Moral Limit and Possibility in World Politics

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1 *Moral limit and possibility in world politics*

RICHARD PRICE

Introduction

At what point, if any, is one to reasonably concede that the 'realities' of world politics require compromise from cherished principles or moral ends, and that what has been achieved is ethically justified? How do we really know we have reached an ethical limit when we see one, or fallen short in ways that deserve the withholding of moral praise? Less abstractly, how might we seek to reconcile the cherished freedoms of liberal democracy with restrictions on immigration? Can war legitimately be waged in defence of human rights, and override competing moral claims to self-determination? Can the perpetuation of slaughter be risked by refusing amnesties to perpetrators of atrocities in order to enforce international criminal law? Is there any way to ethically navigate moral dilemmas such as the above, ones that seem to require choices between cosmopolitanism and communitarianism, or consequentialism and deontology, or the oft-competing demands between procedural and substantive justice?

As the history of ethics and international political theory attest, these are difficult enough questions for which to hope for some answer, not the least given traditions of thought like realism that deny the very existence of developments we could call ethically progressive change in world politics in the first place. But it becomes even more difficult still if a research programme that has itself led the charge in empirically documenting putative moral progress inherently problematises the very grounds upon which prima facie judgements of moral good are often made. How does one even approach the task of formulating robust answers to questions of ethics that can respond to charges of subjectivism and relativism when coming out of an intellectual tradition that suggests all such judgements and the complexes of intersubjective meanings that make them possible are themselves but time- and culture-bound constructions? Moreover, what if, due to the critical theoretical

insights underpinning social constructivism, constructivist analyses lead us to identify that what appear prima facie to be progressive initiatives are themselves revealed to come at the price of concomitant regress in other areas? What if, for instance, the price of extending a peaceful security community of democratic states is the 'othering' of outsiders? Or if domestic progress on gender issues was predicated upon political bargains that entailed setbacks in progressive immigration policy? What if transnational civil society's successful influence curtailing the use of landmines is bought at the price of simultaneously strengthening the surveillance and coercive powers of the state? Or if the bargains to establish an International Criminal Court (ICC) guard crucial elements of the prerogative of states as it forwards a paradigm of human security? How do we evaluate – and justify to victims and their families – amnesties given to perpetrators of atrocities, secured in order to stop ongoing slaughter? Or could they later not be rescinded in the name of justice?

Are there theoretical responses that can help us navigate through such ethical challenges that confront us in contemporary world politics? Talk of progress has long been the purview of liberal and critical theories of International Relations (IR), whose champions in different ways have laid claim to the moral high ground in pointing the ways to positive moral change. And yet both have been the targets of persistent charges of utopianism. Recent constructivist scholarship on the role of norms in international relations, I have argued elsewhere, has responded convincingly to such charges with careful empirical research that demonstrates the possibilities of moral change in world politics.[1] But while it has thus opened up convincing space for taking seriously the role of moral change in the study and practice of international relations, this literature for the most part has not offered its own normative or prescriptive defences of particular changes as good – such positions are often not explicitly articulated let alone rigorously defended.[2] Upon what basis are accounts of moral change, which are presumed to be desirable, to be accepted as in fact progressive? While the challenge of having to offer a convincing defence of the ethical desirability of norms like the abolition

[1] Richard Price, 'Transnational Civil Society and Advocacy in World Politics', *World Politics* 55:4 (2003), 579–606.

[2] See Nicholas Wheeler for a conspicuous exception: *Saving Strangers: Humanitarian Intervention in International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

of slavery or torture would not exactly keep too many constructivist scholars up at night, constructivist analyses do render many other cases potentially problematic as intimated above. Moreover, it is hardly the case that all self-designated constructivists agree on what is ethically right in a given situation, which problematises empirical claims of progressive change in world politics. Not all change is necessarily morally 'good', and neither is all behaviour that conforms with the international community's existing moral standards necessarily morally laudable – so what are the standards for evaluation, an externally derived set of moral standards, or ones dependent upon existing moral norms which constructivists take seriously as structuring the very ethical standards that are available to us to invoke for judgement? Rather than attempting to impose a singular definition for all the discipline of what counts as moral progress here in the introduction, the authors in this volume are rather inveighed to defend their usages of 'good' and 'progress' by being explicit concerning what they view as moral progress and from where it is derived, including to be as self-conscious as possible about how our/their own particular context may shape those very standards that they seek to employ. For the most part, the contributions of this volume share a humanitarian, cosmopolitan vein, though the relationship between constructivism and substantive theories of international relations is engaged in sections below and directly in the concluding chapter.

The evolution of criticisms of constructivist scholarship as well points to normative theorising as a next stage of the constructivist agenda. Much constructivist work was itself a response to scepticism that moral norms matter in world politics. While a few critics still seek to challenge that empirical claim, in the face of empirical scholarship demonstrating the explanatory value of moral norms, the centre of the debate moved to a challenge of how to explain why some norms matter in some places and not others,[3] and responses to that challenge have occupied much of the norms literature in recent years. The remaining avenue to challenge scholarship which touts moral change in world politics is that this agenda (and constructivism generally) has been beset by a normative bias in favour of 'good' norms that worked. While initially couched in

[3] Jeffrey Checkel, 'The Constructivist Turn in International Relations Theory', *World Politics* 50:2 (1998), 324–348.

methodological terms,[4] this challenge itself is only coherent with its own normative premise (namely, of what counts as 'good'). In order to respond to this criticism, scholars ultimately must turn to some form of normative defence, and how constructivism itself might help us to do so in a rigorous way is a central challenge taken up by this volume. To be sure, this challenge goes both ways: critics who make such charges can only make them intelligible on the basis of their own normative defences of what qualifies as good or undesirable norms, else the critique is simply incoherent. This has put the moral question front and centre, among additional reasons argued by Christian Reus-Smit in the next chapter. Not surprisingly, the more that constructivism has addressed the empirical, theoretical and methodological challenges of its critics, the more the sceptical critique has taken on an explicitly normative cast. In response to the plethora of scholarly works demonstrating the importance of norms and the role of transnational advocacy networks in world politics for such developments as the Landmines Convention, the rise of humanitarian intervention, and milestones in international criminal law including tribunals and the ICC, critics increasingly have been responding along the line that they simply don't agree that such norms are 'good'.[5] For all of these reasons, normative theorising is inescapable in making claims about possibilities of moral change in world politics, and thus central to practice and intellectual discourse in International Relations, even as professionally it has not been accorded pride of place in the American academy of International Relations which has been dominated by explanatory agendas that largely exclude normative theorising as the terrain of 'political theory', 'normative theory' or philosophy.[6]

[4] Paul Kowert and Jeffrey Legro, 'Norms, Identity and their Limits'. In Peter Katzenstein (ed.), *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1996), 451–497.

[5] See, e.g., Kenneth Anderson, 'The Ottawa Convention Banning Landmines, the Role of International Non-Governmental Organizations, and the Idea of International Civil Society', *European Journal of International Relations* 11:1 (2000), 91–120.

[6] Surveying what are widely regarded as the top three journals in International Relations in North America – *International Organization*, *International Security* and *World Politics* – over the period 1990–2006, at most four articles could be identified that are arguably characterised as engaging in normative as opposed to primarily explanatory analysis. In contrast, International Relations scholarship in the UK has accorded a much more prominent place to normative theorising. Reus-Smit notes in his chapter, however, the normative turn in the work of Robert Keohane, one of the most prominent positive scholars of American International Relations.

While not expressed precisely in the above terms, the lack of prescriptive theorising issuing from the constructivist movement in the field of International Relations has not gone unnoticed in the literature. Mervyn Frost in particular has laid an important challenge in noting that critical and sociological approaches in International Relations have for the most part eschewed explicit ethical theorising in favour of descriptivism and explanation. As he puts it:

> the task of IR theory according to constitutive theorists is to reveal our global international social order to be a human construct within which are embedded certain values chosen by us and to show how this construct benefits some and oppresses others. This seems to be pre-eminently an exercise in ethical evaluation. It would seem to be self-evident that scholars (be they critical theorists, post-modern theorists, feminist IR scholars, constructivists, or structuration theorists) involved in such evaluative exercise must engage in serious ethical argument – argument about what is to count as oppression (as opposed to liberation), about what is to count as an emancipatory practice (as opposed to an enslaving one), about what would be fair in international relations, what just, and so on. However, in practice, constitutive theorists have done very little of this kind of theorizing. They do not for the most part tackle the question 'What would it be ethical to do in the circumstances?'[7]

Indeed, this is an astute observation and fair charge insofar as a chief motivation of some such constructivist work (at least I can speak for my own) precisely has been to open up space for moral progress in world politics by empirically documenting successes that give lie to the sceptical position that the pursuit of moral progress in world politics is folly. That humanity is not simply and always condemned to the raw exercise of brute power is no small finding, since the consequences are of course unspeakably dire in an era of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction if the sceptical thesis were correct. Nonetheless, this leaves unanswered – from constructivists, as of yet – the above challenge of normative defences of change in world politics, at least on Frost's terms, which are those of the traditions of ethical theory.

[7] Mervyn Frost, 'A Turn Not Taken: Ethics in IR at the Millennium', *Review of International Studies* 24 (1998), 127. As Neta Crawford has also noted, 'constructivists have little to say about what to do'. *Argument and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 427.

Seen from the perspective of constructivists themselves, to take up this challenge may not simply translate into a charge for constructivists or others to engage in recognisably moral theorising of the type that might bring a Michael Walzer, Charles Beitz, Henry Shue or Peter Singer to mind. Indeed, a reasonable response could be that it is not to be expected that empirically oriented researchers should or even could become adequately accomplished moral philosophers. Rather, the challenge is whether constructivism has anything distinctive and valuable to offer in terms of normative theorising, in terms of the prescriptive dimension of political thought and practice, and thus to the practice of making decisions and judgements in world politics. That is to say, what does constructivism contribute to the prescriptive question posed for so long by political theorists, one so central to all politics: how are we to act? What exactly are the theoretical and practical implications of this constructivist opening up of moral space? Does constructivism itself have anything to offer towards normative theorising that can help resolve some of the evaluative dilemmas noted at the outset, and thus contribute in some capacity as moral guides to action? Or is its primary contribution simply to open a wider door for well-established ethical theories like utilitarianism, rights-based or deontological theories and the like to show their faces more fully and frequently in the scholarly field of International Relations, without challenging, modifying or contributing to those theories? What would constructivist contributions to normative theorising look like, if one were to integrate the insights of constructivism regarding the possibilities and limits of moral change? What advantages could it bring to existing normative theories and practice? In the next chapter, Christian Reus-Smit deals with some of these issues in the wider context of the purposes of International Relations scholarship and the development of the discipline, as well as making the case for a broader conception of ethics than the dominant mode of the deduction of principles. For now, it will suffice to state that the premise of this volume is that research programmes which have shown how moral norms arise and have an impact on world politics are well placed to help us answer the ethical question of 'what we should do'. *Since social constructivist analyses of the development and effects of moral norms entail theoretical and empirical claims about the conditions of possibility and limits of moral change in world politics, that agenda should provide insightful leverage on the ethical question of 'what to do' insofar as one accepts that a responsible answer depends*

not just on what one judges as right in the abstract, but also on what one may have some reasonable expectation of working, and thus prescribing as a course of action or judgement.[8] That is, without denying altogether the essential role of idealism, an understanding of the limits and possibilities of moral change should provide additional rigorous grounds for ethics, particularly insofar as I argue in what follows that normative theory and ethical prescriptions cannot completely eschew their own empirical assumptions even as they rarely develop them as systematically as has constructivism. In this chapter I thus outline six major contributions of constructivism for theorising moral limit and possibility and addressing global ethical dilemmas that provide the framework for the substantive chapters which follow. They include: (1) attention to the relation between the ethical and empirical, including providing a way to help adjudicate the empirical bases of ethical positions; (2) recognition of the empirical importance of the debate between rationalist and constructivist accounts of agency and their relevance for normative theorising; which include (3) the identification of different kinds of hypocritical political practice which in turn imply different ethical evaluations of hypocrisy; (4) the illumination of neglected dimensions for ethics, including the identification of different kinds of dilemmas arising from a focus on the constitutive effects of norms; (5) the relevance of relations of co-constitution for thinking through issues of complicity and cooptation; and (6) a theoretical account of morality that avoids the tendency of philosophical approaches to ethics to sidestep questions of power, without falling prey to the shortcomings of post-structuralist ethics that do highlight power. Before outlining those contributions, I canvass how some of the major relevant works in the existing normative literature in International Relations have dealt with these issues in order to make readily apparent the value-added of constructivism, focusing in particular upon a few key recent works in contemporary critical and constitutive normative theory since they have addressed questions most directly similar to those posed here.

[8] Cognisant of the apparent contrast with Kant's criticism of what he termed the naturalist fallacy – that the 'ought' hinges upon the 'is' – I would note that Kant himself suggested that the demands of ethics stand independent of empirical likelihood but not to the point where ethics demands what is demonstrably impossible to fulfil. The position here seeks to excavate constructivism for help to answer the question of just how we know when we can say we've reached such conditions of possibility and impossibility.

Critical theory and normative theorizing in International Relations

Critical theory is a tradition in International Relations that has brought to the fore questions revolving around moral change and its limits. In response to the persistent charges of the utopianism of the critical theory tradition, Robert Cox notably acknowledged that while critical theory necessarily contains an element of utopianism, it is constrained by its sociological understanding of historical processes. As he argued:

> Critical theory allows for a normative choice in favour of a social and political order different from the prevailing order, but it limits the range of choice to alternative orders which are feasible transformations of the existing world. A principal objective of critical theory, therefore, is to clarify this range of possible alternatives. Critical theory thus contains an element of utopianism in the sense that it can represent a coherent picture of an alternative order, but its utopianism is constrained by its comprehension of historical processes. It must reject improbable alternatives just as it rejects the permanency of the existing order.[9]

Little concrete has been forthcoming, however, concerning how one would construct such a theoretical project or what it would look like, specifically in the sense of how one could tell a political and ethical possibility from an impossibility. Until recently, few explicit clues had been provided by critical International Relations theorists as to how to make these imperatives of the desirable and the possible mesh. Indeed, prominent critical theorists themselves have often been explicit that they do not seek to provide 'practical' ethics and solutions to substantive moral problems as that would be anathema to the critical theoretical project.[10] But how then would we know a justifiable ethical limit to change when we saw one, or recognise a possibility to be realised? How do we justify such limits and possibilities? This has been a particularly acute problem for critical theory, I would argue, since a number of

[9] Robert Cox, 'Social Forces, States, and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory'. In Robert Keohane (ed.), *Neorealism and its Critics* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1986), 210.

[10] For a sympathetic overview of critical theory's contributions to ethics that provides a critical challenge to its reluctance to 'do ethics' in the applied sense, see Robyn Eckersley, 'The Ethics of Critical Theory'. In Duncan Snidal and Christian Reus-Smit (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of International Relations* (forthcoming).

recent initiatives like the landmines campaign of the 1990s that would prima facie appear to epitomise a morally progressive critical social movement were subjected to condemnation from some critically minded scholars in conversations within and outside the academy. This was most surprising not only to this scholar, nurtured in the varieties of critical theory, but perfectly bewildering to at least one government official deeply and very importantly involved in the campaign, and who himself had a critical IR theory background and self-identified with the 'progressive/critical' side of the political and academic spectrum. Similar encounters greeted the establishment of criminal tribunals for Yugoslavia and Rwanda (if here, then why not there?), and agreement on the International Criminal Court, championed by some as a great and unexpected victory for moral progress in world politics, chastised by others as merely a shield for great power guilt over having not acted to prevent genocide and ethnic cleansing in the first place. What actually existing or accomplished initiative, one might wonder, could possibly live up to the standards issuing from critical theory? Or is it indeed in a deep sense the essence of critical theory to provide moving and perhaps impossible standards, else the *raison d'être* of the critical project itself collapse? And what would we conclude of such a function of critical theory if it is so?

In the most forthright and systematic attempt to address some of these problems besetting critical theory, Andrew Linklater, in his magisterial work *The Transformation of Political Community*, has argued that the task of critical theory consists of a threefold agenda of ethics, sociology and praxeology. For Linklater, normative and sociological advances are incomplete without some reflection on practical possibilities. Boiled down to basic distinctions, his 'sociology' consists of the identification or explanation of the already immanent; his 'ethical' is the formulation of the not already immanent; and his 'praxeological' is guidance of how to realise the immanent. Concerning the last, he explains that 'praxeology is concerned with reflecting on the moral resources within existing social arrangements which political actors can harness for radical purposes'.[11] Linklater's praxeology seems to consist of teasing out the full implications of principles that have been but partly realised; that is, in identifying the moral capacity of already

[11] Andrew Linklater, *The Transformation of Political Community: Ethical Foundations of the Post-Westphalian Era* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 5.

existing potentials. His method, then, of arriving at the praxeological would seem to consist of identifying logical potentials of ideas immanent in society and following their logic. His procedure here, applied to developments such as how the language of citizenship provided its own dialectical development, does give us some leverage on the inherent power of ideas.

Schematically, Linklater's threefold typology of the critical project is a most fruitful architecture and impressive accomplishment. But this formulation does not escape long-standing suspicions of teleology in progressivist theories: how do we know when something is 'already immanent'? Linklater's formulation does not give us much insight into limits – there are plenty of contradictory and unrealised good ideals out there, others subject to backsliding, and so on. Neither does Linklater's account contain a theory of agency, nor of power. Thus it does not yet, in the final analysis, provide a clear bridge between the ethical and the immanent: how does the transition from the former to the latter occur? Despite his otherwise fruitful agenda, Linklater's formulation does not give us much of a sense of how these potentials are to be realised other than a progressivist mechanism of assumed evolution, thus undercutting this otherwise promising contribution to ethical theory when twinned with the absence of a sustained empirical analysis that could carry the argument.

The problem of power in turn presents difficulties for Linklater's ethics. Linklater's dialogic ethic requires that all participants 'stand back from authority structures and group loyalties' in which they are embedded, to willingly treat all other human subjects as equals, and to engage in dialogue problematising practices of privilege and subordination.[12] This move parallels in an important respect the move critical theorists themselves (among others) have found so implausible in Rawls' veil of ignorance, the thought experiment whereby the most reasonable responses to ethics are to be sought in the 'original position' whereby agents hypothesise what answers they would come up with if they did not know who they were, where they were from and what privileges of wealth and power they possessed. Just as the communitarian critique would have it, the procedural dimension of the ethic that Linklater proposes is strikingly at odds with the constructivist ontology underpinning most contemporary critical theory, including Linklater's

[12] Ibid. 87, 91.

own, which sees every agent and every moral position as unavoidably embedded in a historical and cultural context.

Linklater himself is of course not unaware of this potential paradox, disclosing that 'individuals cannot escape the moral language embedded in the social conventions which have previously constituted them as moral subjects . . . [therefore] absolute foundations for the assessment of the merits of different cultures or historical epochs will necessarily elude them'.[13] A better expression of the social constructivist ontological position would be difficult to find. It does, however, seem deeply at odds with an ethic that requires what for the constructivist would seem to be the impossible. Namely, how to square the ethical shedding of the effects of power and identity inherent in actors necessarily being embedded in time and society and politics and culture, with an ontology whose premise is that such a move is in practice, if not intellectually, impossible?

The problem for Linklater's critical theory then, is that the more deeply true the critical ontological diagnosis of the human condition – the more socially constructed we are, the more language constructs our very agency – the less able we could ever hope to extract ourselves from the subtleties of its clutches, imbued as they always are with the tendrils of power relations. As an ethical ideal to strive for in the sense of a procedural rather than substantive ethic, this author finds much that is appealing indeed about discourse ethics; yet, it remains frustratingly elusive even on critical theorists' own ontological terms.

Here constructivist research methods can make a contribution to ethics when coupled with the self-reflexive epistemological underpinnings characteristic of many constructivists. If interventions in Kosovo or Iraq, for example, presented dilemmas for Western policy makers or scholars, they did so only for those with cosmopolitan sensibilities. But rather than simply ordain an ethical evaluation from a perspective one might defend on deontological or utilitarian grounds, constructivism would additionally encourage the empirical embodiment of a dialogic ethic to open up and buttress the grounds of such assessments. That is, as against exercises in ratiocination like Kant's categorical imperative or Rawls' thought experiment of the original position, communicative ethics of the sort championed by Habermas call for procedures of consensus through deliberation without coercion among all concerned

[13] Ibid. 64.

as the most promising path for justice. Some scholars, most notably those who have engaged in what has been called the 'ZIB debate',[14] have thus sought to investigate empirically the extent to which such practices are actually approximated in world politics. Thomas Risse has importantly responded to the empirical critique of idealism of the communicative action model – namely, the actual existence of situations characterised by actors who recognise each other as equals engaged in truth seeking towards consensus – by persuasively contending that 'the ideal speech situation is not meant as a statement about the empirical world or – even worse – some utopian ideal; instead it constitutes primarily a counterfactual presupposition' to be analysed for its influence in any given situation against other forms of action such as bargaining (as strategic action) and rhetoric which themselves are ideal types rarely uncontaminated by the other forms of action.[15] Risse concedes that his 'counterarguments to various objections raised against the possibility of an "ideal speech situation" in international affairs only help to some extent. The Habermasian condition of "equal access" to the discourse, for example, is simply not met in world politics'. Yet in empirical terms he is surely right that 'The real issue then is not whether power relations are absent in a discourse, but to what extent they can explain the argumentative outcome'.[16]

Deitelhoff and Müller for their part argue that while their systematic research attempt to discover instances of authentic persuasion suggests that it does occur in world politics, the project was 'unable to methodologically and empirically prove this assumption: it is a theoretical paradise that is empirically lost!'[17] Deitelhoff and Müller argue that this is so because one cannot adequately prove methodologically 'whether it was the better argument that carried the day, or other factors such as material power'.[18] While they thus abandoned the search for actor orientations (were actors really truth-seeking in the Habermasian sense or instrumentalist?), one could note that in the absence of convening or finding such an actual procedural ethic via the discovery of

[14] For the journal *Zeitschrift für Internationale Beziehungen*.
[15] Thomas Risse, '"Let's Argue!": Communicative Action in World Politics', *International Organization* 51 (2000), 17–18.
[16] Ibid. 18.
[17] Nicole Deitelhoff and Harald Müller, 'Theoretical Paradise – Empirically Lost? Arguing with Habermas', *Review of International Studies* 31 (2005), 177.
[18] Ibid.

intentions, other alternatives might be useful. For example, scholars could examine a dilemma empirically and ask, say in the case of an intervention: how did it look not just from the perspective of potential intervenors, which is the common ethical referent for debates over Kosovo, for example, but how did it look from the perspective of those who were the targets of outside intervention, and indeed all concerned? What is the position of the marginalised and those of diverse political theoretical persuasions in any given dilemma? How broadly acceptable are given responses to dilemmas? Constructivist research methods, as Deitelhoff and Müller show, can provide an empirical complement and indeed analogue to dialogical ethical theory; in this volume several authors take a related tack by pointing to an assessment of how the actual range of political possibilities are arrayed. As argued by Kathryn Sikkink in this volume, for example, an ethic upholding human rights norms is powerful precisely because such a moral position is not merely the ethical ideal of thinkers of a particular persuasion. Rather, human rights have been produced as consequential social facts through intensive negotiation (not to mention practice) among the vast majority of the world's states and numerous non-state actors for decades, finding champions among the privileged and marginalised alike. Jonathan Havercroft raises the dilemmas of indigenous governance as they appear not just to Western academics but to indigenous peoples themselves, which serves to identify how they inform or fail to inform dominant responses to question of indigenous self-determination. He argues that empirical examination reveals there are resources in indigenous traditions, contemporary international law and the political theory and practices underpinning modern sovereign states that can serve as common ground for just resolutions of the question of self-determination. These issues takes us to the first key contribution of constructivism to normative theorising, which is its explicit and particular attention to the relation between the empirical and the ethical.

The relation of the empirical to the ethical

Drawing more from continental traditions of ethics, Mervyn Frost has made perhaps the most sustained case to develop an ethical theory of world politics via working through the relationship between the normative and empirical in constructing a constitutive theory of international relations, which of course by the very name would seem to offer a

project most compatible with a constructivist contribution to normative theorising. In his important book, Frost deftly shows how any explanation of international relations inescapably involves substantive normative theory.[19] He convincingly illustrates how even a preliminary description of, let alone explanation for, situations such as the conflict in the former Yugoslavia requires rather sophisticated normative judgements by social scientists, such as what counts as a national liberation struggle as opposed to terrorists, or a protection racket run by a warlord. Frost's main criticism of the mainstream of International Relations, and even much of critical theory, is that it eschews ethical theorising, and presupposes the ability to provide objectively correct descriptions or explanations even as Frost argues such exercises cannot escape normative theorising in the process. This is a persuasive argument in the end, even if his own analysis of critical and post-modern theory in the book is too underdeveloped to bear the full weight of all his charges.

However plausible Frost's case for the inevitability of normative theory for even empirical claims in International Relations, Frost's own constitutive theory, in turn, ultimately and ironically rises or falls depending upon the plausibility of his own *empirical* claims about the existence and content of what he terms 'settled' international norms that constitute the terrain of ethical possibility. To criticise realism Frost argues that no account of international relations is coherent without acknowledging the role of rules and norms, and that might and right 'are not conceptually and practically distinct in the way they need to be' to maintain the position that might prevails over right insofar as 'power always exists within a practice which is partially constituted by certain normative ideas'.[20] This critique of amoralism thus requires Frost to identify the constitutive social norms of world politics; Frost, however, does not himself engage in a lengthy empirical analysis and defence of those constitutive norms of the international system – as have constructivists, pitting them directly against alternative explanations – nor does he draw upon such work to robustly buttress his claims. Rather he for the most part simply posits them, confident it would seem that they are uncontroversial enough as to be unlikely to provide the resources to

19 Mervyn Frost, *Ethics in International Relations: A Constitutive Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 35–39.
20 Ibid. 60, 62–63.

undo his constitutive theory. To be fair, such an analysis would take him too far afield from his most central purposes, and thus is asking much within the single volume just as it may be asking too much to ask constructivists to provide ethical defences of the norms they document. And yet, the lack of adequate empirical defence of the contested nature of what he takes to be the empirical ground leaves his theory with much more of a conservative flavour than clearly is his intent. At this level, this is not an insuperable difficulty for Frost's position in my view, insofar as his theory is analytically neutral in principle to dominant forms of political community, thus leaving room for the rise of alternative forms and institutions other than the state. More importantly, however, the result in the end is that it does not give us much leverage in analysing the limits or possibilities of moral change. Consider, in particular, how Frost's theory and its applications might have looked had he systematically utilised Linklater's threefold agenda of critical theory to analyse immanent possibilities in the international system, and incorporated the findings of constructivist empirical research to underscore the changes in state sovereignty, the state system and its regulative and constitutive norms. Failing to do so weakens his analysis of central moral dilemmas such as that involved in his case study on intervention in Bosnia. Here he contended that 'From a moral point of view the task of outsiders in a dispute like the Bosnian one is to provide a dynamic framework within which the people may constitute themselves as citizens in a state or states'.[21] While he is probably wise indeed in arguing that at the end of the day the necessary relationships in such situations are best established by the actors themselves, he skirts the central ethical question that faced the international community to the point of begging it: what if outside force, indeed war, is judged to be needed to establish the 'framework conditions within which the institutions of reciprocal recognition may grow'?[22] Similarly, while Frost provides incisive refinements on our understanding of the importance of the practice of state recognition given his Hegelian theory of mutual recognition, he does not fully answer the pressing normative question that regularly faces politicians squarely in the face: what *should* be the criteria in terms of which states recognise one another? Are contemporary practices adequate? Must sovereignty change? Can it? How would we reach such assessment in

[21] Ibid. 209. [22] Ibid. 211.

the absence of the help of sustained analysis of changes in the practice of sovereignty such as constructivism has engaged in and debated explicitly with other approaches?[23]

In short, while empirical research and International Relations theory may not be able to escape normative theorising, neither, I would contend, can normative theorising escape some degree of empirical descriptivism altogether – a side of the equation that Frost and many other works of normative IR theory don't systematically examine, thus limiting normative IR theory from offering all it otherwise could for the questions that animate this project about moral limit and possibility. This leaves normative IR theories like Frost's (and many others which make parallel moves) in a bind. Acceptance of Frost's constitutive theory requires that one agrees with the descriptive list of norms he proposes as 'settled' norms of world politics, which in turn is even less guaranteed on Frost's own terms since in Frost's view description depends upon the normative premises the analyst brings to the table. Frost argues that 'there is no objective way of choosing between paradigms'.[24] His invocation of a strong interpretivist epistemology obscures the degree to which normative claims do in fact depend in various ways upon empirical assumptions or claims about the world nonetheless, even if they cannot be established as objectively true in a positivist sense. Yet, no criteria are spelt out to defend those empirical elements – they are either arbitrary or simply reduced to purely ethical claims. Thus Frost's ethical theory is doubly weakened by not drawing upon empirical work to give a convincing account of his 'settled norms' – they are simply posited. In some respects it is a most sensible and indeed clever positing to be sure – by running everything through the state Frost insulates his position from the most obvious line of attack from realism for one, a tack Wendt has notably taken in his version of social constructivism.[25] Charles Beitz, in contrast, attempts to harness the ontological grounds of interdependence (as opposed to Frost's statism) as grounds for a cosmopolitan theory, to cite but one

[23] On the changing nature of sovereignty and international systems, see Christian Reus-Smit, *The Moral Purpose of the State* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

[24] Frost, *Ethics*, 24.

[25] Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

of a large number of alternative international ethical positions underpinned by rival empirical grounds.[26]

Similarly, Steven Lee, in his profound tome dissecting our moral condition in the nuclear era and prescribing our moral choices with regard to nuclear weapons, has argued for the analytic utility and practical/ethical importance of a principle of 'tolerable divergence'.[27] By this he means that what moral norms prescribe should not diverge too greatly from what prudential norms prescribe, an eminently plausible formulation. Lee's normative theory revolves around the empirical claim that moral norms are unlikely to survive if adherence to them requires too great a sacrifice of prudential ends. This is exactly the kind of claim where the constructivist project of accounting for the existence, origins and durability of international norms is essential.

It is here, then, where the kind of empirical validation practised by constructivists could help adjudicate between ethical accounts, at least forestalling premature descent into an endless relativist circle of interpretation without hope of discrimination.[28] Constructivist scholars have often made claims about the (contingent) validity of interpretations or explanations with a relative rather than absolute epistemological practice, established in good part by demonstrating the inadequacy of alternative accounts. Constructivist scholarship has thereby provided us with ways to unpack the dichotomy between relativism and positivism, establishing an epistemological halfway house by way of the practice of thoroughly adjudicating between alternative accounts to remove error where accounts in fact directly compete with one another (that is, in cases where the question is the same and both answers cannot be correct at the same time), or showing how putative rival explanations may in fact complement one another for a more holistic account. This produces a measure of plausibility to the empirical claims implicit in ethical theorising at least one degree removed from an unestablished

[26] Charles Beitz, *Political Theory and International Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

[27] Steven Lee, *Morality, Prudence and Nuclear Weapons* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 21.

[28] For a complementary analysis which seeks to outline how to evaluate normative arguments by standard social science methods such as ability to explain or predict, see Jack Snyder, '"Is" and "Ought": Evaluating Empirical Aspects of Normative Research'. In Colin Elman and Miriam Fendius Elman (eds.), *Progress in International Relations Theory: Appraising the Field* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 349–377.

basis of incommensurable ethics – and scholarship as pure politics – and instead offers contingent claims that can at least identify errors if not establish timeless objective truths. The contention here is that it is these kinds of close empirical analyses and the epistemological status of the claims characteristic of constructivist approaches to International Relations that can fill in some of the gaps in the otherwise fruitful beginnings by scholars such as Frost, Linklater and Lee in charting out assessments of moral limit and possibility in world politics, particularly for those interested in putting truth ahead of politics, as far as one is able, rather than the reverse. In addition to its other proclaimed bridge-building capacities, then, constructivism offers a way to think through the normative–empirical gap, thereby offering an avenue for grounding ethical claims in an additionally rigorous way.[29]

The method of closely weighing alternatives against one another, characteristic of many constructivist accounts, points as well to the importance of alternatives that did not happen when considering moral possibility. This intimate relation between empirical explanation and normative possibility thus counsels close attention not just to the empirical grounds underpinning normative positions, but specifically to the counterfactual grounds invoked or, more often, implied but not explicitly established, in claims about possibility. Such considerations are engaged throughout the chapters of this volume, with Sikkink's chapter in particular revolving around a careful identification of the different kinds of counterfactuals that often underlie ethical claims and a systematic dissection of their implications.

This study is not the first to proclaim the need to attend to empirical realities and ethical ideals in formulating a viable ethics for acute dilemmas in world politics. To cite but one recent contribution, Matthew J. Gibney, in his splendidly careful *The Ethics and Politics of Asylum*, seeks to avoid the 'practical irrelevance' that follows from ignoring the legitimate difficulties and dilemmas politicians face; thus, his 'aim is to derive prescriptions for state action that emerge from a process of reasoning in which the results of ethical theorizing are modified by an empirical account of the possibilities actually available

[29] On constructivism's bridge-building capacities see Emanuel Adler, 'Seizing the Middle Ground: Constructivism in World Politics', *European Journal of International Relations* 3:3 (1997), 319–363.

to states'.[30] This project shares this spirit entirely, though seeks to lay out more systematically elements of a practical ethic identified by constructivism that need to be considered, such as the constitutive effects of discourse and policy upon immigrants, as examined by Towns and Gurowitz. Moreover, as we are reminded above, constructivist theorising reminds us that it isn't simply a case of deriving ideal normative theory then subjecting it to the restraints of empirical reality, as if either could be done in isolation from the other rather than the two being integrally related as will be developed in this volume. Christian Reus-Smit dissects this relation in greater detail in his chapter which follows, which further paves the way for the substantive analyses that follow.

Before proceeding, a few words on terminology may be in order. Mindful of the traditions and indeed vociferous debates distinguishing between the terms ethics, morality and normative, these terms are employed relatively interchangeably, and simply, really, all to denote a wrestling with the prescriptive question regarding right conduct: what ought we to do? In deciding what is the right thing to do, we typically seek to enlist the aid of answers to supporting questions, such as 'can we do it?', and 'how do we know?', and the spirit of this project is to include explicitly such components as essential parts of the terrain of 'what is right'. The relation of these considerations and thus the contributions of various traditions of scholarship for global ethics are carefully dissected at much more length in Christian Reus-Smit's chapter that follows this introduction.

By constructivism I refer to a tradition of social and political thought that sees the world as not just consisting of material forces but of ideational social phenomena through which we interpret the material and construct our societies. Constructivism emphasises that such ideas are not just individually held, but occur in the form of intersubjective structures that form the broader social context out of which individual ideas emerge; thus, ideas and communities can be studied as social facts, as against the individualist ontology of rationalist theories. Within the subfield of International Relations in the discipline of political science – that is, given the theoretical contenders against which constructivism has been poised most often (realism and rationalism) – this has meant the importance of stressing that the interests of states are inadequately

[30] Matthew J. Gibney, *The Ethics and Politics of Asylum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 17, 19.

understood as invariably consisting of material interests (maximizing wealth and military power), but rather are shaped by norms and identities that give those interests value and meaning.[31]

Rationalism, constructivism and agency

For some critics, the approach taken by many constructivist IR scholars of taking on mainstream International Relations approaches like realism and rationalism on their own turf has been to artificially privilege those dominant approaches while distorting the contributions of critical contenders. On the other hand, one outcome of constructivism's engagement with rationalism in International Relations would seem to be the conclusion typical of many a sharp theoretical contention in social and political thought – both have something right. It would seem just as impossible to deny that some agents at least some of the time act as they see it in moral terms, as it is to deny that there are actors who act in resolutely instrumental ways (whether pursuing a relatively straightforward conception of maximising their self-interests defined as material power, or acting instrumentally upon more thickly socially constructed interests), with negligible capacity or willingness to learn or redefine interests or identities in the light of engagement with others.[32] As Risse has convincingly argued:

> one should not forget that the various modes of social action – strategic behavior, norm-guided behavior, and argumentative/discursive behavior – represent ideal types that rarely occur in pure form in reality. We often act both strategically and discursively – that is, we use arguments to convince somebody else that our demands are justified – and by doing so we follow norms enabling our interaction in the first place (language rules, for example). As a result, the empirical question to be asked is not whether actors behave strategically or in an argumentative mode, but which mode captures more of the action in a given situation.[33]

[31] See, among many others, Martha Finnemore, *National Interests in International Society* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996); Katzenstein, *The Culture of National Security*; Wendt, *Social Theory*.
[32] See Finnemore, *National Interests*, for clear use of these distinctions.
[33] Risse, '"Let's Argue!"', 18.

Indeed, a major finding of Deitelhoff and Müller's study was that pure 'bargaining' (strategic action, which is based on fixed preferences and uses threats and promises of reward to coordinate actions) was the exception, and that 'arguing' (which presumes open preferences) was ubiquitous in international negotiations.[34] What is the implication of this latest 'great debate' between rationalism and constructivism in International Relations for normative theorising? Profound, I would contend.

A problem in many approaches to ethics is that there is little satisfactory engagement with the problem of whether and how to deal ethically with ruthlessly instrumental actors. As encountered above, a most powerful and prominent strain of contemporary theories of justice and ethics comes from the critical theory tradition, and in particular the influential work of Jürgen Habermas and those who have extended and applied his agenda to International Relations. The Habermasian project raises three major issues of concern for this research agenda: first, the relationship of the empirical to the normative for assessing moral limit and possibility discussed in the previous section; second, questions of agency that will be addressed here; and third, the role of power, to be addressed further in a section below.

In the Habermasian account of discourse ethics, the most plausible path to norms that are valid – that is, just and ethical – is if they are attained through a process of unforced truth-seeking dialogue among all agents affected by the norm, and accepted with their consent and agreement; that is, the product of rational consensus. Shapcott interprets Habermas to be claiming further that the rules of discourse ethics are universal regardless of the self-understanding of any agent; a slightly different reading of the passage cited by Shapcott is that anyone who accepts discourse ethics presupposes the rules are valid. In any case, although Shapcott and I may take different paths, we arrive at a similar point, which is the observation that in a Habermasian ethic those who do not accept 'the universal and necessary communicative presuppositions of argumentative speech' are excluded from consideration.[35] This Shapcott finds troubling for it circumscribes the inclusiveness of a dialogic encounter and thus compromises its ethical appeal in accommodating

[34] Deitelhoff and Müller, 'Theoretical Paradise', 170–171.

[35] Jürgen Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, 86, cited from Richard Shapcott, *Justice, Community, and Dialogue in International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 114.

diversity and difference. My critique comes at the same issue but from more of an empirical bent, namely the observation above of the pervasiveness in world politics of practices and their enactors embodying both the logics of consequences and logics of appropriateness. What do we do in a situation – indeed, in a world – confronted constantly with agents who do not approach a negotiation or a crisis with the characteristics of the ethical encounter entailed in a dialogic ethic? With actors who do not see themselves as equal, who have no intent to enter the encounter open to learn, to be persuaded, to change their views of others and themselves, but who fully intend to bring their power to bear on the situation to realise their interests, which may well be defined by material interests, or parochial culture and traditions rather than a self-conscious awareness of their contingency and historical situatedness? With a hegemonic state, for example, which reportedly objected to even make a commitment to *engage in dialogue* over global climate change in negotiations in 2005? Does this mean that engagement with such actors is simply consigned outside the ethical realm, that decisions reached through political compromises with archetypal strategic actors would by definition be unjust, ruled out a priori as inherently unable to carry redeemable potential? If we were to concede that many, even most, perhaps virtually all, important political situations will contain elements of such strategic practices and instrumental actors, is the realm of the ethical thereby confined to the scraps? Is the effect to consign strategic action and instrumental actors to the realm of immorality, that which must fall short, and would this not be an impoverished political ethic serving less as a positive ideal and more to confirm a deep contemporary cynicism of politics – and politicians – as inherently disreputable? Or, on the contrary, would not a workable political ethic be one that confronts the everyday rather than define it as outside its jurisdiction? To use a practical political example: what is the valid conclusion to draw of the Reagan administration's conclusion of the INF (Intermediate Nuclear Forces) agreement with Gorbachev, achieved despite its initial proposal by the USA as a cynical gambit believed so outlandish as to be sure to be rejected, by agents including a chief interlocutor who would seem difficult to qualify a priori as 'post-conventional' agents in the Habermasian sense?[36] Indeed, most any international treaty

[36] As Shapcott questions, 'how does a universal postconventional theory of justice include those who do not share the same self understanding, that is, who are not,

dealing with subjects like human rights or war would seem to be a mix of the brutal bargaining of national interests sprinkled if not always enveloped with other, including humanitarian, considerations.

Constructivist accounts of moral agency are not necessarily to be taken to be claiming that moral entrepreneurs act 'irrationally', nor that members of transnational advocacy networks do not also act instrumentally in pursuit of their ethical goals.[37] Rather, constructivist empirical findings suggest that it is not only communicative dialogue that may be justifiable in a workable global humanitarian ethic, but indeed forms of counterinstrumental action. To date, what that might mean has not yet been well developed. Deitelhoff and Müller simply note the failure of even reasonably approximating ideal speech situations in world politics; that 'Once challenges occur, "normal" communication is hampered and needs to be suspended. Actors can either accept the breakdown of communication or they might decide to make an effort to rebuild agreement at a higher discursive level'.[38] Their empirical findings very importantly point the way to several strategies to contribute to the latter; namely the role of institutions and publicity in creating common life worlds and fostering approximations of ideal speech situations, as well as the importance of cultivating the reputational legitimacy and authority of the interlocutor in a given situation. Thus, without disagreeing with the desirability of the Habermasian answer to the question of 'what to do' – namely, seek truth towards a consensus – this volume points to the necessity to elaborate upon what additional ethically justifiable strategies might be available rather than resting with 'suspension' or attempting to reconstruct the elusive ideal speech situation in its absence. This volume thus seeks to push constructivist ethics beyond the limits of the important Habermasian contributions while including elements of it, most notably in the chapters by Marc Lynch and Jonathan Havercroft.

An implication of the empirical engagement of constructivism with rationalism then, is that the only pathway for a viable ethics lies not in positing how to respond as if myopically instrumental agents did not exist or were not who they were, nor with smuggling in a hidden

in Habermas' terms, part of the discourse of modernity?' *Justice, Community, and Dialogue*, 123.

37 Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, 'International Norm Dynamics and Political Change', *International Organization* 52:4 (1998), 887–917.

38 Deitelhoff and Müller, 'Theoretical Paradise', 168.

premise hopeful of reforming unreconstructed instrumental actors. Such tacks would themselves ironically constitute forms of exclusion, something antithetical to the core of dialogic ethics itself. And indeed, such approaches would be a manifestly inadequate way to think of how to deal with actors like those who have animated the George W. Bush administration with their coming to power in 2001, a regime whose most powerful members would seem to exemplify – hardly uniquely, though prominently – the instrumental monological actor par excellence, impervious to learning and redefining their interests and identities in the light of dialogue and engagement (not to mention evidence), instead constantly deploying every conceivable means at their disposal to reinforce the pursuit of their already decided-upon goals. And all this from a position embraced explicitly as one of dominance, not equality. How else do we conceptualise of policies conceived and pursued with the conviction that what is good for the USA is good for the rest of the world?[39] That the world is either 'with us or against us' in Bush's oft-repeated phrase? Or of the view, in the words of John Bolton, the Bush administration's ambassador to the United Nations (UN), that 'There is no United Nations. There is an international community that occasionally can be led by the only real power left in the world, that is the United States, when it suits our interests, and when we can get others to go along.'[40] Such actors' approach to international interaction embodies the antithesis of Linklater's characterisation of genuine dialogue as 'not a trial of strength between adversaries who are hell-bent on converting others to their cause; it only exists when human beings accept that there is no a priori certainty about who will learn from whom and when'.[41] The ethical problem, then, is whether and how to deal morally with the existence of such instrumental actors pursuing their interests when the laudable procedural discursive ethic is unavailable. What will not do, then, to set the sights for constructivist contributions to ethics, is a conclusion to a moral dilemma whereby the author sighs, '*if* only government such and such had not been so obstinate in insisting upon maximizing its power/pursuing its narrow

[39] As put by Condoleezza Rice in 2000, who was shortly thereafter to become Bush's National Security Advisor, and then Secretary of State in 2005, in 'Campaign 2000: Promoting the National Interest', *Foreign Affairs* 79:1 (2000).

[40] John Bolton, 'In His Own Words', video clip. Accessed April 12, 2005; www.truthout.org/multimedia.htm.

[41] Linklater, *Transformation*, 92.

interests'. Rather, the chapters in this volume engage as a central challenge and necessary component of global ethics the question of 'what to do' when faced with instrumental actors relentlessly pursuing their interests.

If rational actor assumptions are taken to imply that *all* actors act in narrowly instrumental ways *all the time*, the proposition is simply false. More challenging for International Relations theory and ethics, however, is the 'bad apple' thesis: do not instrumentalist power-seeking agents force others to engage them on their own terms lest they be taken advantage of, even perish in extremis? Constructivism points to several responses. First, Wendt's argument about the tipping points when cultures of friendship, rivalry or enmity come to be seen by actors as constituting properties of the system as a whole rather than particular agents is most salient here.[42] The implication is that there is no one single static system of friendship or enmity in world politics, but fluid and cross-cutting subcultures, meaning there is scope for moral practice. That is, it is one thing to say that engaging with a particular actor in a given situation precludes a dialogic ethic, and quite another to contend that the system as a whole precludes such moral action. Concomitantly, however, practices engaging with such strategic actors do have constitutive effects, the cumulative effect of which determines whether the cultural system tips from cultures of amity or enmity. It is thus not simply the morality of a particular act per se that is highlighted by constructivism, but its constitutive effects on the social structures of world politics. This is brought out powerfully in this volume's analyses of the effects of hypocrisy on sanctions and immigration policies and on legitimacy more generally in world politics, and marks a core contribution of this agenda.[43]

Constructivism and hypocrisy

One of the contributions of constructivism for normative International Relations theory is an unpacking of the concept of hypocrisy, a concept that has lurked in the background of normative theory and that is

[42] Wendt, *Social Theory*, 264.
[43] There are some formal parallels with rule-utilitarianism here, which counsels as the best path to morality choosing to act according to the rules whose observance would have the best overall consequences.

ubiquitous in criticisms of political practice in global politics. The overwhelming connotation of the very term is one of moral condemnation, even as hypocrisy seems to be used in a number of senses: that it is wrong to say you are doing something for one reason that appears morally good when it is really for another; that it is wrong to do something regarded as morally desirable in one situation but then not uphold it in another (that is, it is wrong to be morally inconsistent in the application of principles like protecting human rights); or that it is wrong to hold another to standards that one does not meet oneself.

The theme of hypocrisy resonates throughout ethical literature in International Relations. Michael Walzer ultimately defended the relevance of morality as a topic for his scholarly attention in his courageous *Just and Unjust Wars* by paraphrasing La Rouchefocauld's aphorism that 'hypocrisy is the tribute that vice pays to virtue'; that is, we would only have hypocrisy and be able to identify it if morality did figure in our political world in some less than trivial sense. Thus for Walzer, one of the objectives of *Just and Unjust Wars*, as he put it, *was to expose hypocrisy*,[44] the reason being that where there is hypocrisy there is moral knowledge that can expose it as such.[45] For an undertaking centred upon expounding upon the present structure of the moral world and the stability of the practical judgements we make[46] in order to study the social patterns of our moral judgements,[47] that indeed is an appropriate and insightful technique. But while doing so is justified for his task, this move simultaneously risks taking for granted the stability of those structures, and in thereby positing hypocrisy as the necessary antipode of morality provides little avenue for assessing possibilities of critical moral change in world politics. This is not to criticize Walzer insofar as this was simply not his purpose, but it is to note that his approach to moral theory in world politics does not provide us with a lever to think through the particular challenges of moral limit and possibility identified for this volume.

In immigration policy, for example, what do we think of a situation in which there are toughly worded legal restrictions against illegal immigrants that are nonetheless weakly applied in practice? While such 'hypocrisy' by the very naming as such is generally seen as

[44] Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2000), xxviii.
[45] Ibid. 19. [46] Ibid. xxviii, 19. [47] Ibid. 45.

condemnable, could this not be a desirable form of hypocrisy from a humanitarian point of view at least in the short term, perhaps provided that longer-term resolutions are simultaneously sought? Or take recent debates about torture, where it seems to be assumed by some commentators that hypocrisy above all is to be avoided.[48] That is, governments ought not put themselves in a position of proclaiming that torture can never be condoned while even in the rarest of 'ticking bomb' occasions its agents may engage in practices that may at the least blur the boundary between stressful interrogation and torture. But are we really to accept that such a painful resolution of this dilemma must be less desirable than legitimising torture (and all that would entail) on the rationale of avoiding the sin of hypocrisy? And how has hypocrisy come to be seen as so important that to avoid it one should actually counsel legitimising the torture of human beings?[49]

To take another prominent contemporary manifestation of these issues, few arenas of world politics are as rife with accusations of hypocrisy as that of intervention, and few events in the last decade received as much global attention as the US-led war against Iraq launched in 2003. In the run-up to that war, one of the justifications offered by proponents of the war was the human rights opportunity to remove a dictator of a repressive regime responsible for horrendous atrocities. This presented the human rights community with a serious dilemma, and indeed it produced divisive splits within the liberal/left side of the political spectrum. Some members of the human rights intellectual community like Michael Ignatieff supported the war on

[48] For the logic of an argument for 'torture warrants' on this basis see Alan Dershowitz, 'A Choice Among Evils', *Globe and Mail*, March 5, 2003. Accessed March 5, 2003; www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/ArticleNews/TPPrint/LAC/20030305/CODERSH/. . .3/7/2003.

[49] Part of the answer here seems to lie in the empirical assumption that torture is going to occur anyway, so we should at least try to regulate it. But this completely fails to acknowledge that even if torture was legalised it is not at all empirically certain that this would eliminate the occurrence of non-sanctioned torture, though this position advocating the legalisation of torture silently relies upon the counterfactual that it would. Charged by Sikkink's injunction in her chapter to make explicit the counterfactuals that underpin normative arguments, the alternative counterfactual appears at least if not more likely – namely, that non-sanctioned torture would still go on, and indeed would in all likelihood become if anything more prevalent given the dramatically altered moral landscape permitting torture.

the basis of anticipated human rights benefits even while recognising that the war was being prosecuted primarily for other reasons:

> What tipped me in favor of taking these risks was the belief that Hussein ran an especially odious regime and that war offered the only real chance of overthrowing him. This was a somewhat opportunistic case for war, since I knew that the administration did not see freeing Iraq from tyranny as anything but a secondary objective ... if good results had to wait for good intentions, we would have to wait forever.

Without disavowing the noble motives – of protecting Iraqis from further atrocities from the Saddam Hussein regime – Ignatieff later as much as conceded the mistake in this approach:

> So I supported an administration whose intentions I didn't trust, believing that the consequences would repay the gamble. Now I realize that intentions do shape consequences. An administration that cared more genuinely about human rights would have understood that you can't have human rights without order and that you can't have order once victory is won if planning for an invasion is divorced from planning for an occupation.[50]

The quandary faced by the human rights community in this case was telling. For years, critics of the injection of human rights in foreign policy from the sceptical left and the realist right have made that claim that human rights norms cannot possibly really matter since they are applied so inconsistently. Noam Chomsky notably among numerous others has frequently objected that if human rights matter so much for Western governments (say, in Kosovo), then why didn't it provoke responses in places like Turkey, Colombia, Tibet or Chechnya? Attentive to the relation between the empirical and normative, one could in the first instance point out the glaring logical fallacy in this empirical argument: simply because one consideration – human rights – did not trump all other factors as an explanation in every case does not mean it could not have prevailed in any one particular case. This is, simply, an empirical matter, and requires careful empirical research to carry the critical suggestion that such humanitarian concerns could

[50] Michael Ignatieff, 'The Year of Living Dangerously', *New York Times Magazine* March 14, 2004. Accessed June 2, 2006; www.ksg.harvard.edu/news/opeds/2004/ignatieff_year_dangerously_nyt_031404.htm.

never really be consequential motives for any intervention, a position constructivists have successfully rebutted.[51] Instead, as Sikkink alerts us to in her chapter, counterfactuals typically do all the heavy lifting in such arguments; moreover, there are numerous different types of counterfactuals whose usage needs to be considered with the utmost care, as Sikkink pursues in detail. The more normative response of human rights advocates would point out that there is nothing wrong with inconsistency insofar as it is unreasonable to require that human rights be applied in some mindless 'all or nothing' fashion – as if one must fanatically either pursue a consistent human rights agenda in every case including where it is sure to be utterly ineffective or even backfire, or not pursue human rights at all even in cases where prospects for positive change appear very strong.[52] Politically, however, such moral opportunism still raises the political liability of hypocrisy discussed above, since such charges do seem to often tap a sensitive public vein (Chomsky's books, after all, sell extremely well). Is there a way to defend against the charge of hypocrisy in such situations that is not, well, mere hypocrisy as commonly impugned?

Hypocrisy figures importantly in constructivist accounts as a mechanism on the road to compliance with norms, such as the literature which stresses the ultimate impact of holding governments to account even if they only rhetorically – that is, hypocritically – profess adherence to human rights norms.[53] Yet as Marc Lynch argues in his chapter, while rhetorical entrapment can offer real tactical benefits, it also threatens to evacuate the power of moral argument by undercutting the power of legitimacy altogether. While hypocrisy may thus be invited at the earliest of stages in the spread of international norms, it is a double-edged sword. A constructivist contribution here, then, is grounded in the first instance in taking the legitimacy effects of moral

[51] See Martha Finnemore, *The Purpose of Intervention: Changing Beliefs about the Use of Force* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2004); and Wheeler, *Saving Strangers*.

[52] Chris Brown, 'Selective Humanitarianism: In Defence of Inconsistency'. In D. Chatterjee and D. Scheid (eds.), *Ethics and Foreign Intervention* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 31–50.

[53] Daniel Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect: International Norms, Human Rights, and the Demise of Communism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); Thomas Risse, Stephen Roppe and Kathryn Sikkink, *The Power of Human Rights: International Norms and Domestic Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

language seriously (which some prominent theories in International Relations do not), thus positioning the analyst well to uncover the nuances of progressive and regressive effects of even strategically moral uses of morality including hypocrisy.

A focus on hypocrisy arises as well from the basic structurationist ontological insight that grounds constructivism, which tells us that what may be constraining social structures at one historical juncture or cultural space may not be so at another. The ethical corollary – if international normative theory is to really take constructivist ontology seriously – is the possibility that one may morally justify a given course of action in a particular context, but then judge an alternative course of action morally justifiable in another place, or that same situation at a later time when structural conditions of possibility may have changed. Thus, might it not be mere hypocrisy (nor unjustified duplicity) but morally defensible to defend the granting of amnesties to the perpetrators of atrocities in an ongoing conflict to put a halt to the terror, and then justify the later withdrawal of that amnesty when the threat of a resumption of civil war had receded? Would not the structural conditions have changed so much that a moral assessment of genuine possibilities and limits of international criminal justice must itself be altered?[54] And if so, what, if any, are the differences of such considerations from a realist ethic of prudence which conceives of political ethics as 'the art of the possible', or even a ruthlessly opportunistic Machiavellianism?[55]

A constructivist analysis of the possibilities of normative action in world politics thus opens up ways in which situations typically castigated as mere hypocrisy may at least in principle be subject to more moral defence than the contemporary connotation of the term suggests. Yet, at the same time, a constructivist worry would be that too transparent and pervasive an application of such an approach might fatally undercut the social structures which underpin the practices of making and accepting such commitments altogether, something most constructivists would be loath to sacrifice given their findings on the importance of legitimacy for just and stable social orders. In short, a

[54] Conversely, Jack Snyder is correct to note that careful attention to empirical context might reveal that 'unsuccessful attempts to apply the norm to areas where it is unworkable would tend to undermine adherence to the norm in areas where it might otherwise have held firmly'. '"Is" and "Ought"', 369.

[55] The relation of the contributions of this project to the ethical stance of realism will be assessed in the conclusion.

constructivist ethic might evaluate such practices according to their effects upon the legitimacy of norm carriers, and upon the structural power of moral legitimacy itself. This would distinguish constructivist approaches to ethics from those realist approaches which discount the role of social legitimacy and norms. It is thus that hypocrisy garners attention across a range of chapters in this volume, most systematically in Marc Lynch's chapter on hypocrisy and sanctions and Amy Gurowitz's chapter on immigration, but it also figures as part of the background in the human rights themes engaged in the chapters on indigenous self-determination by Havercroft, intervention by Finnemore and international criminal tribunals by Sikkink.

Dilemmas and the constitutive effects of norms

A fourth contribution of constructivism to normative theory is, at first blush, to complicate the moral calculus – which of course might not seem like an advance at all – in the sense of identifying previously underappreciated regress which may accompany progress or which may even be the condition of possibility that accompanies moral change. This occurs through the identification of social conflict revolving around concerns such as ethics, legitimacy and identity that may be overlooked by other theoretical traditions but are taken seriously by constructivism. But after identifying additional kinds of moral consequences that follow from a focus on the constitutive properties of social practices, constructivism can help clear the waters it has muddied itself by identifying the structure of different kinds of moral problems and working through their implications for ethical limit and possibility.

A contribution of constructivism for normative theory inheres in the focus on the constitutive and not just restraining effects of norms on agents and identities, the contention that structures do not merely constrain already existing agents who have pre-given interests, but also constitute those very agents and their interests themselves. In International Relations, Alexander Wendt has provided the most thorough theoretical treatment of this phenomenon, but as Bahar Rumelili has noted, Wendt's account, like the security communities and democratic peace literatures, downplays a dark side of the constitutive processes of identity and interest formation. Wendt outlines the mix of Hobbesian, Lockean and Kantian cultures of anarchy that co-exist in contemporary world politics, arguing that we live predominantly in a

Lockean culture of tolerance, moving towards Kantian cultures of peace as contended by theorists of the liberal democratic peace. But what if the very condition of possibility of establishing a peaceful regional security community like the European Union or liberal democratic peace – within which the thought of inter-state war fades to insignificance – is the exclusion and othering of outsiders and all that such processes may imply? As Bahar Rumelili has argued, 'the discourses on the promotion of democracy and human rights are inevitably productive of two identity categories, a morally superior identity of democratic juxtaposed to the inferior identity of non-(or less) democratic',[56] thereby 'constructing the very differences that transformation would ostensibly eliminate'.[57] Similarly, Helen Kinsella shows that while contemporary analysts focus on the salutary effects of just war doctrines which place the protection of innocent civilians as paramount, neglected is her finding that such protections were granted at the price of excluding and producing a category of outsiders – heretics and infidels – which in turn justified some forms of slaughter and the Crusades.[58]

The additional dilemma raised by constructivist analysis then is: *what do we make of moral change whose own condition of possibility seems to involve the production of the very (unjust) phenomena that are supposed to be overcome?* More positively, the achievement of constitutive analysis here is to make us more aware of and sensitive to the consequences of recursive relations of structures and agents, as well as the link between identity construction and normative development, processes that have tended to fall outside the lenses of traditional moral theories like utilitarianism, Kantian deontology and rights-based theories, Rawlsian contractualism and so on, which have tended to black-box sociological descriptions or explanations of identity formation at least as they have appeared in their International Relations incarnations.

[56] Bahar Rumelili, 'Producing Collective Identity and Interacting with Difference: The Security Implications of Community-Building in Europe and Southeast Asia' (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 2002), 49.

[57] Roxanne Lynn Doty, *Imperial Encounters* (Minneapolis, MN, University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 136, quoted in Rumelili, *Producing Collective Identity and Interacting with Difference*, 49.

[58] Helen Kinsella, 'The Image Before the Weapons: The Genealogy of the "Civilian" in International Law and Politics' (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 2003).

Communitarian and identity-based political theory is conspicuously different on this score, of course, yet in turn such projects tend to struggle with the difficulty of how to deal with transcommunity morality such as international norms. Without wading into that enormous literature and its debates here, I will confine myself to noting that a constructivist focus on the exclusionary practices that accompany the securing of community identities (which in turn are at the base of any moral construction) are the subject of work in this volume by Amy Gurowitz, Ann Towns and Bahar Rumelili. The latter two engage the question of whether such practices of identity formation are inherently exclusionary (as seems to be the implication of post-structuralist accounts of identity that are predicated on difference and othering) and necessarily ethically noxious. They further identify in particular contexts how the undesirable features of identify formation (such as exclusion) may be avoidable, subject to amelioration or even morally beneficial, thus identifying a spectrum of otherwise elided considerations for moral judgement and practice by unpacking the ethics of 'othering'. As Sikkink and Rumelili note in their chapters, moral judgement itself at some point involves othering, so simply condemning 'othering' wherever it occurs does not get us very far ethically. Thus, this volume sets out to examine different forms of 'othering', an important mechanism in constructivist explanations for community building or lack thereof, and to evaluate their moral implications.

A contribution of the constructivist analyses in the chapters that follow, then, is the illumination of moral dimensions that arise from a focus on the constitutive properties involved in the development of new international norms (including that is, of even putatively progressive moral change in world politics). This project then pushes that analytical strategy further into normative theory, asking us to consider what we make of practices that at once contain elements of progressive change that are not to be summarily discounted – such as the protections of innocents in warfare, or peaceful relations among the powerful industrialised democracies – yet at the same time are predicated upon or produce the conditions of possibility for other forms of exclusion, inequality, repression or violence. Such an analytical awareness bears the potential of pre-emptively designing policies more sensitive to a multidimensional ethical sensibility and building in protections for the novel moral challenges raised by attempts to deal with previous problems.

The chapters in this volume thus seek to make explicit the additional and often painful ethical dimensions arising from the mutually constitutive construction of structures and agents. This includes reconstruction of the ethical worlds of the agents involved themselves.[59] In exposing them, however, the point is not to engage in post-facto condemnation with 20/20 hindsight, nor leave such critical analysis hanging in ethical limbo – rather the spirit is to put such constitutive empirical insights to work for a forward-looking ethic. That ethic may be one that regards the moral value of political practices as always a project in process, for which final moral judgement is virtually never available, insofar as instances of moral change may only admit ethical justification that takes into account the social structures such change is predicated upon and productive of, as well as the agents it empowers or excludes. Take, for instance, Peter Andreas' insightful research demonstrating that the popular tool of international sanctions – conceived of by many as a way of avoiding the tragic violence of war – may in fact have had the effect of entrenching corruption and criminalised black-market economies in target states, thus actually contributing to their pariah status.[60] Rather than conclude from such work that the enactors of sanctions are thereby to be condemned post facto for negative consequences, an approach informed by the above considerations might counsel forbearance by the international community in demanding fealty to standards of battling corruption and criminal justice to the extent that the very same community produced the conditions for the flowering of such pathologies in the first place, and the instantiation of these additional criteria for continued pariah status after the original pathology had subsided. Indeed it might counsel active support in granting exceptions and providing exceptional assistance rather than applying a one-size-fits-all universal standard and engaging in punishment for failure to live up to the standards one had a hand in constituting.

Complicity and co-optation in moral change

Attention to the constitutive nature of social and political relations as identified above can cut several ways. It can make what prima facie

[59] Thanks to Michael Barnett for pointing this out.
[60] Peter Andreas, 'The Clandestine Political Economy of War and Peace in Bosnia', *International Studies Quarterly* 48:1 (2004), 29–52.

might seem like an unproblematically progressive development appear much less so upon further analysis by underscoring new sources of exclusion or repression or violence opened up by new social structures. This is one sense in which this project responds to the criticism that constructivists have to date mostly studied the origins and operation of 'happy' international norms (such as the abolition of slavery) rather than 'bad' norms (such as, say, slavery itself) – constructivists themselves are particularly well placed to identify some of the morally undesirable implications of erstwhile progressive developments. This includes identification of complicity of the progressive with the oppressive. But this agenda also points towards the progressive potential in social structures that critical theorists have condemned for their repressive effects or potential. Thus, to take an example of the former, I would contend that the effort to ban anti-personnel (AP) landmines represents a progressive intervention in world politics insofar as its primary objective has been to protect the lives and limbs of innocent human beings wherever they live.This stands against conservative claims of statist or military imperatives that reject civil society infringements upon the security requirements of the state, or the critical legal argument that just war concepts promote rather than restrain warfare and thus that initiatives based upon those categories have been co-opted into the war convention that legitimates warfare.[61] Contrary to the latter, I find that the landmines ban has in some – though not all – respects crucially depended upon just war categories for its realisation, and with progressive results. Without the powerful connection made to the well-established if oft-violated just war norm of discrimination – that is, the argument that AP mines are inherently indiscriminate – the taboo against any use of anti-personnel landmines would not have been widely accepted by states, if at all.

This points to a potential disagreement between some variants of critical theory and constructivism on the question of ethics.[62] Reliance on existing social structures such as just war norms for critical change

[61] For the former, see Anderson, 'The Ottawa Convention Banning Landmines', 91–120. The latter the author has heard charged numerous times by critical IR scholars.

[62] For a defence of the compatibility between constructivism and critical theory, see Richard Price and Christian Reus-Smit, 'Dangerous Liaisons? Critical International Theory and Constructivism', *European Journal of International Relations* 4:3 (1998), 259–294.

should come as no surprise to constructivist International Relations theorists who take discourse, structure, culture, norms and institutions seriously. For if such phenomena are to have any significance we would expect that they could not simply be jettisoned at every conscious and instrumental whim, and that efforts, for example, to instantiate a new paradigm of human security (that places the security requirements of individuals before states) could not start anew from whole cloth. And yet, the insistence of some critical theorists amounts uncomfortably close to just that, lest critical change be tainted with undue complicity with previous social structures beset by forms of domination. Norms of warfare, notably, have been excoriated by critical theorists as ineffective at best and complicit in state violence at worst. Jochnick and Normand do not recoil from charging that 'despite noble rhetoric to the contrary, the laws of war have been formulated deliberately to privilege military necessity at the cost of humanitarian values. As a result, the laws of war have facilitated rather than restrained wartime violence. Through law, violence has been legitimated.'[63]

These claims about the violence-legitimising function of laws of war are not altogether without any foundation. But it is precisely the dilemma of how to judge such double-sided developments that this volume seeks to address rather than rest with one-sided theoretical critique that is all too often quickly refuted by careful empirical work. The general argument has some appeal insofar as it is grounded upon a brutal correlation: the twentieth century witnessed the flourishing of elaborate laws and codes of war, and yet it was the bloodiest century of warfare in history. In one sense, then, critics of just war norms importantly underscore that these norms do suffer from often severe inadequacies in actually and always restraining the character of contemporary large-scale violence. But: *compared to what*? We need to note that there are difficulties with the one-sided critique of these claims, not the least the lack of consideration of counterfactual scenarios and ethical consideration of the implications of so many cases to the contrary. To cite but one obvious but very telling example, what on earth would the destruction visited upon Iraq in the Gulf War of 1991 have looked like (the source of the just war criticisms of Jochnick and Normand as well as David Campbell among others) in the absence of

[63] Chris af Jochnick and Roger Normand, 'The Legitimation of Violence: A Critical History of the Laws of War', *Harvard International Law Journal* 35:1 (1994), 50.

norms which constrained the blatant targeting of civilians enough to prevent any bombing of Iraqi cities after the bombing of a Baghdad air-raid shelter, let alone the obliteration of Iraq with nuclear weapons? In her chapter, Kathryn Sikkink dissects meticulously the sources and moral perils of confining one's analysis to a counterfactual that is based upon an implicit 'comparison to the ideal'.

While the empirics of war at once give some support to critiques of just war norms while also belying them in particular instances, overlooked in this critique is the fact that since World War II, most civilian deaths have not been the result of state to state violence, which we call war, but rather civil conflicts. A key question that arises then, is whether the structure of laws and rules of warfare written for state to state warfare can adequately transform and respond to the changing nature of contemporary warfare. Given that the International Criminal Court embodies the norms of the just war tradition, even as it introduces what I would term a revolutionary paradigm of individual criminal responsibility into the traditional sovereignty-based paradigm of state responsibility, the ICC by implication would seem to be a prime subject for indictment on the above critical theoretical grounds. This raises several questions. Are these norms subject to the same criticisms as just war concepts? Are they best understood as merely statist creations in origin and effect, carrying with them the presumption of protecting statist (read: militarist) imperatives, and great power ones at that? Or are those imperatives changing in an adequately progressive sense? These are some of the background considerations for analyses such as Kathryn Sikkink's chapter on criminal tribunals and their critics; here she takes on the conservative critique that such tribunals are too idealistic, but also the critical theoretical critique that such efforts fall short of the ideal. Her retort is that the ICC is not the ideal, national prosecution is, and that it is those who don't adequately acknowledge that the new social reality includes global justice norms institutionalised in a variety of ways that risk being idealists. Similarly, the critical theoretical stance is sceptical that attempts to develop new norms of humanitarian intervention are anything but new guises for Western domination, one of several elements that inform the dilemmas of humanitarian interventions addressed by Martha Finnemore in her chapter.

Critical international theorists and critical legal scholars would seem to expect little more of such new norms than their complicity in the service of the military imperatives of dominant states, at the expense of

humanity and justice towards the vulnerable. Alternatively, one might argue that in part these criminal norms necessarily build upon those very just war norms whose utter rejection and displacement is called for by their critics, and in fact those very just war norms form the very conditions of possibility of progressive developments in how the world deals with crimes of war. It is in this vein that in his analysis of indigenous self-determination, Jonathan Havercroft argues that 'the involvement of so many groups representing indigenous peoples' at the UN forum for a declaration on indigenous self-determination 'is significant insofar as it means that for most indigenous peoples, the system of international law that facilitated their oppression does have resources that can be positively harnessed'.

In this sense, a key argument here is that the normative ground of a critical theoretical perspective (at least for a good number of its practitioners) betrays its constructivist ontological underpinnings by not taking social structures seriously enough. Pushed too far, this ultimately results in a critical theory that seems inadequate to recognise progress short of wholesale revolution. This effectively leaves it stranded between irrelevance or ethical paralysis since the demand seems to be for some ethical *tabula rasa* that bans all forms of even complicity in violence, domination or exclusion, without in turn engendering new forms (yet such forms of injustice are seen as inherent in all social relations and political communities).

This ontological–ethical tension derives from several sources. First is the relentless critical tendency to engage in the unmasking of each and every political practice as being inevitably complicit in forms of domination, an alleged tendency of the likes of Foucault and Derrida seized upon by their critics, and also present in the works of International Relations scholars like Ashley, Walker and Campbell who have 'gained inspiration from the critical themes of continental philosophy',[64] as well as theorists more in the neo-Marxian tradition of critical political economy. This relentless identification of every new social formation as yet another form of domination, since relations of domination can never be eliminated (having dispensed with the teleology of Marx), seems no less applicable towards those developments that would seem to have a prima facie case for being progressive and hence ethically praiseworthy.

64 David Campbell, *Writing Security* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, revised edition, 1998), 216.

To the extent that this is so leaves theorists so inclined in something of a bind. Since there must be some hidden agenda of complicity with domination in every political practice – for power is everywhere – the analytical imperative leads such theorists to too quickly look past – let alone analyse ethically – progressive change for what it is where it occurs. It is almost as if progressive developments that have been achieved, because they have become reality, cannot be sufficient praised as ideal, because their very realisation then resets the ethical bar of possibility. To be sure, this might be more a matter of analytical focus insofar as the practice of such scholars is typically to identify hidden forms of exclusion and domination to prepare the way for further expanding the realms of autonomy and freedom and respect for diversity and difference.[65] And yet, there is a risk of disjuncture between the ontology of the diagnosis and practice of critique as response:

> Exposing the inconsistencies between the normative, rhetorical, and practical performances of global capitalism has no preventive or transformative capacity. The forces of power have proven to be immune to such exposure; revelations have had no serous political consequences; moral indignation has had a very limited reach.
>
> . . .
>
> Expecting effects from revealing the inconsistencies between the rhetorical and practical would imply that the global structures of power are erected on different principles than they really are; that paradoxes, pain, unnecessary deaths of men, women, and children mean something; and that the system can be shocked or shamed into generosity and solidarity. It would mean that one is appealing to a sense of justice that does not rule our world.[66]

In the process, an effect of this neglect is a perpetual ratcheting up of ever more stringent litmus tests that political action seems to almost always necessarily fail to meet, since the goalposts are constantly being moved else the critical enterprise have nothing to critique, and since

[65] See Jim George and David Campbell, 'Patterns of Dissent and the Celebration of Difference: Critical Social Theory and International Relations', *International Studies Quarterly* 34 (1990), 269–293.

[66] Radmila Nakarada, 'The Uncertain Reach of Critical Theory'. In Paul Wapner and Lester Edwin J. Ruiz (eds.), *Principled World Politics: The Challenge of Normative International Relations* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), 68.

some form of domination is never precluded. In one sense the ontological underpinnings of this position are entirely consistent with constructivism; one calls something progressive moral change if it represents a moral improvement upon the current social and political constellation, so in that sense the present – and the standards of ethics situated in the present – always form something of a contingent historical–cultural baseline from which change is judged. As such, this may not be a position that constructivist-informed international ethics can dispense with even as it cannot realise it either. Sensitivity to the fact that ethical standards applied in any given case may not be those embraced by all others, or that those that are widely accepted may nonetheless be interpreted quite differently in disparate cultural contexts, is a constructivist tenet that must therefore pervade the analyses called for by this volume.

Another source of the critical paradox identified above issues from the reticence of many such theorists to engage in explicit ethical theorising, at least of a form obviously recognisable as such and applicable towards justifying action or alternative courses. This tendency is born of the post-Enlightenment sensitivity to the pitfalls and potential terror of such totalising narratives of modernity, and a conviction that it is modernity's very urge to provide universals that is the root of the problem. One result of this scepticism about moral philosophy has been a critical project that might leave us as sceptical about the ontological possibility of meaningful and progressive change as the hard-bitten realist agenda of International Relations theory; indeed, there are no small affinities between the Marxian, post-structuralist and realist traditions regarding their scepticism about the role of morality in world politics given the prominence of power in their analyses.

The result (often if not necessarily) is a backward-looking tack that frequently characterises critical theoretical arguments. Thus, while constructivist and other scholars have shown just war norms to have had meaningful effects in restraining death and atrocity that would otherwise have taken place, Jochnick and Normand level stinging criticisms that 'the basic fact that nations purport to respect the rule of law helps protect the entire structure of war-making from more fundamental challenges'.[67] Yet the alternatives are not stated, and remain mysterious, pointing perhaps to an implied banning of all war itself as the only acceptable moral action in dealing with war, a proposal that has been

[67] Jochnick and Normand, 'The Legitimation of Violence', 58.

the only alternative this author has heard on the issue by critical scholars, and one that is rather ripe for the critical theorists' own sceptical scalpel among just a few others. The main point here is not to discourage such criticism, which is indispensable, but to point out nonetheless that critical accounts which do not in fact offer constructive alternatives in the aftermath of critique ironically lend themselves to being complicit in conservative agendas opposing erstwhile progressive change in world politics. In short, this volume seeks to leverage the constructivist agenda of empirically explaining how moral progress has occurred for the critical project of plausible moral alternatives to deal with global dilemmas.

Constructivism offers a way out of the potential critical trap by taking the prevalence of power seriously without precluding the possibility of meaningful progressive moral change nonetheless. It does so by recognising that complicity in previous social structures is inherent in social change whether regressive, reformist or even those that are revolutionary, that varieties of co-optation of some agents of change to forms of domination is likely common or perhaps even pervasive rather than the exception for political action that amounts to more than self-sacrifice and defeat. Thus this volume enjoins the careful identification of such elements of power, co-optation and complicity carefully in the context of constituting and reconstituting social and political constellations, analysing and assessing them without reflexively casting upon them the shadow that the mere and very identification of complicity renders the developments of which they are a part irrecoverably problematic by association in ethical terms.[68] Thus, Havercroft's analysis revolves around the insight that 'indigenous peoples face just the kind of dilemma around which the contributions to this volume revolve, namely whether a critical rejection of the existing system is required to avoid co-optation, or self-determination as an element of that sovereign system can be harnessed to progressive purposes'. Moving from the constitutive effects of structure to agency, Rumelili argues that the critical element of constructivism for ethics requires it to 'recognise the complicity of the self in the construction' of the others upon whom it may depend for the creation of peaceful security communities like

[68] The critical theorist might respond that such a position would evacuate any revolutionary potential from constructivism (thanks to Adriana Sinclair for pointing that out). This is an important issue addressed in the conclusion to the volume.

the European Union or states that populate a zone of liberal democratic peace.

While thus attentive to the use of 'complicity' as a short cut that forestalls more careful unpacking and assessment of ethical substitutes, this volume hardly denies that the charge may indeed carry decisive weight. But what indeed constitutes ethically justifiable pragmatism, or conversely what constitutes a 'sell-out' – and by what metrics would we tell? The above section on hypocrisy highlighted the effects of strategic behaviour on the legitimacy of moral structures, which gives us one metric on this issue. In addition, we must consider the effects of compromise and pragmatism on agency – that is, on the legitimacy and moral status of norm entrepreneurs themselves. As Michael Barnett points out:

> The ICRC's [International Committee of the Red Cross] stance during the Holocaust, where it stuck to its principles of 'speak no evil', meant that it helped to reproduce the silence as the Jews were exterminated. The ICRC might be able to justly claim that there was little else that it could do in the situation, which might be true, but others might also note that this compromise undermined its ethical position. The UN during the Rwandan genocide might have been acting pragmatically, because it could know with certainty that no intervention would take place. But others suggest that this act of pragmatism compromised its very ethical soul.[69]

Research has shown the indispensable role of moral entrepreneurs for the origins and effectiveness of international norms – in this light, the question is: if they don't stick to principle when it may be needed most, who will? And can moral norms under severe duress survive to live another day without agents occasionally engaging in sacrifice to uphold their moral authority, which research shows is such a key asset? On the other hand, at what point would such sacrifice fatally undercut the political relevance and thus the very agency of such actors?[70] Just because we can ask a question does not mean there must be an answer

[69] Michael Barnett, correspondence.
[70] Thus, Barnett considers the position of some in the UN that attempting an intervention in Rwanda was morally wrong insofar as the most likely outcome would have been a fatal discrediting of the UN such that it would not be available for future cases when it could have a salutary effect. See his wrenching account in *Eyewitness to a Genocide* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002).

to it, and this volume does not presume there is some universal answer that matches the level of abstraction of this formulation. But the authors in the chapters that follow are enjoined to take up this challenge, and to do so by carefully contextualised assessments of the ethics of pragmatism and limit in their particular domains.

Power and dialogic ethics

A final contribution of constructivism to normative theorising in world politics extends the importance of power broached above. In attending to the power of ideas and norms, recent constructivist scholarship in International Relations provides a way to avoid a liability of previous generations of liberal- and critical-minded scholarship, not to mention the traditional criticism of philosophy by political scientists, by eschewing the undue divorce of ethics from power. Jürgen Habermas' discourse ethics has of course been one of the most influential contributions to ethics in the last half-century, and his approach has been put to a number of adaptations in International Relations as we have already seen.[71] But as I have argued above, there remain important respects in which the critique of utopianism still haunts approaches like his which assess ethical outcomes by the force of the better argument between interlocutors divested of the dialogically corrupting accoutrements of power, since such situations would seem to be empirically rare if not indeed theoretically impossible for some versions of constructivism. Must one then simply condemn all situations tainted by any form of power? One approach, eminently sensible, is to underscore that the ethical task for International Relations flowing from a Habermasian approach to justice is not to try to find the ideal types and weigh events against them: 'You don't confirm or disaffirm the ideal type. You use it as a standard to measure the closeness or remoteness of empirical phenomena to it; this comparison then generates the question of which circumstances help to explain the different distances from the ideal type.'[72] This approach, followed by Risse as well, is eminently sensible in adjudicating the theoretical debate between rationalism and constructivism as an empirical issue of what each accounts for in the

[71] In addition to others already engaged, see also Crawford, *Argument and Change in World Politics*, chapter 9.
[72] Deitelhoff and Müller, 'Theoretical Paradise', 178.

explanation of a given situation.[73] However, in harnessing Habermas' approach for empirical purposes of explanation, it does not give us guidelines concerning how much or what forms of intrusions of power might be ethically defensible.

Alternatively, Ann Towns in this volume alerts us to the simultaneously homogenising and stratifying effects of norms, dissecting them to identify those elements she regards as unwarranted. She shows how the discourse on gender equality of the past decade in Sweden, regularly held as a model for the world, in fact 'has become constitutive of ethnic difference and inequality in Sweden, defining gender equality as "Swedish culture" and setting it apart from "immigrant/non-Western culture"'. What constructivism contributes to normative theorising becomes clear: 'One needs to be able to ethically justify and take responsibility for, rather than plead ignorance to, the deleterious effects of approaching gender equality in such a way.'

Bahar Rumelili comparably demonstrates the exclusionary effects of the production of collective identities, even ones that have otherwise morally praiseworthy effects. Highlighting forms of power, she argues that ignoring the role outsiders play in the formation of collective identities

> silences the relations of power and domination in the interaction of security communities with outsiders, by reducing it to a voluntaristic process where outsiders fulfill certain conditions and the community institution admits those states that validate its identity. Such an understanding disregards the authority of the community institution to define and shape the dominant discourses that ascribe identity and difference, its power to include and exclude and thereby bestow or inflict on the outsider states both the material and the symbolic benefits and costs of inclusion and exclusion, its ability to construct the outsiders as morally inferior and as potentially threatening, and thereby authorise certain forms of behaviour towards them.

These analyses remove as an ontological premise the divide between morality and power, a move common to many of the contributors, but without thereby evacuating the relevance of ethics. In doing so, constructivism addresses the traditional 'so what?' question often asked of philosophical approaches to ethics which may deduce a desirable moral principle of action without a satisfying analysis of how it may be

[73] Risse, '"Let's Argue!"', 14–18.

plausibly put into practice. Kathryn Sikkink is puzzled why the ethics producing human rights norms aren't more obviously recognised as a powerful force in human affairs (in IR theory at least) since presumably just about everyone would prefer not to be tortured than to be tortured. To cast aspersions of idealism towards their embodiments such as international criminal tribunals ironically substitutes an ethical argument for the empirical fact that such tribunals and the denial of amnesties for war crimes are becoming such prevalent social facts – that is, reality. By analysing the different and intimate relations between ethics and power, then, a normative theory informed by a constructivist ontology is from the outset inoculated from what has been at the heart of most critiques of moral theory in world politics in their various forms – idealism in the form of the divorce of morality from power as such – since particular kinds of moralities are here understood as forms of power insofar as they irreducibly involve empowerment and disempowerment. As Rumelili puts it, 'the practices of external differentiation that are necessarily implicated in community-building are not a price to be paid for progress but an essential mechanism that guarantees the ever-contested nature of identities in international relations'.

This is a crucial contribution of constructivism since it simultaneously provides a response to two critiques that could emerge from the Habermasian and Foucauldian poles of contemporary political and social theory. On the one hand, the accounts of ethics and politics in thinkers like Habermas or Linklater privilege those outcomes that issue from deliberation, argument and consensus, 'the force of the better argument' as free as possible from what they see as the distorting influences of power. Without denying the appeal of this ethical ideal, one could still note that constructivist analyses have demonstrated that ethically progressive change has been attained in other ways, and indeed that confirmation of the Habermasian ideal may be methodologically and empirically next to impossible.[74] This suggests that the Habermasian account may not provide the only viable account of a

[74] Deitelhoff and Müller, 'Theoretical Paradise', 170–171, state 'our research design failed, at least in part. While we found important arguing instances, our assumption that arguing as a mode of communication involved a truth-seeking actor-orientation was not confirmed . . . We demonstrated the importance especially of moral and ethical argumentation. However, arguing could not be isolated empirically from bargaining.'

cosmopolitan global ethic, and indeed may be in danger of providing a largely unworkable account of politics.

On the other hand, and as alluded to above, another vein of critically minded scholars like Richard Ashley, Jim George and David Campbell among numerous others have insisted on placing power front and centre in their analyses of world politics, while contending against the mainstream of explanatory positivism that International Relations is all about ethics. Campbell in particular has centrally engaged the question of ethics, taking up the challenge that 'radical' interpretivists cannot provide a workable ethics. A more earnest engagement with ethics in international relations is not to be found; to date, however, it is difficult to claim that the fruits of such labours have succeeded in providing workable responses to the kinds of questions of ethical judgement and decision being posed here that are also meaningfully distinct from the morality produced by the liberal, Enlightenment or modern thought that is the target of their criticism. This is due to several reasons.

The first is that these kinds of questions often are simply not directly engaged given the different critical tasks taken up by scholars. David Campbell's subtle and informed deconstruction of the conflict in Bosnia attempts to show how 'the settled norms of international society – in particular the idea that the national community requires the nexus of demarcated territory and fixed identity – were not only insufficient to enable a response to the Bosnian war, they were complicit in and necessary for the conduct of the war itself'.[75] The vast bulk of his analysis is descriptivist in Frost's sense, though on the premise that deconstructive thought is a necessary prerequisite for historical and political progress, a term, notably, from which he does not recoil.[76] But in the end he does recoil from addressing in a straightforward way the kinds of ethical dilemmas that, I would argue, genuinely arose in that case and were put at some point to various practitioners, dilemmas that have since arisen in other contexts. Namely: is war to be waged in defence of humanitarian principles, and if so, what kind of war could possibly be so waged? Could it be said that air strikes genuinely seemed to be the only non-suicidal political possibility for Western politicians, and if so, what then? While Campbell does go so far as to criticise the air

[75] David Campbell, *National Deconstruction: Violence, Identity and Justice in Bosnia* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 13.
[76] Ibid. 14.

strikes in Bosnia in an insightful way, he follows this by stating 'this is *not* to suggest that large-scale military intervention should have been undertaken'[77] – leaving it at that.

Some scholars eschew the provision of ethics as conventionally understood since they diagnose the very urge to do so as lying at the heart of the problem of contemporary ethics and politics.[78] Others, however, recognising that not answering the question does not in the end answer it, and granting that such questions are indeed important ones which it might be appropriate for scholars to address, have taken initial steps to take the question of ethics – in the sense of having to make decisions and/or judge – more to heart. Perhaps not dissimilar to this effort to extract the utility of the sociological programme of constructivism for ethics, Campbell in his later work follows more explicitly the conventional question of ethics – what to do – left mostly unanswered in his earlier work. He has drawn upon the work of Levinas to posit not a theory of ethics akin to the universalising injunctions à la Kant's categorical imperative or Rawls' difference principle, but rather an ethical relation in which responsibility to the other is the basis for reflection.[79] For Campbell as for Levinas, being is a radically interdependent condition made possible only because of my responsibility to the other, thus incurring an obligation to other.[80] This formulation, however, even as one can grant the social core of identity, is deeply problematic as a basis for ethics insofar as it ultimately delegates one's own ethical responsibility to the other without providing any grounds for distinguishing when that other is morally reprehensible and not deserving of such moral consideration as opposed to ontological recognition. Campbell himself is forthright enough to acknowledge this: 'We may still be dissatisfied with the prospect that Derrida's account cannot rule out forever perverse calculations and unjust laws. But to aspire to such a

[77] Ibid. 226.
[78] Richard Ashley, 'The Achievements of Post-Structuralism'. In Steve Smith, Ken Booth and Marysia Zalewski (eds.), *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 240–253.
[79] David Campbell and Michael J. Shapiro, 'Introduction: From Ethical Theory to the Ethical Relation'. In David Campbell and Michael J. Shapiro (eds.), *Moral Spaces: Rethinking Ethics and World Politics* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), x.
[80] David Campbell, 'The Deterritorialization of Responsibility: Levinas, Derrida, and Ethics After the End of Philosophy'. In Campbell and Shapiro, *Moral Spaces*, 32–35.

guarantee would be to wish for the demise of politics, for it would install a new technology.'[81] Thus, despite Campbell's earnest wrestling with the ethical question front and centre, we are returned in the end back to the original problem of this project if the solution is to privilege the diverse struggles of politics over the homogenising domination of the good.[82] Rumelili reorients the ethical compass somewhat here by similarly noting that 'The normative implications of the claim that identity is complicit in the production of others as different are profound', though she uses it to point out 'that the moral responsibility for being different does not fall squarely on the other; the self is simultaneously responsible for perceiving and representing the other's differences in a certain way'. She thus proposes ethical criteria for different forms of othering, marking a significant constructivist contribution to normative theorising.

In short, while interpretivist scholars like Campbell have placed power central in their analyses of ethics, they have not squared the circle with normative theory to date in a way that provides anything like a satisfactory guide to practical ethical questions of the type with which this chapter began: what ought the practitioner or citizen do? How does one know that one is in a situation calling for action within ethical limits not of one's own design nor that one approves of?

In their eschewing the label and allegedly the logic of constructivism, sometimes very pointedly as in the case of Campbell, I would contend that strong interpretivist approaches have missed the ways that constructivism may help to offer ways out of what has become something of a normative trap for critical or interpretivist theories in world politics. Campbell himself has launched a harsh critique of constructivism as failing to take the radical insights of critical social theory to their logical conclusions.[83] But in his enthusiasm to sharply distinguish his own work as not constructivist,[84] he has overlooked the fact that he has

[81] Ibid. 51.

[82] Nor does the vague call for a Derridean cultivation of 'new gestures' which aim to 'encompass' rather than resolve contradictory demands as counselled by Zehfuss get us there, unless those new practices are actually articulated (as is approximated in Gibney, *The Ethics and Politics of Asylum*, for instance); Maja Zehfuss, *Constructivism in International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 258.

[83] Campbell, *Writing Security*, Epilogue.

[84] For an effort to engage in dialogue between critical theorists and constructivists that argues Campbell is constructivist in important senses of the term, see Price and Reus-Smit, 'Dangerous Liaisons?'.

lumped a diverse range of scholars into one category of constructivism, accusing them all of the sins he identifies in but a very few that he takes as exemplary of the genre. This is rather an odd sin for a scholar given to complain that the very use of labels like post-modernism has served not to accurately describe the work of a group of thinkers but rather to cultivate a negative disposition, since the effect of his treatment of constructivism is indeed precisely that.[85] This is unfortunate, since many constructivists have no small sympathies to critical elements of work like Campbell's and take very seriously the resulting insights. More importantly for this project, however, the lack of direct engagement with the logic of constitutive claims made by social constructivists in favour of a strategy of dismissal of all such efforts as explanatory and causal (and thus misdirected in Campbell's view), deprives critical theorists of a crucial lever upon which to make plausible claims about ethical possibility and limit apt to have some political resonance. The disavowal of the empirical and all explanation does not provide this position with the resources to engage questions of possibility inherent in the ethical.

Yet, self-consciously eschewing as they do the language and logic of causal claims as impossible,[86] self-professed interpretive accounts nonetheless routinely invoke verbs such as 'legitimise', 'facilitate', 'mask', 'reveal' and so on to account for the workings of discourses, bringing in empirical explanation through the interpretivist door. However, the grander the claims being made on behalf of civilisational structures such as modernity, the liberal project, imperialism, globalisation, the end of history, nihilism and the like, the more the social scientists' Scylla of overdetermination and Charybdis of variation creep in. While a typical constructivist formulation is to claim to account for conditions of possibility (as opposed to causality), the most trenchant contributions of constructivism specifically seek to attend to these difficulties by explicitly addressing the nexus between claims of possibility and those of actuality or (constitutive) causation, and doing so by taking into account both agency and structure and their recursive effects upon one another. The chapters that follow attempt to do so, and thereby seek to discern the possibilities and constraints – structural and agent-oriented – of critical interventions in world politics. To preview but one startling finding in this volume along these lines, Ann Towns discovers

[85] Campbell, *Writing Security*, 212. [86] Campbell, *Writing Security*.

that while they have dominated the political debate, 'no clear line can be drawn between "Swedes" and "immigrants" as cultural categories' when analysing gender equality, and thus "there is no necessary trade-off between multiculturalism and gender equality as conceptualised in Sweden'.

As such, one can see how many of the contributors to this volume recoil from the lengths to which post-modern critics of constructivism such as Zehfuss push the contention that any positing of a 'reality' out there that is taken to impose limits on political action is nothing but 'an *unfounded* violence', a closure of thought 'based on *nothing* but a prior decision'.[87] This strong interpretivist position is unobjectionable insofar as any positing of limitations and opportunities entailed in 'the present' is itself an interpretation, an interjection in the production of social reality, and thus Zehfuss and Campbell are surely right to make us suspicious of any invocation of 'political realities' as a pre-given limit. And yet, at the same time it is not difficult to appreciate the merit in empirical claims like Towns' above, or the claim that the rise in asylum claims in Germany by 8,000 percent from 1980 to 1993 presented politicians with a pressing new political reality, one that politicians did not have to deal with in, say, 1973 when some 5,595 asylum claims were made, compared to the 438,000 in 1992, a number which represented two-thirds of all claims made in Western Europe that year.[88] This is so even if those numbers were themselves the products of prior political decisions, as Zehfuss reminds us, and even if the very subject of the 'refugee' is itself politically constructed, for it still presented itself to politicians as a social fact given its widespread acceptance among target populations and indeed asylum applicants themselves. That 'nothing' referred to by Zehfuss thus becomes a something, the accumulation of social practices and decisions that, however arbitrarily grounded, constitute an existence beyond the ability of one person's interpretation to change.

The notion of political crisis in this context emerges as a particularly salient ingredient for a constructivist ethic. Invocation of a situation of 'crisis' is a powerful device to invoke as a limit on political and ethical possibility. Yet the social constructivist would ask: just how do we define what comes to constitute a genuine crisis? And crisis for whom

87 Zehfuss, *Constructivism in International Relations*, 197, my emphasis.
88 Gibney, *The Ethics and Politics of Asylum*, 3, 86, 97.

or for what? What is it reasonable to ask of politicians to risk in dilemmas such as that which faced Western policy makers over Kosovo in 1999? Are politicians to do what is otherwise deemed 'right' – intervene militarily in situations of mass atrocity, say, or expand accommodations provided to refugees – even if strongly opposed by their own domestic public opinion or in the face of stark resistance among allies, and even if the result is the risk or actual loss of political power? Zehfuss rightly underscores that while it is common to hear in such dire dilemmas that one 'had no choice', the very claim that no choice was available is not solely a reflection of an unalterable and objective outside reality so much as a political contextualisation of actions,[89] a political construction, I would add, that of necessity includes normative judgements about what is acceptable to be sacrificed as Mervyn Frost's position would hold.

'Crisis' thus emerges as a particularly salient concept for thinking about moral limit and possibility, particularly since scholars have identified moments of perceived crisis as crucial catalysts for ideational and political change.[90] And yet, definitions of just what constitutes a crisis are as varied as theoretical perspectives in International Relations. What counts as a domestic or international political crisis is by no means given, even in the case of something like the Cuban Missile Crisis that is widely taken as a quintessential crisis.[91] For post-structural theorists, sovereignty (not to mention all the rest of our taken-for-granted foundations) is always already in crisis, the 'crisis of representation of modern subjectivity'. From a Marxian perspective, the global economy is always already in crisis. For Malthusians and contemporary environmentalists alike, it is the global ecological system that has been and now is at a precipice. And so on.

The upshot is that we require a theoretically self-conscious unpacking of the social construction of the relevant thresholds that animate crucial

[89] Zehfuss, *Constructivism in International Relations*, 256.

[90] See, e.g., Peter Haas, 'Introduction: Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination', *International Organization* 46:1 (1992), 1–35. Thanks to Adriana Sinclair for pointing out that a focus on addressing moral dilemmas conceived as acute 'crises' carries inherently conservative potential insofar as it distracts attention from the everyday agonies of poverty and the like that do not pose threats to dominant structures such as capitalism.

[91] Jutta Weldes, *Constructing National Interests: The United States and the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

questions of ethics – namely, what political or personal cost and risks can ethics demand, and what situations qualify as the kinds of crisis that demand such sacrifices? Was a putative crisis in part of one's own making or perceived as such in the context of one's own political benefit? Careful and self-conscious empirical investigation of the social construction of choice, and of crisis as a trigger for political action (or inaction) is necessary to contextualise what is at stake in a given situation.

The task for a constructivist contribution to ethics that follows, in short, is to unpack and identify the sources and different kinds of moral dilemmas. As the tragic realist view of politics among others reminds us, there simply may be genuine dilemmas not subject to ethically satisfying resolution, and this is the situation that Martha Finnemore tries to navigate through in her chapter on the dilemma between self-determination and humanitarian intervention. Constructivists stand at varying points along a continuum in their willingness to grant the existence of immutable material realities, from Wendt's 'rump' materialism to a post-structuralist denial of any political reality that could be said to exist outside of discursive practices. Putative dilemmas, however, may be revealed to be the product of the contestation of social practices amenable to long-term transcendence if not immediate resolution, and whose irresolvable character evaporates upon further analysis. Thus the power of Towns' demonstration that while gains in gender equality in Sweden were achieved by defining gender equality as 'Swedish' culture and setting it apart from 'immigrant/non-Western' culture, the key to gender equality does not have to be found in culture conceptualised this way, and thus a politician is not forced to choose as if in a genuine and immutable moral dilemma.

It is here, I would argue, that constructivism's structurally contextualised empirical analyses of the possibilities of change and the limits imposed by social structures become indispensable for normative theorising. It is to the substantive analyses of moral dilemmas in world politics along the dimensions identified in this chapter that the rest of this volume now turns, though not before Christian Reus-Smit orients the place of the constructivist normative agenda in the larger traditions of International Relations scholarship and philosophy in the next chapter to finally set the table for the chapters that follow.