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# **Poststructuralist Approaches to IR and the Question of Ethics**

A reading of R.B.J. Walker and David Campbell

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## DECLARATIONS

The word length of this dissertation is 14913 words, including footnotes.

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation is a philosophical critique of R.B.J. Walker's and David Campbell's respective contributions to poststructuralist thought on ethics in international relations (IR). It focuses on how their work deals with the predominant question asked about ethics in IR in terms of its framing, the answers it calls for and the link between the two. This question (here *the question of ethics*) asks what ethical conduct in IR is and even though Walker and Campbell undermine the concepts the question relies on, they ask questions similar to this. The dissertation is motivated by a suspicion that doing so might be inherently difficult as well as by a perceived lack of similar engagements. The dissertation argues, through close readings of texts by Walker and Campbell, that their approach is different from that in normative IR in content, but similar in form. This form of answer is taken to depend on their framing of the question of ethics and to induce tensions in their answers. Due to the focus on these writers the knowledge claims will be restricted to their work and it will thus be argued that it seems inherently difficult for them to answer the question of ethics in coherence with the critique of normative IR that their work takes as point of departure. Hence, the question limits their critical potential and their persistence in asking it circumscribes the debate about ethics in IR. However, the dissertation refuses to go beyond the critique and search for a solution since this would contradict the suspicion that guides this work.

# Introduction

Questions about ethical conduct have over the last few decades become a thriving site of debate in international relations (IR) theory. This is manifest in two theoretical developments: On the one hand, and intuitively, we see this in the increasingly popular literature referred to as *normative IR theory*. This is a literature that takes the morality of state actions as its main concern<sup>1</sup> and – in its current expression – follows influential work by John Rawls (1971) in political theory and by Charles Beitz (1979) and Michael Walzer (1977) in IR. On the other hand, and for many much less intuitively, we also see a concern for ethics in poststructuralist thought in IR. Notwithstanding the common allegations of amorality and nihilism (for a rebuttal see Der Derian 1997: 57-8), this literature has made ethics and the ethical relation a central concern (e.g. Campbell 1998a; 1998b; Walker 1993; 2003).

However, the poststructuralist engagement with ethics is in many ways radically different from that in the literature of normative IR. Indeed, poststructuralist thought aim to undermine the core assumptions of this literature. For instance, Jacques Derrida, who is an important source of inspiration for IR poststructuralists, has even demonstrated the impossibility of ethics (1995: chapter 3). Nevertheless, (at least some) IR theorists writing in a poststructuralist vein seem to retain the question asked in normative IR: namely, *what is ethical conduct in international relations?* (see Brown 1992) This will in the following be referred to as *the question of ethics*.

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<sup>1</sup> The notion of *normative IR theory* will be important to the dissertation. This literature will be defined primarily as literature against which the poststructuralist literature on ethics in IR is formulated. Hence, normative IR theory is taken to be comprised by normative studies in IR that does not take poststructuralism as their point of departure or in other words the more conventional literature on ethics in IR (see e.g. Brown 1992). This definition is considered sufficient only because this literature is not the concern of the dissertation.

Retaining the question of ethics whilst critiquing the concepts of the literature that conventionally asks it appears a straightforward and reasonable approach. Indeed, it seems necessary in order to make possible communication with the conventional literature. At the same time, and for the same reason, it also appears fundamentally difficult. There is, namely, reason to suspect that the criticised concepts are inherent to the question or necessary for giving what is considered a plausible answer. Hence, there is a risk for tensions and contradictions between the answer and the critique. This forms the puzzle that motivates this dissertation and it will be elaborated on as the argument proceeds.

My aim is to address this puzzling feature of the poststructuralist thought on ethics in IR. The rationale for doing so is twofold. Firstly, critical engagement with poststructuralist thought in IR (and particularly concerning ethics in IR) is relatively rare (see below), even though criticism is abundant. Such criticism is however seldom the result of theoretical engagement in which the authors' assumptions and ideas are taken seriously; rather, 'poststructuralists' are most often dismissed by a sleight of hand for being relativist and even dangerous (see George 1995: 215-6). Hence, the dissertation is motivated by a perceived gap in the literature and the puzzle delineated above is a place to start when addressing this gap.

Secondly, engaging with the question of ethics is also motivated by a general concern for the link between questions and answers and the dissertation is informed by a suspicion that this link might be more important than is often thought. Here this relates to the framing of the question of ethics and what types of answers that are deemed appropriate. The puzzling treatment of the question of ethics in poststructuralist thought then becomes an inroad to this exploration. Indeed, it forms the most forceful critique of the assumptions of normative IR but also takes on the task of moving beyond critique to constructive thought<sup>2</sup> whilst retaining

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<sup>2</sup> For a discussion on poststructuralism as constructive, see (Der Derian 1997: 62).

the same question. This makes possible an engagement with the framing of the question and its answers.

This dissertation will engage with how the question of ethics is treated by two contributors to poststructuralist thought on ethics in IR (R.B.J. Walker and David Campbell). Importantly, the dissertation does therefore not aim to assess poststructuralist thought on ethics in IR. Rather, I will focus on the two writers' contributions to this literature and what that can tell us about the question of ethics in IR. The knowledge claims that will be made is thus not thought to be generally applicable; rather, I intend to be able to say something about the authors under scrutiny, and about the question of ethics as they ask it. Of course, since these writers are both central to this literature and their work has been influential, it is possible that the insights presented here has some broader purchase, but I will refrain from making any such inferences.

The purpose of the dissertation is thus to critically engage the work of Walker and Campbell on ethics in IR with focus on the link between the question of ethics and the answers that are given to it. These aspects are here treated as integral to one another. Hence, the dissertation asks a question about a question: *What does Walker's and Campbell's respective contributions to poststructuralist thought on ethics in IR tell us about the question of ethics in terms of its framing, the answers it calls for and the link between the two?*

The question will be answered in three steps that provide insights into three themes, which then are combined to answer my overarching question. The first chapter will aim to provide insights into the poststructuralist critique of normative IR with focus on how it relates to how the question of ethics is framed and answered in the scrutinised literature. This will be dealt with through R.B.J. Walker's critique of normative IR. But since he does not explicitly address the question of ethics, I will read Chris Brown's (1992) discussion on normative IR through Walker's critique in order to see what it tells us about the question of ethics. The

second chapter addresses Campbell's attempt of going beyond this critique in answering what seems to be the same question of ethics. This aims to provide insights into the question of ethics in Campbell's thought and how he goes about to answer it. There, the focus will be on the differences and similarities between normative IR and Campbell's formulation of a poststructuralist ethics and the first chapter thus sets the stage for the second. In the third chapter, then, I discuss the results from the first two chapters with focus on the tensions between the critique and constructive work. This aims to provide insights into the link between the framing of the question of ethics and the answers it seems to presuppose. It is however important to note that this is not to be seen as a critique of Campbell through Walker; rather, as will become clear, their projects are integral to one another and the tensions that occur thus apply to both.

The character of the investigation is thus best described as a philosophical critique of poststructuralist ethics or as second order theorising; that is, thinking about theorising. For this purpose the abovementioned writers will be critiqued from the inside – on the basis of their own premises rather than adopting a position external to their setting by criticising these very assumptions. The investigation is therefore focused on the writers under scrutiny and I will not engage with the literature that these writers, in turn, base their work upon. For instance, I do not wish to contest these writers on the level of their reading of Derrida, since this would be to establish such an external position. Furthermore, introducing Derrida or Levinas in the end would make them, or a different reading of them, look like a solution to the ethics problematic. This would contradict my motivating suspicion that trying to solve old puzzles with new means might be difficult and limiting.

These considerations also determine the methodology that will be used: namely, a close reading of the selected authors. This kind of endeavour is not unproblematic and the most notable risk is that in the process of recounting the theorists' viewpoints, these are made to

seem more coherent than they ever were (see Skinner 1969: 16). The aim here is to make tensions obvious, but such an endeavour can never be complete and I will not attempt to compare different works of the same writer. Rather, the aim is, as described above, to think about Walker's and Campbell's respective, and joint, work in relation to the question of ethics in IR.

## **Poststructuralism and Ethics in IR**

Before embarking on the abovementioned work, it is appropriate to introduce the literature that is dealt with, motivate the choice of Walker and Campbell and briefly glance at the existing critique of these authors<sup>3</sup>. This will be addressed in turn below.

The first question that comes to mind when thinking about the topic of this dissertation is what poststructuralism is, and this raises an important caveat. Defining poststructuralism is problematic since it is a diverse literature, those drawing on poststructuralist thought often refuse to label their work and doing so seems inconsistent with core poststructuralist assumptions. Indeed, there are many different ways of interpreting poststructuralist thought and defining it is an inherently political act with no right or wrong answer; rather, the analyst imposes a definition that by necessity privileges particular writers and exclude others. Therefore, no definition will be given.

Nevertheless, there are some uniting tenets of poststructuralist thought that pertains to the view on ethics in IR. Most importantly, poststructuralist thought put into question what “seems natural, obvious, self-evident or universal, in order to show that these things have their history, their reasons for being the way they are, their effects on what follows from them, and that the starting point is not a (natural) given but a (cultural) construct, usually blind to itself”

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<sup>3</sup> I will restrict my discussion to internal critiques.



(Barbara Johnson quoted in Edkins 1999: 74). Hence, the main concern is the seemingly natural limits to our thought (Ashley & Walker 1990: 263; Zehfuss 2002: 246).

This takes us to two other important notions. First, poststructuralists in IR have undermined the rationalist-positivist reliance on philosophical realism and made explicit the political character of these assumptions. The focus is, *inter alia*, the political character of representations of reality (Zehfuss 2002) and of concepts that we take for granted (e.g. the state)(Edkins 1999: 2-5). This line of thought relies mainly on Foucault's (1977; 1989) notions of archaeology and genealogy, and Derrida's (1992a) deconstruction and thought on the "mystical foundations of authority". Relating to ethics in IR this has implied to question the ethical constitution of IR as a realm where there is no place for morality making obvious that this is a historically contingent conception infused with politics (Walker 1993).

Second, poststructuralist writers have questioned the sovereign subject and, therefore, also the ethical subject. Conventional accounts of ethics in IR are seen to "depend on the notion of a prior and autonomous sovereign subjectivity (whether it be the individual, the state, or some other corporate actor) deploying either a supposedly universal moral code (the deontological view) or muddling through their situation in order to achieve what might be thought of as the best possible outcome (the consequentialist account)" (Campbell & Shapiro 1999: viii). Poststructuralist thought undermines the autonomous and pre-social subject. It then finds inspiration in Levinas and Derrida's thought on how, identity, and subjectivity, is relies on difference (or *différance*) from the Other wherefore we are what we are only because of our relation with Others (Campbell 1998a, see also Derrida 1992b). In this way, we are "intrinsically bound together in an ethic of responsibility, without ontological detachment clauses. ... [and therefore] 'it is impossible to free myself by saying, "it is not my concern". There is no choice, for it is always and inescapably my concern'." (George 1995: 210)

R.B.J. Walker and David Campbell formulate one of these positions respectively. They are not, however, to be seen as representative in the generalising sense. Rather, they are chosen because they have contributed extensively to poststructuralist thought on ethics in IR<sup>4</sup>. Of course, the insights drawn here could be generally applicable, but this would require connecting them to other writers. This falls outside the scope of the dissertation and general insights will not be attempted. However, this is not the purpose; rather, as laid out above, the purpose is to engage with the selected writers with the aim of discussing the question of ethics.

Serious critical engagements with Walker or Campbell are relatively rare, and engaging with both is even less common, especially when focusing on the question of ethics. One important exception is Molly Cochran's attempt to assess poststructuralist ethics in which she touches on the question of ethics (1999: chapter 4). The gist of her argument is that poststructuralist thought on ethics in IR retains notions of universalism and foundations that otherwise are criticised. Indeed, even though these notions are qualified versions, they seem integral to speaking of ethics (ibid: 136-7). This is a concern that is important for my purposes since it relates poststructuralist critique to poststructuralist ethics and implies that speaking of ethics presupposes universalism and foundations.

When it comes to critiques that address one of the writers treated here, it seems that Walker's work has been largely exempt from such engagement. There are of course

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<sup>4</sup> The case for choosing Campbell is more obvious than the one for choosing Walker. Whereas Campbell "seeks to explore the ethical and political possibilities enabled by poststructuralist thought" (1998a: 3), Walker is more reluctant in using categories to describe his own work and uses poststructuralist thought in a somewhat disguised manner. For instance, in *Inside/Outside* he relies on Derridean deconstructive genealogy (1993: 8, 13), but goes about his investigation in a seemingly commonsensical manner (see Brown 1994: 223, fn 22). However, Lene Hansen positions him rather unambiguously in that category in her extensive portrait of his work (1997).

exceptions (see e.g. Bartelson 2001; Hansen 1997; Hoadley 2001) but the engagement on his view of ethics seems to be lacking. There is thus a gap in the literature, which makes it interesting to engage with Walker's work. Campbell's writing in general and on ethics in particular has attracted more attention, perhaps since his work more explicitly takes on the question of ethics. Poststructuralist critique of Campbell has also been relatively extensive. Jim George (1995) has engaged with Campbell's earlier work and makes a similar observation as Cochran – that the question of ethics seems to demand some sort of universality – but draws slightly different conclusions. Rather than seeing this as a problem for poststructuralist ethics, George tries to avoid either-or thinking and problematises the notion of universalism. He is however sceptical about Campbell's reliance on Levinas for this, but still sees this work as potentially more productive than the flawed universalist ethics that allows for actions that should never be possible to justify (ibid: 211, 215).

Other critiques are less celebratory and question Campbell for even formulating an ethics. Jenny Edkins notes that intellectuals, when talking about ethics, need to resist the “closure that comes with the status of ‘expert’ ... [by refusing] to give an abstract, generalising answer to an ethico-political question. Even a framing in terms of ‘an ethos of political critique’ or a ‘struggle for ... alterity’, as Campbell suggests, risks such abstraction.” (2005: 68) Hence, the weak universalism that George saw impossible to avoid is criticised. Mark Franke, in a related argument, sees Campbell's work on ethics as totalising since it still refers to the international, and therefore relies on the idea of “being human” (2000: 324). Franke claims that Campbell's intentions can “be served only once ethics itself is renounced as an appropriate entry point to the political” (ibid: 307). This idea is elaborated on by Madeleine Fagan (2006) who criticises Campbell for retaining a separation between ethics and politics (again a fundamental concern in the poststructuralist critique). In brief, this makes ethics seem answerable and thus makes Derridean responsibility impossible (ibid: 29). Fagan goes

on to argue that the problem seems to be that Campbell starts with Levinas who then is supplemented by Derrida. This allows Campbell to overlook that Derrida, at least in Fagan's reading, can be taken to argue that ethics is impossible since in fulfilling our responsibility to one Other we fail in responding to other Others. (ibid: 31-4) These critiques all raise doubts whether the framing of the question might create pitfalls that poststructuralist ethics cannot avoid. This suspicion informs the dissertation.

# **1 Walker and the Critique of Normative IR**

In this first chapter I will engage with R. B. J. Walker's work on ethics. The reason for choosing Walker was, as we saw in the introduction, his centrality to the poststructuralist literature on ethics and because he formulates what is perhaps the most articulated poststructuralist critique of normative IR. Here this critique will be related to how the question of ethics is framed and answered in normative IR. Since Walker has not engaged explicitly with the question of ethics and since his treatment of the literature of normative IR is predominantly abstract, I will proceed by reading Chris Brown's (1992) classification of this literature through Walker's critique. However, engaging with this particular aspect would not make sense without a broader understanding of Walker's work in general and on ethics in particular. This will therefore be addressed in the first section. In the second section I will then engage with the question of ethics as asked in the literature of Normative IR through a reading of Walker's critique. Finally, I will in a shorter section discuss where Walker thinks this critique will lead us, which also works as a bridge to the next chapter.

## **Ethics and the Limits to our Political Imagination**

For Walker, IR theory does not help us to understand politics. Rather, it is an expression "of the limits of the contemporary political imagination when confronted with persistent claims about and evidence of fundamental historical and structural transformation" (Walker 1993: 5). The quote contains the two components of Walker's concern: that IR theory functions as a historically contingent limit to what we consider possible, and that this limit makes us fail in understanding the contemporary world. He thus separates our situation from the means we use to grasp it, and notes a mismatch between the two. New conditions thus warrant a rethinking of settled categories. (ibid: 22)

The same argument applies to ethics. What is ethically possible in IR is limited by our political imagination and prevent us from responding to a necessity of ethical deliberations on a global scale that is stronger than ever (Walker 1993: 52; 1994: 265; 2003: 268). But the literature of normative IR ignores these limits and thus does not “take the difficulty of speaking about ethics in the modern world seriously enough” (Walker 1993: 51). The result is a “rather stale debate” (Walker 2003: 273) and, more importantly, that these limits are concealed in two ways: Firstly, Walker argues that normative IR assumes that *IR (or politics) is separable from ethics* since ethics can solve political problems. This obscures how IR is already ethically situated through “accounts of ethical possibility” which limits our political imagination. Secondly, Walker argues that normative IR assumes that *ethics is separable from IR (or politics)* and works as “a repository of principles awaiting application”. This is also a limit – all possible ethical principles are already known – and obscures how ethics is an ongoing historical and political practice. (Walker 1993: 51, 79) Therefore, in order to speak about ethics in IR we need to recognise and address these limits.

Walker’s analysis of the limits of our political imagination targets the principle of state sovereignty. This principle is seen as “the primary constitutive principle of *modern* political life” providing answers to questions about political community; i.e., “questions about who ‘we’ are, where ‘we’ have come from, and where ‘we’ might be going” (Walker 1990: 160). But the question has been forgotten and the answer has come to seem natural; in other words, state sovereignty has become “an essentially uncontested concept” (ibid: 159). But Walker stresses that this is *one* answer and that it has not always been as convincing; rather, “it was once bizarre and radical, even nonsense” (1993: 167). Therefore, state sovereignty is seen as an answer we need to question (ibid: 64).

The principle of state sovereignty emerged as an answer to what political community might mean when negotiating competing claims to universality and particularity in early-

modern Europe. A spatial transition from feudal hierarchies to dispersed autonomies and a temporal rejection of Christian universalism forced thinkers to grapple with new conditions in old categories. (Walker 1990: 164-5) State sovereignty provides a spatiotemporal resolution to these competing claims that holds “extraordinary conceptual elegance” yet is underachieved so that its internal tensions have become indicative of the modern project (Walker 2003: 270). Walker attempts to trace these tensions and in this way make obvious how the principle of state sovereignty limits our political imagination.

Spatially, state sovereignty is a resolution of “the tension between the universalist claims of Christianity and Empire [or later humanity] and the competing claims arising from participation in a particular statist community” (Walker 1993: 61). The solution makes both universality and particularity possible simultaneously by invoking “one system, many states; one Europe, or Christianity, or modernity and many (European, Christian or modern) peoples, cultures, nations and jurisdictions” (ibid: 176). This results in political community being possible only on the inside of the state and, consequently, impossible on the outside.

The spatial solution also resolves a temporal paradox between competing claims to contingency and claims to teleology and universalism (first Christian and classical, then a secular universalism with Enlightenment and the scientific revolution)(ibid: 39). This provides for “the fundamental paradox of modernity: in a world characterised by increasing rationalisation ... there is no rational way of deciding among an irreducible plurality of value commitments” (ibid: 56). This insecure side of modernity is however looked upon as dangerous. Nihilism and relativism are commonly seen as obstacles to the good life (ibid: 54). The spatial delimitation between an inside and an outside solves this predicament: “Within states, the possibility of universalist claims to the good, the true and the beautiful is opened up to actualisation in time. ... Between states, however, the lack of community can be taken to imply the impossibility of history as a progressive teleology, and thus the possibility

merely of recurrence and repetition.” (ibid: 63) This division between inside and outside has since then become defining of our political thought. This is obvious in the division of labour between political and international theory: whereas political theorists aspire to progress, international theorists can hope for no more than alleviating the tragedies of eternally recurring conflicts. (ibid: 62, 125)

Importantly, the inside and outside are mutually constitutive; i.e., both are the other’s condition of possibility. Therefore, idealism is a more appropriate candidate than realism for a tradition of international relations theory, since realism “is unthinkable without the priority ascribed to universalist claims within political theory” (ibid: 42). Cosmopolitan reasoning in normative IR, although in many ways appealing, thus makes it possible to argue that universalism is impossible in IR. “Universalism, to put it bluntly and heretically, can be understood as the problem, not the solution.” (Walker 1993: 77; 2003: 268) Hence, cosmopolitanism takes part in constituting IR as a realm of ethical impossibility. However, this does not render speaking of ethics in IR impossible (many scholars actually do). Rather, Walker’s point is that such discussions tend to oscillate between equally implausible alternatives (1993: 67-73) and “add up to a discourse that seems content to wish politics away” (2003: 284). This is why it is so difficult to talk about ethics in IR and the only way out is to ask once again the questions about political community in terms of unity and diversity in this time of rapid transformations (Walker 1993: 21-2). The literature of normative IR is thought to obscure such possibilities.

## **Walker’s critique and the Questions of Normative IR**

In this section I explore how Walker’s critique of normative IR relates to how the question of ethics is framed and answered in this literature. I will do this by reading Chris Brown’s (1992) classification of normative IR through Walker’s critique since this critique is highly



abstract and does not explicitly address the question of ethics. The reason for choosing Brown is that his classification has been highly influential and attempts to cover the field.

In *International Relations Theory: New Normative Approaches* Chris Brown (1992) engages with the resurgence of normative studies in IR theory. There he forwards a, now highly influential, reading of this literature as a debate between cosmopolitan and communitarian approaches. *Cosmopolitanism*, Brown argues, is based in Enlightenment thinkers (e.g. Kant) and takes the rational individual and universal humanity as the starting point for ethics (ibid: chapter 2). *Communitarianism*, on the other hand, is thought to be based in counter-Enlightenment movements such as Idealism or Romanticism (e.g. Rousseau, Herder, Hegel and Mill) and sees particular communities (most often states) as the basis for ethics (ibid: chapter 3). In other words, the debate in normative IR concerns how we rate our responsibilities as human beings against our responsibilities as citizens (Robinson 1999: 73, see also Cochran 1999). We thus see how the tension between universalism and particularism that Walker highlights sets stage for the contemporary normative debate in IR.

The dichotomy fills two functions for Brown: Firstly, it is an analytical device ordering IR theory. He argues that this “classification is more or less inclusive for the modern age – all variants of international relations theory can be seen as falling into one or the other camp without too much violence being done to the intentions of the theorist” (1992: 27). Secondly, the two strands work together as a framework from which political theories and positions can be formulated (ibid: 75-6). So the dichotomy both classifies all that we already say and defines what makes sense to say. Therefore, it contributes to the forgetting of the historical constitution of this debate and provides the basis for an oscillation between two positions which Walker sees as a “rather stale debate” (2003: 273).<sup>5</sup> The cosmopolitan-communitarian

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<sup>5</sup> These positions are ideal types and Brown argues that the gap might not be as big as suggested (1992: 110). He also admits that this dichotomy only makes sense in the modern world (ibid: 27) and acknowledges that there are

debate thus provides a prime candidate for my analysis of what Walker's critique of normative IR tells us about the question of ethics.

After delineating his analytical framework Brown goes on to see how the different positions are played out when debating international political issues. He applies his framework to what he sees as the three main agendas of normative IR: state autonomy, distributive justice and the use of force (1992: 103) by addressing the questions "Do states have a right to be left to their own devices?" (ibid: 109), Can war and the use of force be justified? (ibid: chapter 6) and How should the distributive injustices in the world be dealt with? (ibid: chapter 7). The debate in normative IR thus seems confined to justifying particular (state) actions from cosmopolitan and communitarian perspectives respectively. Hence, the question of ethics in normative IR is framed in terms of a political problem that has to be solved through recourse to already existing moral thought. This resonates with Walker's description of ethics in IR as presupposing an intersection between political problems and ethical principles, which is problematic since IR already is ethically situated through the principle of state sovereignty.

Since politics and ethics are separated and ethics is seen as a guide for politics, we only need to find the correct principle to pass judgement on policy. This, however, proves painstakingly difficult in Brown's analysis. He notes regarding state autonomy that the

absence of uncontroversial answers to these questions ought not to be surprising. It is of the nature of this sort of question not to be answerable – there is a clash of values involved, each of which is real, and in such circumstances it is unrealistic to expect that a background

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critical approaches that try to transcend this debate. These are however dismissed since "rather better reasons than those offered by Derrida or Barthes would be required before most people would be prepared to throw overboard the social thought of two-and-a-half millennia" (ibid: 235).

theory can always be found which will reveal that the clash is more apparent than real.  
(Brown 1992: 126, see also 183)

Brown's reading of the literature as a cosmopolitan-communitarian dichotomy thus makes the question of ethics insoluble (Robinson 1999: 75). This is in line Walker's argument on "the fundamental paradox of modernity"; i.e. that an increasing rationality cannot help us decide between competing values (1993: 56, see also 1993: 53). But, as we saw, the framing of the debate made those who reject final solutions seem relativist and even dangerous. This, Walker argues, is a rationale for forgetting that Machiavelli's work was tentative deliberations on a new reality in the formulation of a realist canon, and for Weber to opt for realist power politics after having struggled with the temporal tensions in modernity (Walker 1993: 72). It is also something that can be seen in normative IR.

Even though Brown sees the question of ethics as fundamentally unanswerable, this is not how the question is treated by the thinkers he analyses. Rather, the protagonists in this debate seem, in Brown's analysis, to propose final answers that render other answers unnecessary. In this way, they all aim for universally applicable principles, whether these are derived from a common humanity or from putting the own community first. Indeed, communitarian approaches also presuppose a notion of universal truth since their guiding principle is that the state is the most important community and that the members of such communities share a distinguishing moral essence. Such a final answer seems integral to the framing of the question since advice for policy-making is supposed to be unambiguous and is considered flawed if it is not (Zehfuss 2002). It does not suffice to present the apparent unsolvable limbo of the cosmopolitan-communitarian debate.

This is further exacerbated by two other modern concerns which seem to bring about separate strategies for overcoming this predicament. Firstly, the situation is incompatible with the modern notion of knowledge; i.e., to "construct a coherent representation that

excludes contesting interpretations” (Ashley & Walker 1990: 261). This seems connoted to how different writers argue for the correctness of their position. For instance, Brown highlights how Charles Beitz justifies his cosmopolitan approach to state autonomy by proving interdependence and the mistake in seeing states as individuals (1992: 114-8). Vivienne Jabri refers to this as an attempt of solving moral issues through epistemology (1998: 593). In a related argument, Walker shows how epistemological inquiry has dominated Western philosophy with the effect that values are either separated from facts, or equated with how the world has become through modernisation (1993: 54). Therefore, this strategy is also connected to the Enlightenment ideal of *truth*. Claire Colebrook reads Foucault to argue that what we see as truth shifted with Enlightenment from being in “the *force of words*” (2005: 163) to “lay in what was said” (Foucault quoted in *ibid*: 164). This calls for external motivations. Hence, Walker’s critique directs us to a first strategy for reaching a conclusive answer to the question of ethics: namely supporting the answer with epistemological proof.

Secondly, but not separated from the above concern, modern notions of accumulative science and progress (Halliday 1999: 106) also call for moving beyond the apparent stalemate of the cosmopolitan-communitarian debate in order to create a better world. Hence, even though the cosmopolitan-communitarian debate is founded in modernity (Brown 1992: 27), modern thinking also calls for overcoming this opposition. This seems connected to another development that is not treated by Brown but relies on his dichotomy. In that reading the cosmopolitan-communitarian debate is seen as an impasse that has to be overcome if we are to be able to aspire to a better world (Cochran 1999). Since the cosmopolitan-communitarian dichotomy is seen as covering all there is to think about ethics in IR, the difficulty of adjudicating between the strands makes it sensible to believe that progress can be achieved through a middle position (see e.g. Erskine 2002; Frost 1996; Linklater 1998; Shapcott 2001).

However, for Walker this is part of the problem. He argues that such attempts will be very tempting, but that this “must be a perpetual wandering on a road that is closed at both ends” (1993: 72). Crucially, this reaffirms the terms of the debate, which – rather ironically – makes the search for progress in these terms an inherently conservative strategy. Hence, Walker’s critique directs us to a second strategy which attempts to overcoming the impasse by a middle position.

To conclude, it follows from Walker’s assumption of the historicity of ethics that it is in this constant rehashing of the cosmopolitan-communitarian debate we reproduce and reaffirm the modernist ethics inherent in the principle of state sovereignty. This, in conjuncture with claims that this is all there is to think about ethics, defines the limits of our political imagination and this brings us to the aim of Walker’s critique: an aspiration to open up for thinking differently. The next section will briefly address what Walker sees as the way out.

## **A new Machiavelli?**

Walker’s argues, in his critique of normative IR, that the reliance on the principle of state sovereignty impedes us from speaking of ethics in IR in a way that corresponds to our contemporary situation. This then calls for a rethinking of ethics in IR, something that is considered rather urgent. We are now at an historical juncture where temporal accelerations can no longer be captured in spatial categories, and this destabilises our old categories. In other words, we seem to find ourselves in the position of Machiavelli.

Hence, we need to rethink political community, but Walker himself is not all that specific about what this might mean. Nevertheless, it is clear that this involves moving beyond the confines of the cosmopolitan-communitarian debate. For instance, he argues that a “busier intersection [between ethics and IR] is no indication of an escape from the routines through which attempts to speak of ethics are either marginalised or trivialised. These routines emerge from the way claims about ethical possibility are already constitutive of theories of

international relations.” (Walker 1993: 79) Furthermore, it is rather obvious that Walker aims for an ethics that is not bound by the spatial limits of state sovereignty. This is seen in his claim that contemporary conditions “will amplify the claim that a more universalistic account of human community is now called for” (ibid: 76).

However, we have seen that Walker’s critique could be related to the question of ethics and even though his critique relies on a radically different question, his hopes for a more appropriate ethics seems likely to attract some of the criticism he voices. Firstly, Walker’s critique targeted how the separation between ethics and politics was untenable and obscured the historical and political constitution of ethics in IR. However, Walker calls for an ethics that is more appropriate to contemporary conditions. His thus seems to aim for better policy, which implies a separation between politics and ethics. Secondly, Walker’s critique highlighted how the answers in normative IR were intended to be final and universally applicable. It seems likely that Walker’s call for a new ethics might attract this criticism as well. In brief he can be taken to argue that if we could understand the contemporary world, we would also be able to formulate an appropriate ethics, which then seems to be a final answer. Of course, this is a stereotyped picture of Walker’s argument and it is important to note that he admits that speaking of ethics in the way he does presupposes a certain universality (ibid: 74) and “the very possibility of something called ethics as we have come to understand it may well require fundamental reconsideration” (ibid: 79). The way out seems to be to ask, “how universality and particularity might be rearticulated without capitulating to the modernist presumption that the different must always be resolved into the same” (ibid: 78). Nevertheless, this new ethics is likely to attract criticism for formulating a final and universally applicable answer to the question of ethics. Finally, Walker’s critique highlighted two strategies that were used to justify the given answer: either by appealing to epistemological foundations or by formulating a middle position in the cosmopolitan-

communitarian debate. When claiming that contemporary conditions call for a new ethics, Walker also seeks a justification for his ethics and is likely to attract the first criticism since he seems to argue that these observations are in some way devoid of ethics or politics.

Tensions thus appear when Walker moves beyond criticism. In the next chapter this move, and the tensions it might lead to, is further explored by engaging with David Campbell's attempts to rethink ethics in a way that is better in tune with contemporary conditions. The reason for choosing Campbell is, in part, that his work might be seen as an answer to Walker's call that "the most interesting ways forward will be opened up by those who seek to speak of the possibility of new forms of political community while resisting the resolutions that have made the demand that ethics be applied to international relations seems [sic] so reasonable." (ibid: 80)

## 2 Campbell's Poststructuralist Ethos

David Campbell's work contributes affirmatively to a poststructuralist ethics in IR and is perhaps the most elaborate in this vein. This was also the reason why his work was selected. Importantly, his project is also in line with the trajectories that Walker drew up and this chapter addresses Campbell's attempt of going beyond Walker's critique. This will be done with focus on how Campbell asks and answers the question of ethics aiming to tease out the differences and similarities to normative IR. The tensions that were mentioned in the end of the preceding chapter will thus be further explored. I will, however, begin by briefly introducing Campbell's work in the same time as I make the connection to Walker. In the second section I will then address how Campbell moves beyond the cosmopolitan-communitarian debate focusing on his question and answers in relation to those in the preceding chapter. Finally, I will briefly assess how this works out and thus provide the basis for the following chapter in which this will be more thoroughly analysed.

### Identity/Difference and Globalisation

Campbell shares the concern of Walker that our political imagination restricts us from understanding our contemporary situation. His focus is however not on the principle of state sovereignty, but on identity. For instance, in *National Deconstruction* he claims that the prevailing conceptions of identity made the West fail in their responses to Bosnia (1998a, see also 1998c; 1993). Campbell's argument is informed by Derridean thought on the identity-difference problematic and thus sees identity as performatively constituted in relation to difference (or *différance*)<sup>6</sup>. Hence, identity cannot exist without difference, but this does not

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<sup>6</sup> This line of reasoning is also instrumental to Walker's thought, and the similarities between the two are therefore not surprising (e.g. Walker 1993: 123).



mean that the different always needs to be turned into something dangerous (Campbell 1998c). Crucially, the modern conception of identity makes us look for the same and the different in spatial categories and notably in states. Campbell even argues that the narrow territorialized conception of identity, which is central to modern political thought, was part of the problem in Bosnia and a problem that was exacerbated by Western diplomatic efforts (1998a). This is inherent in Campbell's attempt to a "deterritorialization of responsibility" (ibid: 166) implying that there is a nexus between identity and territory (or sovereignty) in modern thought that we would be better off without (ibid: 165).

Campbell's work is in thus indicative of the trajectory for a more appropriate ethics that Walker sets out. Indeed, he wants to move beyond seeing states as the only possible political community. Campbell has also voiced a critique that is highly similar to that of Walker by criticising the idea of a distinction between normative and empirical theory and between IR and previously established principles (Campbell & Shapiro 1999). Crucially these problematic distinctions "depend on the notion of a prior and autonomous sovereign subjectivity (whether it be the individual, the state, or some other corporate actor)" (ibid: viii). Campbell aims to go beyond these problems by establishing an ethos (implying that it is weaker and not as fixed as an ethics) that is supposed to be more in line with what contemporary world politics demands. In that way, he also wants to prove that those who criticise poststructuralism for relativism and nihilism are wrong by showing how this literature carries an affirmative ethos<sup>7</sup>. This ethos is supposed to avoid the pitfalls connoted with the conventional conception of ethics and normative IR. Hence, he tries to reconceptualise political community and universality and think about politics rather than

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<sup>7</sup> For Walker this does not necessarily seem like a problem since he argues that this uncertainty is a central feature of modernity – not post-modernity – and this is also why he finds modern writers like Weber just as informative as Derrida, Foucault and the likes (1993: 20).

ethics. This resonates with what Walker saw as interesting and rewarding steps forward and how this is drawn up in detail will be the focus of the following section.

## **A Politics of Affirming Alterity from an Ethos of Responsibility**

Campbell advocates a new policy in international relations which aims to ‘affirm alterity’. This principle “goes beyond the narrow and static confines of tolerance and maintains that the active affirmation of alterity *must* involve the desire to actively oppose and resist – perhaps, depending on the circumstances, even violently – those forces that efface, erase or suppress alterity.” (Campbell 1998a: 206) In *National Deconstruction* (ibid) he deals with this in relation to the war in Bosnia. His concern is how Western diplomats, politicians and international relations scholars responded to this crisis. In brief, he argues that the enacted policy failed and that his policy recommendations would fare better in comparison. This principle is thus thought to go beyond the narrow interpretation that is connoted with the principle of state sovereignty and a territorialized conception of identity. It also leads to a particular form of politics and, also, to particular recommendations of courses of actions. With respect to the Bosnian case Campbell argues that this principle results in two guidelines:

A variety of political strategies which *on the one hand* requires the constant pluralization of centers of power, sources of knowledge, loci of identification, and the spaces of community, while *on the other hand* recognizes that each deterritorialization necessitates and results in a reterritorialization, that in turn has to be disturbed (and so on).

An emancipatory ideal of multiculturalism, which *on the one hand* affirms cultural diversity without situating it, while *on the other hand* recognizes that multiculturalism can itself succumb to an enclave mentality that suppresses cultural interdependence and plurality. (Campbell 1998a: 208)

Through these principles, then, Campbell argues there can be democracy in Bosnia that does not reduce politics to ethnicity. Importantly, Campbell also sees this as applicable to contemporary multi-cultural Western societies (ibid: 167, 218).

Campbell develops on his principle of affirming alterity in “Why Fight”, albeit in a slightly different context. Here he argues that the context of “millennial chaos” cannot be captured in the “conventional political architecture and discursive resources of International Relations” and we thus fail to respond to crises such as those signified by names like “Bosnia, Rwanda, Chechnya, Somalia, Afghanistan, [and] Sudan” (Campbell 1998b: 479). What is called for is instead a politics of affirming alterity which, in this case, motivates fighting and intervention. Campbell admits that his position makes it difficult to formulate any hard and fast rules. Indeed, this would contradict much of his purpose and his basic assumptions. However, he argues that this weaker principle provides a certain direction to decisions which “can better enable responses to disasters” (ibid: 519).

We thus see that Campbell departs from the problematic identified and criticised by Walker – that the principle of state sovereignty (or a territorialized conception of political identity) makes us fail in responding to contemporary conditions – and argues that what is called for is a politics of alterity. This solution seems to be a logical continuation of Walker’s work but also seems to be asking a similar question of ethics as normative IR in the sense of guiding the formulation of (state) policy. Hence, even though the starting assumptions are quite different, Campbell’s work communicates with the literature that Walker (and Campbell) criticises.

In terms of answering the question there are also some striking similarities between the kind of answers Campbell and the literature of Normative IR seeks. Indeed, Campbell sees affirmation of alterity as following logically from a particular ethos or ethics, which makes it an ethical principle. In this way it presupposes a certain universalism since it is supposedly

universally applicable. Campbell argues that ethics presuppose universalism but ventures a different kind by departing from Derrida. He recognises that doing so can be problematic since universality always “calls forth foundational elements of philosophical traditions that Derrida’s thought has sought to disclose, disturb, and dislodge” (Campbell 1998a: 199). Nevertheless, he argues that through Derrida’s thought, and in particular through the notion of “iterability”, it is possible to retain “a sense of the nonparticular that gives meaning to the particular” (ibid: 200). Iterability, in brief, is the condition of possibility for communication since signifiers (or words) can only signify as long as they involve a remainder of the same even though they are constantly changing and never entirely the same (Zehfuss 2002: 200). For Campbell universality thus occurs in a repetition of the particular in which a remainder of the same is retained. But there is always a remaining alterity or difference and the apparent unity of the universal is thus always in danger (1998a: 200). Therefore, he does not study the Bosnian case to apply universal ethical principles, “but because we could not have enunciated the universal other than through the structure of iteration that produces and names the particular” (ibid: 207). Hence, Campbell tries to reconceptualise the relationship between universality and particularity to avoid reducing the other into the same. On this point Campbell’s effort is in line with Walker’s critique of normative IR. However, Campbell still seems to argue that the principle can be universally applied. For instance, in “Why Fight” Campbell introduces the problematic by listing a number of humanitarian crises to which this principle, if heeded, would improve our responses (Campbell 1998b: 497). In other words, Campbell also aspires to a final answer to the question he poses – no other answers are necessary except for his.

There are two converging inroads to Campbell’s ethos. One of which is more interesting for my purpose here. I will however begin by delineating the other inroad since it is important in Campbell’s work and gives a background to his argument. Firstly, Campbell

argues – even though this is a bit pointedly expressed – that if we accept deconstructive thought we also need to accept the principle of affirming alterity<sup>8</sup>. This goes hand in hand with the aim to highlight the affirmative character of deconstruction (see above). In Campbell’s view, deconstruction – or political criticism – has a basic ethicality “because of its orientation to the call of the other” which makes it far from nihilistic (1998a: 182) and because such thought implies resisting totalitarianism whether it is political or ontological (1998a: 4; 2005).<sup>9</sup> This boils down to what in deconstructive thought is called the “double contradictory imperative”; i.e., “thinking the limit yet going beyond it, maintaining a commitment to reason by questioning its operation and that which escapes it, and resisting the inside/outside demarcation while exposing how the outside inhabits and helps constitute the inside”<sup>10</sup> (Campbell 1998a: 198). Therefore, “deconstruction is, in itself, a positive response to an alterity which necessarily calls, summons or motivates it” (ibid: 129). Hence, by accepting deconstruction, we also need to affirm alterity – sometimes even by violent resistance (Campbell 1998b). But, crucially, this also depends on a leap of faith for prior

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<sup>8</sup> This is of course a rather contestable contention and others have questioned Campbell’s reading of Derrida on this point (e.g. Edkins 2005; Fagan 2006)

<sup>9</sup> It is interesting to note that Campbell connects the ethos of deconstructive thought to Enlightenment and democracy (1998a: 201). This reading of democracy relies on Campbell moving beyond the more conventional institutionalist view by talking about a “spirit” of democracy that is thought to involve indeterminacy and constant debate over options to which there are no secure foundations (ibid: 195-6). Campbell’s definition of democracy is thus reminiscent of deconstructive thought, and the convergence in terms of ethos does not seem that surprising. Therefore, Campbell’s contention that “deconstructive thought is necessary for ... a democratic politics” (ibid: 202) is not surprising and, more importantly, does not tell us that much since this is true by definition.

<sup>10</sup> This, however, only appears to be contradictory “if one succumbs to the blackmail of the Enlightenment” (Campbell 1998a: 198)

acceptance of deconstructive thought. This is, nevertheless, rather similar to some of the motivations that we saw in the preceding chapter where particular moral philosophies were invoked to substantiate particular policies. It must be noted, of course, that the line of thought that Campbell draws on is not what is commonly encompassed by moral philosophy, but the strategy in finding the answer is similar.

Campbell's second motivation is more substantive. Here he takes as point of departure how a politics of affirming alterity would be better suited to respond to world events. He argues that the ontological, or 'onto-political'<sup>11</sup>, assumptions that underlie these policies prevent proper responses. In this way Campbell highlights the politics of ontological assumptions. In "Why Fight" he argues that the character of "the political violence of the post-Cold War era" spurs "the formation of 'emergent political complexes' which disturb the conventional cartography of the international order" and that "their importance can no longer be dissimulated by geopolitical modes of representation" (ibid: 497). The onto-political presumptions guiding these defunct modes of representations thus prevent "the development of a politics of responsibility potentially better attuned to the context of crisis" (ibid: 501). In *National Deconstruction* the same argument is reiterated as Campbell claims that "conventional understandings of international violence have little purchase on the complexity of the war in Bosnia" and thus "seeks to explore the ethical and political possibilities enabled by poststructuralist thought" (1998a: 3). For Campbell the political imaginary of state sovereignty – or in his words the nexus between (political) identity and territory – makes us

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<sup>11</sup> The 'onto-political' is a term that Campbell borrows from William Connolly, whose work is close to that of Campbell. "To say that political interpretation is 'onto-political' highlights the way in which 'it contains fundamental presumptions that establish the possibilities within which its assessment of actuality is presented.' This dimension is more often than not occluded within the human sciences, particularly by those accounts that depend upon unacknowledged assumptions about an unproblematic reality." (Campbell 2005: 128)

fail to understand and react to the problematic of Bosnia (ibid: 165-6). We cannot respond properly without a “deterritorialization of responsibility” (ibid: 166). Campbell’s aim is an approach that is more appropriate, but at the same time more self-conscious about its onto-political assumptions (ibid: 23).

Campbell’s solution is an onto-political position derived mainly from the work of Levinas and Derrida. This is based in deconstructive thought and how “our condition can be characterised by the problematic of identity/difference, where neither term can be understood except in relation to the other, and because of which claims about secure identities, traditionally authorized grounds, and the political necessities said to flow from them are met with a critical scepticism” (1998b: 509). Hence, the subject is thought to be constituted through a process of identity and difference and our existence as subjects thus stems from our relation to the Other. Therefore, responsibility to the other comes before our subjectivity. Ethics thus comes to precede philosophy and this makes Campbell’s reconceptualisation radically different from conventional ethics founded in epistemologically. (1998a: 174) This also makes the ethical subject radically different from the subject in normative IR, which is thought to pre-exist all ethical relations “deploying either a putatively universal moral code (the deontological view) or muddling through the situation in order to achieve what might be thought of as the best possible outcome (the consequentialist account)” (ibid: 12).

Since the subject is thought to be constituted only through its relations with the Other, responsibility also loses its previous meaning as a choice (ibid: 165). Instead, responsibility is the relation with the other that makes possible our highly interdependent condition of being in the first place (Campbell 2005: 131; Campbell 1998a: 173). Indeed, “one’s being has to be affirmed in terms of *a right to be* in relation to the Other” (Campbell 1998a: 174). Here Campbell goes on to quote Levinas who writes that “One has to respond to one’s right to be, not by referring to some abstract and anonymous law, or judicial entity, but because of one’s

fear for the Other” (Levinas quoted in *ibid*: 174). The freedom of the subject is dependent on a prior relationship to the Other which makes “how response-ability can be fostered and exercised” the problem for Campbell (*ibid*: 12) rather than arguing for this responsibility.

However, it seems to me that Campbell’s argument is rather similar in form to the ones forwarded in normative IR. Therefore, he also appears to be more concerned to argue for why we should feel responsible rather than how this can be fostered. Hence, notwithstanding the differences in content, it seems that Campbell’s answer draws on many of the argumentative strategies that were criticised in the preceding chapter.

## **Another Ethos Guiding Policy?**

Campbell’s argument is in many respects diametrically opposed to that of the conventional literature in normative IR as described in the preceding chapter. For instance, Campbell tries to evade the territorialized conception of identity that dominates in Western political thought and draws on a radically different notion of subjectivity than the individual autonomous subject that cosmopolitan and communitarian perspectives rely on. He also attempts to reformulate the relationship between the particular and the universal. Essentially Campbell moves beyond Walker’s critique by arguing that there is an ethos connoted with poststructuralist thought – and in particular deconstruction – and that this ethos logically leads to a principle of affirming alterity that guides the direction or basic content of politics. Crucially, this ethos is thought to (1) take us away from the highly problematic nexus of identity and territory (what Walker describes as inherent in the predominance of the principle of state sovereignty as a frame for our political imagination) and (2) is better in tune with the challenges of the contemporary world. Notwithstanding, the differences and the attempt to move beyond the narrow confines of the cosmopolitan-communitarian debate, there also seem to be some important similarities.



First, Campbell's politics of affirming alterity and its basis in the ethos of responsibility seems to be asking the same question as the literature of normative IR does. This involves a separation between politics and ethics, or the principles that policies rely on. Second, the question seems to presuppose that the answer is somehow final which, in turn, presupposes a notion of universalism. Both Walker and Campbell argued that this might be inherent to speaking about ethics, but at least it presents them with a problem. Third, even though Campbell argues that ontology is political, he anchors his argument in a description of reality and argues that the principle he advocates would be more appropriate for this reality. Hence, he tries to find proof for why the principle of affirming alterity is better suited to contemporary conditions (something that he seems to share with Walker). This resembles how norms were decided epistemologically in the literature of normative IR. Finally, both writers use virtually the same argumentative strategies as we saw in normative IR. This might be necessary, but it might also rely on assumptions that are in tension with the assumptions of poststructuralist thought. These tensions will be explored in the next chapter.

In order to summarise, it seems that Campbell evades Walker's critique when it comes to the content of the argument. However, in terms of the form of the argument and the questions that are asked, the differences are less obvious. This is perhaps a necessary part of trying to communicate with the literature of normative IR or the wider discourse of IR theory. However, in the next chapter I will argue that this might not be unproblematic. Rather, in doing this Campbell and Walker also encounter the same problems that they criticise.

### 3 Poststructuralism and the Question of Ethics

This chapter aims to analyse the insights from the preceding chapters. In brief, these have highlighted that notwithstanding the substantial differences in content between Campbell's argument and those presented in the cosmopolitan-communitarian exchange, the form of the argument is similar. This seemed related to the tensions in Campbell's work. Here I will discuss how these tensions relate to the framing of the question of ethics, the answers it calls for and the link between the two. First, however, it is important to note that this should not be read as a critique of Campbell through Walker. Rather, Campbell departs from Walker's critique, and Walker sets out a trajectory for overcoming the problems he identifies that is in line with Campbell's work. Hence, this is a discussion on both writers and the question of ethics in IR.

The argument will be presented in three steps. Firstly, I address the framing of the question and the answer it seems to presuppose. Then I turn to the problems that Campbell (and Walker) encounters when trying to fit their argument into the conventions of the question. Finally, I will return to the question of ethics and discuss how the question works as a limit for critical thought.

#### Framing the Question

The question of ethics in IR is generally framed in terms of what should be done. This might be asked with respect to a particular case or in a more general sense but it seems that the aim is to argue for some sort of action. This is the case, as we saw, both in the literature of normative IR and in Campbell's work. In Brown's reading of normative IR we saw questions such as *What is the right thing to do about world poverty?* In other words, what we in the more affluent part of the world should be obliged to do. For Campbell the question was how

the West should respond to crises like the one in Bosnia. Ethics thus conceived offers a direction, or even content, to politics and policy before decision-makers are allowed in, and it works by defining what is not negotiable. Another way of seeing it could be that the question is asked in way as to allow the one who is asking to promote policy recommendations.

The answer to this question thus resides in convincingly showing why something should be exempted from discussion and debate – from politics. The literature of normative IR is interesting here since it works as a stepping-stone for Campbell's work through Walker's critique. As we saw in chapter 1, Walker's critique indicated that for an answer to be taken seriously it was supposed to be derived from the canon of moral thought as represented through the cosmopolitan-communitarian dichotomy. Even though Campbell does not accept this premise, his reasoning is reminiscent of that which Brown identifies as proper normative IR. Campbell also tries to work through moral philosophy by starting from Levinas. Of course, he claims that deconstruction precedes philosophy (Campbell 2005: 130), but as his argument goes this is of lesser importance. Indeed, he tries to justify the principles he delineates.

This problem leads to a second. Indeed, how can we justify basing our work in one set of philosophical principles or moral codes and not in any other possible set? Here we saw two different strategies in normative IR. The first attempted to prove the correctness of particular norms through epistemology; i.e., by proving correspondence to the world. The second attempted a middle position in the cosmopolitan-communitarian debate, without being separated from the wish for epistemological proof. Campbell's work is particularly different from the latter strategy since he does not accept the terms of the debate that makes accommodation a possible answer. Nevertheless, he shares with these writers a concern to move beyond the stale division of cosmopolitans and communitarians. However, his answer is actually rather similar to the former strategy. Campbell's principles are justified and

motivated in a comparable manner<sup>12</sup>. He seems to argue – as does Walker – that we need principles that are better in tune with observations they make of world politics which will better equip us to deal with this reality. This adherence to the same kind of question and answer also led to problematic tensions, which will be addressed in the next section.

## **Answering the Question of Ethics from a Critical Perspective**

It turns out that Campbell asks virtually the same question as in normative IR, and seeks a similar answer – not in content but in form. In the preceding chapter I alluded to four sets of tensions in Campbell's work that seemed related to the question of ethics. These tensions will here be explored in further detail.

Firstly, the framing of the question of ethics seems to require a separation between politics and ethics. Indeed, just asking for principles and codes that give a direction or content to politics that is exempted from political debate presuppose that we can in some way separate the two. This was at the centre of Walker's critique. It can be said, however, that Campbell tries to overcome this problem by arguing that ethics is always political, but this renders his conception of ethics as a codification of politics, which, then, can work as a guide for politics (Fagan 2006). Hence, the choice of point of departure – i.e. deconstruction – is to be seen as a political one, but one that then in a second step can work as a guide for politics. This separation is problematic since there is unclear why Campbell should be the one making such political decisions. In this context is worth reflecting on why scholars should have the power over ethics (see e.g. Edkins 2005). Furthermore, Fagan (2006) and Edkins (2005)

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<sup>12</sup> It is worth remembering at this point that Campbell presented two converging yet separable justification and that the one based in the logical ethical corollaries of deconstructive thought is not the one referred to here. Rather, what is discussed here is the view that there is a political objective that can be met through relying on deconstruction.

criticise Campbell for separating ethics and politics since this is incoherent with Derrida's thought on undecideability and the impossibility of ethics. In short, they read Derrida to indicate that politics, and thus responsibility, only can occur if the decision is made in a situation of aporia; i.e. where there is an experience of the impossibility of a decision. (see also Zehfuss 2002: 231) Hence, the ethics that Campbell devises is always already political, which he admits (2005), but it also removes responsibility since it predefines a content to politics and in this way removes the decision. This critique relies on a reading of Derrida that focuses on the decision whereas Campbell's reading sees the principle of affirming alterity as following logically from deconstructive thought. I will not attempt to adjudicate between the two, but it is enough for my purposes to note that asking the question of ethics seems to create a tension in Campbell's work when it comes to the separation between ethics and politics. This is also noted by Fagan who argues that the question is the reason for these tensions (2006: 28-30) and by Franke who argues that questions are ethical only if they are treated as answerable (2000: 326). It thus seems that the question of ethics in IR presupposes a separation between ethics and politics, which introduces, if asked, a tension in poststructuralist thought on ethics in IR.

A second problem is that the framing of the question seems to demand a final answer. Indeed, we saw that this was the ambition in the more conventional literature of normative IR, notwithstanding Chris Brown's contention that no such answer was readily available. It also seems to be the ambition of Campbell and Walker, although the latter does not endeavour to find this answer. This relates to the question of universalism since a final answer also is universally applicable. Indeed, the debate about ethics seems, as Walker noted, to presuppose a certain universality. We saw that this was true even for communitarian approaches and the answer to the question of ethics seems to be formulated as a universally valid principle regardless of its foundation. Importantly, Walker and Campbell are also looking for

universalism. Although this is a slightly different universalism, it is rather obvious in Campbell's writing that his principles are supposed to be universally valid and applicable – resistance against totalitarianism is always to be exercised. For Walker it is equally obvious that he is calling for universal principles that can replace the old ones. Jim George identifies this as a crucial question for postmodernists who engage with ethics in IR (1995: 211). I will not try to answer whether Campbell and Walker succeeds in their attempts of overcoming what is seen as a problematic universality and if theirs is in some way less problematic, but it seems that the question demands something that is difficult for them to deal with. In this way Walker seems to be correct in arguing that the ethics, as we know it, presuppose a certain universality. Moreover, the notion of universality is also problematic since it presupposes that the bases for the advocated principles are somehow extra-cultural or shared by all humans. This is the main problem that Franke (2000) targets, arguing that responsibility (in a Derridean sense) is thwarted if we retain this idea of the international. He thus disqualifies Campbell's attempt to formulate an ethics for still attempting to be globally acceptable and therefore presupposing a uniform humanity. In this way Campbell also risks "capitulating to the modernist premise that the different must always be resolved into the same" (Walker 1993: 78). His ethos is obviously contingent and situated in a particular context and it seems difficult to argue that it should with necessity extend to all others. Hence, even though the authors attempt a different and qualified universalism, such a notion seems to be integral to asking the question of ethics and to induce problems they have to deal with.

Thirdly, tensions occur from Campbell's attempts to motivate his principle of affirming alterity. This is also the main point of contact between his and Walker's work. They both make analyses of contemporary world politics that call for a new, more appropriate, ethics. This is reminiscent of the epistemological adjudication between norms, or what Jim George describes as deriving ought from is (1995: 202). The strategy was common in the

cosmopolitan-communitarian debate and is something that both Walker and Campbell are critical of. It seems that such an anchorage<sup>13</sup> of the norms they rely on is a necessary corollary of the question they ask (see Cochran 1999). For Walker this anchorage lies in the claim that temporal accelerations distinguishes contemporary conditions from previous and for Campbell in the analysis that the conventional conceptions are the reason behind the failure of the Western response to Bosnia and similar crises. Walker and Campbell thus make assertions about a reality that is supposed to demand a particular ethics and disqualify other approaches.

This is problematic since it relies on the assumption that principles can match the world in a more or less accurate manner, and that we can actually adjudicate between contending principles. This is a very dubious contention especially in light of Walker and Campbell's view on the historical constitution of reality. Furthermore, it resembles what Maja Zehfuss (2002) in a critical discussion refers to as the "politics of reality". Zehfuss argues, through a reading of Derrida, that politics can only occur if we accept that all representations of reality are already political. Hence, it seems to be a tension in Campbell's work since his heavy reliance on Derrida is difficult to combine with his assertion that the situation in Bosnia demands a particular ethics. Hence, Campbell's critique of how onto-political assumptions have influenced mainstream interpretations of Bosnia (1998a: chapter 3) is difficult to reconcile with what seems to be an underlying assumption that his interpretation in some way manages to elude this difficulty. It is important to note, however, that Campbell qualifies his argument by arguing that it is not to be seen as the correct interpretation, rather he wants to problematise the conventional interpretation (e.g. 1999a). Nevertheless, his reliance on that

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<sup>13</sup> This is Molly Cochran's (1999) notion that she sees as necessary for talking about ethics and is briefly put a weaker form of foundation and a way of trying to avoid the search for firm foundations that, inter alia, poststructuralists are highly critical of.

analysis is central to his justification of the ethics that makes possible responding to Bosnia. The same problem also occurs in Walker's work; his reliance on temporal accelerations is difficult to reconcile with his view that our conceptions of the world are historically contingent. Therefore, the framing of the question of ethics in IR seems to presuppose an answer that can be justified not only through recourse to philosophy but also by reference to some aspect of reality. In brief, motivations that refer to some given reality are difficult to combine with poststructuralist sensitivities for the impossibility of accessing this reality in an unmediated form (George 1995: 208).

Finally, it seems that the very argumentative strategy that is used by Campbell leads to tensions since it presupposes that the reader is a knowing subject. Indeed, the argument seems to take part in constituting us as autonomous choosers who in, strikingly well defined, moments of decision can consult ethical principles that guide our choices. That is the case both in the literature of normative IR and in the work of Campbell since both tries to provide such rules of thumb. The whole idea of motivating the principle of affirming alterity by how it stems from a poststructuralist subjectivity seems contradictory since this subjectivity would imply that responding to the other no longer is a choice (Campbell 1999b: 463). Hence, there should be no need for motivations. It is true, however, that Campbell argues that the aim should be to work out "how response-ability can be fostered and exercised" (1998a: 12), but it still seems that he tries to provide the subject with part of the content of their informed choices and thus takes part in constituting the modern subject. The problem is less straightforward than the three above, and it might be part of a general difficulty of trying to formulate a poststructuralist position in modernist terms. We can also ask ourselves whether it is possible to argue differently and it is important to note that neither Walker nor Campbell claims that poststructuralism is anything else than closely attached to modernity. Nevertheless, this problematic poses the question whether it is possible to retain a



conventional form of argument without presupposing that the subject in some way stands independent and autonomous.

To conclude, the condition of possibility of these tensions seems to reside in the division between ethics and politics. This provides for the necessity and possibility of the other problems. Hence, the framing of the question seems to make for these tensions. Furthermore, all tensions seem connected to how the question of ethics is framed in modernist terms. This is perhaps less obvious when it comes to the discussion on universalism and Walker seems to argue that the question of competing claims to universalism and particularism is a question that we always have grappled with (Walker 1993, see also Hansen 1997). But Campbell and Walker still had to address the modern conception of universality since it was connoted with the question. It is of course important to remember that neither writer claims that poststructuralism offers a clean break with modernity, and this critique might therefore not be entirely warranted. However, if we refrain from seeing it as a criticism, it makes obvious how the question of ethics in IR is framed in modern categories and if it, as Walker argues, is necessary to be suspicious of these categories in order to speak about ethics (1993: 52), our suspicion should include the question as well.

## **The Question as Limit**

It seems that the question of ethics in IR creates problems for Walker and Campbell and in some respects even make them argue in ways that lead to tensions in their work. Asking this question is thus not as unproblematic as it would seem. Walker's contention that "the very possibility of something called ethics as we have come to understand it may well require fundamental reconsideration" is relevant here (1993: 79). But neither Walker nor Campbell attempts to go beyond the question of ethics, even though it must be said to rely on a conventional conception of ethics. The question thus functions as a limit for the critical thought both writers try to effectuate.

But what is it in the question that limits our thought? As we saw above, the question of ethics in IR is framed in modernist categories and trying to answer it therefore presupposes that these categories are, at least partly, heeded. There are several plausible reasons for this: On the one hand, questions might be tightly connected to the assumptions or theories that have functioned as a background when asking them. Indeed, different assumptions and theories make for different questions. In this way it would not make sense for a writer in a poststructuralist vein to ask realist questions. The underlying assumptions of the realist questions are not compatible with poststructuralism and hence the question does not make sense. (e.g. Zalewski 1996) It remains unclear why the question of ethics in IR should be any different. Indeed, in many ways Walker's critique can, as we saw in chapter 1, be read as undermining the possibility of the question of ethics. For instance, the question presupposes that ethics is a realm separable from politics; otherwise there would be no question of ethics, only questions of politics. Yet, Campbell's work – which is in line with the trajectory set out by Walker – takes this question at face value.

On the other hand, there are conventions to how the question should be answered. In a first instance, different questions call for different theoretical tools. Hidemi Suganami (1996) has shown how different questions about war demand answers that rely on specific theoretical assumptions. If this is not met, the answer lacks coherence. Again it remains unclear why this should not be applicable to the question of ethics. In a second instance, when asking a question, we also communicate with the literature that formulates the conventional answers. For Campbell and Walker this amounts to communicating with the literature of normative IR even though both reject the assumptions of this literature. In other words, Campbell, in particular, has to convince normative IR theorists of the plausibility in his approach. It is likely that this calls for particular justificatory strategies. Furthermore, the question can also be thought to summon up a particular form, or kind, of answer. In an argument that can be

related to this, Hayden White (e.g. 1987) has claimed that there is a content to the form of historical accounts; i.e. that the form of the argument influences its very content. As different kinds of historical accounts also seems to come with different questions, White's argument can be taken to imply that the form of the answer the question calls for also has a particular content to it. Hence, by asking the question of ethics we already commit to a particular form of answer and, crucially, to a certain content to this answer. Using a particular literature and its question of preference as a stepping-stone is problematic since in doing so we also buy into the conventions regarding the kinds of answers that are considered acceptable or potentially convincing. In this way, what seems to be logical in terms of an answer might actually work as a limit. With regard to the question of ethics, the content seems difficult to reconcile with poststructuralist thought and to create tensions in the work of Campbell and Walker. This is particularly obvious when it comes to the justificatory strategies that are used and how the form of the argument partakes in the constitution of the modern subject.

In this way, asking the question of ethics – as framed in IR – limits the possibilities for critical thought. In order to answer the question that Campbell asks, and Walker alludes to, it seems that particular moves have to be made. Moves that are not necessarily consistent with the assumptions of these writers and seem to contradict the critique of normative IR that provides the starting point for their work. By asking the question of ethics we have already – or so it seems – committed to some of the categories that Walker and Campbell want to remain sceptical of. Hence, we might say that the question forms a limit for the critique that both writers are intent on making. Their arguments, and notably Campbell's, therefore partly fail in their ambition to formulate a critical argument about ethics in IR since they ask a question which is inappropriate for this task.

Importantly, failing to question the question is not only problematic as a limit for our thought; it also risks reifying the terms of the debate. On the one hand, by doing this they

make Walker's critical question seem 'only critical' and somewhat insufficient since it lacks constructive aspects. On the other hand, in contemporary IR theory, poststructuralism is generally seen as the farthest possible from the mainstream. Considering the discipline's predilection for binary divisions, there is a risk that Campbell's ethos and normative IR come to form the end points of yet another dichotomy. This might be broader than the cosmopolitan-communitarian exchange, but still prevents us from questioning the question. Hence, the debate is normalised once again and that which lies beyond becomes nonsensical, illogical and unnecessary. Most would agree, of course, that poststructuralism is far from being that accepted, and it could also be argued that such a situation still would be better than the one we are in today. These objections notwithstanding, I find it dangerous to accept the situation – also from a poststructuralist vantage point – since it would limit the debate in ways described above. Indeed, it would be to give legitimacy to the question of ethics as conventionally framed and thus limit the possibilities of critical thought.

In sum then, there are reasons to believe that the answer might not be all that easy to separate from the question of ethics and that the question calls for a particular form of answer. Campbell and Walker share the highly commendable aim of trying to make the world a better place to live through better politics. However, this aim makes them ask a question that calls for a type of answer which contradicts their basic assumptions. It seems, and this might not be all that surprising, that keeping the question but giving a radically different answer does not work particularly well. This is supported both in the theoretical discussion in this section, and in tensions that were highlighted in the work of Walker and, more obviously, Campbell. Therefore, it might not only be difficult to speak about ethics in IR under contemporary conditions, as Walker argues, it might even be difficult to speak about ethics at all.

## Conclusion

In this dissertation I have critically engaged the work of R.B.J. Walker and David Campbell. This was done by asking the question *What does Walker's and Campbell's respective contributions to poststructuralist thought on ethics in IR tell us about the question of ethics in terms of its framing, the answers it calls for and the link between the two?* My answer was then formulated in three steps: Firstly, I delineated Walker's critique of normative IR. This was done with focus on how his critique could be read to undermine the framing of, and answers to, the question of ethics in normative IR. Secondly, I saw Campbell's work on an ethos of deconstruction as a continuation of Walker's critique and discussed how Campbell treats the question of ethics. Campbell's work showed us how we could avoid the influence of the principle of state sovereignty that Walker targets in his critique. However, Campbell asks the same question of ethics as the literature of normative IR and his work also seemed to be open for some of Walker's critique. The third chapter then addressed the link between the question of ethics and the problems we saw in normative IR and Campbell's work. There I argued that it might not be possible to answer the question of ethics without subscribing to some of the assumptions that Walker was critical of, and that the question thus becomes a limit for critical thought on ethics in IR.

This leads me to a dual conclusion. A cautious conclusion would claim that it is very difficult for poststructuralists to address the question of ethics as framed in IR. Doing this namely seems to induce tensions in the argument. Indeed, poststructuralist concern for the political, decentering the subject and historical constituted reality seems difficult to combine with asking the question of ethics. The task for poststructuralists thus seems to be to explore different questions about ethics in IR – as Walker does when discussing how IR is already ethically situated.

If we, on the other hand, accept the assumptions of poststructuralism and the positioning of this line of thought within modernity, a more extensive conclusion can be reached. Indeed, then my investigation would indicate that the difficulty is not so much one of asking the question of ethics in the contemporary world within modern categories; rather, it might be very difficult to ask the question of ethics at all. Hence, the question of ethics as framed in normative IR, and in Walker and Campbell's work, would appear to constitute a limit to what can be thought and said about ethics in IR. Talking about ethics in any other way would not make sense, implying that such deliberations fall outside of this limit. By continuing to ask this question Walker and Campbell helps constitute the debate of ethics in IR in a manner that they start out by criticising and the ethos of political criticism that Campbell advocates thus becomes a convenient position against which the attempts of accommodation in the cosmopolitan-communitarian dichotomy can be formulated. In this way Walker and Campbell actually partake in circumscribing the debate and disqualifying for instance Walker's critique of normative IR from what is thought to be relevant to ethics in IR.

But, then, what does this mean? Is this the end of talking about ethics? Mark Franke formulates this dilemma in two questions that are generated by critical thought on ethics in IR: "first, is it really possible to make such a break with ethics? And, second, is it not the case that breaking the ethics would also force the possibility of responsible conduct from one's grasp as well?" (Franke 2000: 325) Like Franke, I believe that questions of ethical conduct will not disappear and indeed it is by debating ethics that ethics is constituted. However, I also believe – again like Franke – that this debate is better off without framing the question of ethics as answerable and applicable to everyone, everywhere. However, when it comes to the second question I am reluctant to make any suggestions. Franke would have it that responsibility might only occur if no rules for ethical conduct existed since then "a person can do nothing than respond at all points" (ibid: 327). This seems to be in line with some of

the readings of Derrida that we also encountered in the last chapter (Fagan 2006; Zehfuss 2002; 2005). I will refrain both from making any judgement on the reading of Derrida and from trying to solve the problem that is identified. However, I do believe that it is interesting to keep asking what this line of thought means for ethical conduct, albeit I doubt the possibility of finding an answer. I also wonder why this debate should be confined to scholarly debate.

All this notwithstanding, Walker and Campbell's work open up the debate about ethics in IR. This is a commendable contribution since it seems to me that the debate in normative IR, in spite of the good intentions of its participants, navigates a terrain where actions that should never be possible to justify simply are taken for granted. This, sadly, tends to result in predominantly pessimistic appraisals on what we can hope for in international ethics. Since debates about ethics draw up what is ethical in IR, Campbell's contribution might broaden the possibility for and scope of ethics in IR and I take such a concern to be what motivates both Walker and Campbell. However, I worry that they circumscribe the possibility and strength of their own critique when they move on to ask the question of ethics themselves.

Therefore, if this dissertation entails any recommendations for future research, it would be to direct our attention to how we can ask questions of ethics differently and what this might mean. Walker's critique is one such example. Other different question might include asking what it would mean to take the power over the ethical away from scholarly debate. It could also imply reinforcing the efforts to denaturalise the conventional conception of ethics in IR and to open up what is seen to be legitimate in the field of ethics in IR. Importantly, we need to be aware that such questions do not make our work less political.

Finally, a seemingly logical corollary of this investigation would be an attempt to move beyond my critique and solve the problems that I have identified. However, this would be contradictory to my conclusions. Indeed, doing so would also be limited by the framing of

the question. This does not mean that we should refrain from asking the question of ethics, but we need to be aware of how it limits our thought and doing so would therefore necessitate a more extensive treatment than is possible here. It thus remains established what it might mean to speak about ethics without asking the question of ethics.



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