Vol. 1, para 76). He did not say this to discredit scientists, but just wanted to set apart those 'possessed by a passion to learn' from the vast majority of 'practical men, who carry on the business of the world' (Peirce, 1932: Vol. 1, para 43).

Most social scientists, and in particular theory-prone IR scholars, do not experience the situations that their inquiries are about but observe them from afar. Towards the end of *Praxis*, Kratochwil seems to acknowledge this when he portrays social scientists as 'critical observers in the privileged position

of academics' who contribute to an order 'that allows us to "go on" in that mode of communication that is a "conversation"' (Kratochwil, 2018: 475). Yet even if acting together is a conversation rather than 'working together on joint tasks', our social scientific habit of distancing might get in the way. What social scientists speak is not the performative voice of practice. It is a distant, disciplining idiom that is constantly annotating, criticizing and correcting what others say and do. That *Über-ich* voice, as I argued in this chapter, disrupts the tacit understanding on which practices rest. The reflexive-critical stance of social scientists who dissect real-world practices to gain knowledge about them seems hard to reconcile with the habitual conduct of those practices that rely on tacit and unquestioned knowledge. Therefore, the prospects for re-establishing wholeness in a late modern, functionally differentiated world are dim. Ironically, perhaps, the sheer existence of social science as a breadwinning professional activity is among the forces that militate against it.

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