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EDITED BY  
GUNTHER HELLMANN  
AND JENS STEFFEK



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# Practising Academic Intervention: An Agonistic Reading of *Praxis*

*Antje Wiener*

## Introduction

As the ink of the special issue on *The Status of Law in World Society: Meditations on the Role and Rule of Law* (Kratochwil, 2014) is barely dry (Peltonen and Traisbach, 2020), this chapter follows yet another invitation to engage with Friedrich Kratochwil's seminal work in International Relations (IR) and International Law in celebration of his most recent monograph titled *Praxis* (Kratochwil, 2018). In this chapter, I turn to Kratochwil's veritable gusto in performing academic interventions to explore the purpose and effect of his by now seminal practice of deeply engaging with the work of others by way of intertextual interaction. While some detect a certain 'grumpiness' (Welsh, 2020), this chapter argues that his academic interventions on IR theory and International Law, are of a notable game-changing quality. As the following will demonstrate, based on an agonistic reading of these interventions, this quality is characterized by two moves: firstly, a *normative* call for more critical engagement with the claims of other IR theorists, for 'values and committing to them have to be an intrinsic concern for social analysis that cannot be sacrificed on the altar of scientific objectivity as otherwise we lose, so to speak, the "object" we are supposed to study' (Kratochwil, 2020: 1); and secondly, the development of a *practice*-based approach to constructive critique through academic intervention. According to Kratochwil, this kind of practical engagement works best through *praxis*, which involves the practices of thoroughly scrutinizing and contesting the theoretical claims of others. This constructive critique in the social sciences is not value-free, to be



sure, for ‘it makes at least *prima facie* sense to be sceptical about the possibility of a value-free “scientific” approach to problems of *praxis* since values are constitutive for our interests, and following rules is linked to “commitments” and the validity of norms, not to causality’ (Kratochwil, 2020: 1, emphasis added).

This chapter argues that throughout his academic career Kratochwil’s own scholarly action has been developed to a fine point. In the process, his repertoire for academic intervention has been constituted by the writings of those IR theorists whose work he finds to be misleading their readers, thereby often distorting the potential of the discipline. It is this approach to critical engagement with other(s)’ texts that this chapter will highlight and explore as a distinct practice of academic intervention. To Kratochwil, practising social sciences must be precisely the opposite of complying with calls ‘to provide rather promptly the “solutions” to our problems’, and, as he stresses ‘anyone not delivering them, or even refusing to do so, becomes easily an incompetent and a party-pooper to boot, whose “negativity” might even justify yanking his licence to practice social science’ (Kratochwil, 2020: 8). By taking a closer look at Kratochwil’s academic interventions, I demonstrate the effects of this practice, illustrated by his most recent book. Developing the argument against the backdrop of Kratochwil’s career and drawing on excerpts from *Praxis*, this chapter presents ‘acting through *praxis*’ as a practice of academic intervention that is mindful of the dynamic of the ‘hermeneutic cycle between facts and norms’ (Kratochwil, 2020: 7) with a twofold effect. For it is both critical *and* facilitative. The chapter seeks to bring these constitutive and political effects of *praxis* to the fore. To demonstrate them the following undertakes an agonistic reading of Kratochwil’s *Praxis*. Following Mark Wenman, I understand ‘“agonism” to imply both the necessary interdependence of social relations and also the constitutive nature of strife’ (Wenman, 2003: 167, referring to Connolly, 1995, and Tully, 1995).

As per the editors’ invitation, I address *praxis* as an enabling foil that invites us to engage critically with Kratochwil’s lifelong academic interventions which carry the theme of ‘rules, norms and decisions’ in international relations (Kratochwil, 1989; for earlier contributions, see Kratochwil, 1984; Kratochwil and Ruggie, 1986). Given the beneficial effects that these interventions had for the development of this author’s thinking and academic progression, the following offers an appreciative reading of these academic interventions. The wider context of this reading is set by critical constructivist scholarship in the discipline of IR, while the more immediate context is set by the privileged ‘thinking space’ that was provided by the workshop that preceded this book manuscript. The latter was conceived as an opportunity to read and engage with Kratochwil’s contemplations of human action, through interactions, inviting the participants to critically

reflect upon their own motivation for undertaking academic research. This said, the following raises three guiding questions:

1. To what end and for what purpose do scholars engage in academic research (*motivation*)?
2. How do we identify our respective standpoint as researchers vis-à-vis the real world (*coming from somewhere*)?
3. Do academics acknowledge their privilege of accumulating knowledge and recognize the social responsibility to use it (*academic intervention*)?

The chapter addresses these questions in three further sections. The first section introduces the concept of academic intervention as a principled practice that is based on the positions of privilege and responsibility. The second section turns to the method of agonistic reading and the central importance that is assigned to ‘conflict’ according to this approach. The third section then undertakes an exemplary agonistic reading of Kratochwil’s *Praxis* in order to illustrate the approach and its impact for future research by new generations of IR scholarship.

### **Practising academic intervention from the positions of privilege and responsibility**

Broadly speaking, academic interventions comprise the bulk of academic output on a global scale and therefore do not represent a helpful categorical distinction as such. However, I suggest that an agonistic reading that defines academic intervention as a principled practice facilitates explorative research with a view to pinpointing the potential effects of these interventions. The effects may be political or normative. As will be detailed later, responsible academic intervention sets out to depict political inequality, moral injustice or material exclusion from partaking in processes of development and progress in the world. In practice, it aims to reflexively counter these conditions, for example by generating better theories and/or proposing measures to counter these real-world issues. The social sciences identify a range of such practices of principled academic interventions. Given the limited space of an edited volume, a few examples may suffice here. For example, the public policy literature speaks of ‘reciprocal elucidation’ (Tully, 2002). It highlights conditions of unequal access to contestation vis-à-vis the norms that govern them and suggests accounting for ‘multiplicity’ as a challenge to modern constitutionalism. Against this background, research seeks to identify novel conditions of ‘contemporary constitutionalism’ that allow for reconnecting and rewriting the interrelations between ‘civic activity’ and ‘civil orders’ in late modern political orders (Tully, 1995, 2002, 2008a, 2008b; Owen and Tully, 2007; Owen 2019a, 2019b).

In the light of the unequal conditions that set the reciprocal relation between *being* in the world, on the one hand, and *governing* society, on the other, principled academic intervention has been practised as ‘staging global multilogues’ (Wiener, 2018). This intervention identifies conflicts about norms and then zooms in on sites where affected stakeholders engage in contestation under unequal conditions. To constitute a space for visible public engagement, these stakeholder groups are then placed on a global stage where their discursive input in global normative change is made visible. This type of academic intervention is centred on local discursive interventions that are constrained by unequal access to contestation. To counter this lack of opportunity for political participation, it gives a voice to those who have a stake in a given global norm conflict (Wiener, 2018, especially chapter 8). In sum, a growing critical scholarship has foregrounded the necessity and purpose of academic intervention with the public philosophy in a new key project (Tully, 2008a, 2008b; as well as Laden and Owen, 2007; Karmis et al, forthcoming), the Global IR project (Acharya, 2014, 2016, 2018; Hurrell, 2016; Tickner, 2016; Acharya and Buzan, 2019), the post-critical IR project that invites IR scholars to address the consequences of critical approaches to IR more specifically, asking us to engage in ‘explicit discussions of how we might make (critical) impact in and on the world’ (Austin, 2018: 1); or the grounded normative theory (GNT) project that brings political theorists, IR theorists and feminist theory together in order to ‘theorise with those who struggle’ (Ackerly et al, 2021). Last and by no means least, another example is offered by the growing literature of feminist and post-colonial work that calls for rereading societal constellations with reference to the condition of intersectionality and offers novel perspectives with a view to rewrite the emergence of international order(s) on a global scale (Spivak, 1988; Chakrabarty, 2008; Wilkens, 2017).

More specifically, Kratochwil’s academic interventions highlight the two dimensions. This involves, firstly, generating knowledge through critical interventions with the text of others and thereby recovering lost ‘thinking space’ and putting these on the academic map. Secondly, and relatedly, this remapping has played a facilitative role over the years, for it has allowed generations of younger, less prominent scholars a legitimate ‘space’ from where they, in turn, were able to engage in knowledge generation themselves. That is, on the one hand, and most visibly, his academic interventions consistently advanced knowledge in the social sciences – bringing hidden gems to the fore, as it were. And by keeping his ‘voice’ up, both literally and with a continuous presence in print with the top journals of the discipline, on the other hand, Kratochwil has succeeded in maintaining the presence and accessibility of that very thinking space, thereby enabling and encouraging critical thinking for subsequent generations of IR scholars.

The two effects are interrelated steps in the process of joint knowledge generation, to be sure. To the general IR scholarship, the former effect will be more obvious, while to those of us who were fellow spatio-temporal travellers, the latter facilitative effect has often turned out to be the crucial – even career-making or career-turning – intervention. After all, up to the 2000s, IR was a discipline that moved forward by means of paradigm battles that did not care for making prisoners (Farrell, 2002). Kratochwil recalls

tedious epistemological debates over the last three decades when logical positivism was bolted together with empiricism, grafted upon Kuhnian notions of paradigms, was modified by Lakatosian ‘generative problem shifts’ and pepped up by some notions of ‘instrumentalism’ *a la* Milton Friedman, in order to realise that such constructions are neither able to provide an accurate account of scientific ‘progress’ nor define usable demarcation criteria for distinguishing ‘science’ from other activities. (Kratochwil, 2007: 25–6)

Against the background of the dominant narrative which pitched the discipline as an ‘American social science’ (Hoffmann, 1977; cf Zürn, 1994; Wæver, 1998: 687; Acharya, 2014), Kratochwil’s manifold academic interventions were decisive for creating the ‘thinking space’ and ‘reference frame’ that allowed for innovative and critical thinking and enabled critical IR scholarship to thrive.

Against the often overbearing institutional and substantive constraints that were set by the ‘American’ narrative – nurtured by recurring paradigm battles and the long-uncontested steadfast belief in a ‘Westphalian’ international order, this thinking space enabled innovative research on change that raised questions about the mainstream’s state-centric assumptions (Wæver, 1996; Zalewski, 1996; Tickner, 2001; Ackerly and True, 2008). To Kratochwil and many other critics it was obvious that ‘the “debates” turn out to be largely *ex post facto* constructions provided by the historical narrative rather than by the events themselves’ (Kratochwil, 2007: 26–7). Over the decades, Kratochwil has chosen his critical interventions carefully. He engaged in questioning the fundamental research assumptions and theoretical claims advanced by (neo-)realist colleagues and held their authors to account. In the process, doors into academia were opened for generations of younger scholars who, especially in the 1980s and 1990s, had to be constantly mindful of the powerful hegemony of the positivist language of the so-called mainstream in US-based IR theory. In Kratochwil’s own scathingly clear words, in the 2000s,

the vast majority of students are still being ‘trained’ (not to say indoctrinated) in ‘the scientific method’ no matter what area or problem



they want to investigate. Apparently, as in the case of the Midas muffler, ‘one size fits all’. Why? Because we (the authors) say so! Similarly, the power structure within the profession and reflected in the ‘top departments’ has remained predictably stable. (Kratochwil, 2007: 27)

To bring the effects to the fore, the following sections recall Kratochwil’s academic interventions along the two core dimensions of his work. The first consists in the project of studying human action and its effect on the transformation of norms, rules and orders through redrawing the disciplinary boundaries of international studies. And the second consists in opening and expanding access to thinking space that enabled subsequent generations to engage in critical questions about international studies and advance knowledge building on these interdisciplinary strands of theoretical engagement. To that end, academic intervention is defined as ‘making use of knowledge in a responsible and purposeful way’. Having access to this knowledge and knowing how to use it effectively places academics in a position of privilege, and this privilege comes with the duty of using that knowledge responsibly. The concept of academic intervention therefore implies taking account of the tools available to us as researchers who engage in ‘acting and knowing’ (Friedrichs and Kratochwil, 2009; Kratochwil, 2018; for responsible intervention compare also ‘diplomatic intervention’, Fierke, 2007; and more generally, the debates about the responsibility to protect, Ulbert et al, 2017; Hansen-Magnusson and Vetterlein, 2021).

Following public philosophy, in principle, academic interventions are identified according to two types of action that are distinguished by an individual’s *access* to knowledge, which enables scholars to act in a dual role, namely, as learned scholars and political activists. These access conditions are set by the socio-cultural grounding of that action (acting from somewhere). As ‘learned citizens’, academics are able to use and generate knowledge about the rules and norms that are constitutive of civil order while at the same time enjoying the freedom to act as ‘struggling citizens’ who engage in civic activities in order to change that order (Laden and Owen, 2007; Tully, 2008a; Owen, 2019a). While, in principle, both categories of citizens are related through their position as potential contestants in the same conflict, their respective positions remain to be activated based on a strategic decision to ‘enter into the dialogue with citizens engaged in struggles against various forms of injustice and oppression’ (Tully, 2008a: 3).

According to James Tully, one way of activating the relation between these distinct positions involves establishing ‘pedagogical relationships of *reciprocal elucidation* between academic research and the civic activities of fellow citizens’ (Tully, 2008a: 3, emphasis added; Tully, 2002). In *Praxis*, the chapter on ‘Acting’ (Kratochwil, 2018: chapter 10) makes a similar

point when referring to ‘the “vocation” of pragmatism, which “demands that we recognize our scholarship as political tools ... [which] are integral to the constitution of the global public”’ (Kratochwil, 2018: 426; citing Abraham and Abramson, 2017: 19) That is, as scholars we are not only in the position to obtain and develop knowledge, but we are also enabled to apply that knowledge in our respective academic interventions. Performed in public, and notwithstanding qualitatively distinct types of intervention (e.g. theoretical or activist), academic intervention is therefore always *per se* political.<sup>1</sup> In addition to the socio-cultural ground of academic intervention, scholars choose their epistemological standpoint, whether foregrounding it or not (Jackson, 2008). It follows that academic interventions are value-based, they carry socio-cultural capabilities, and they are political.

At the hands of *the few*, academic intervention is therefore conceived as a potentially powerful tool that has a constitutive effect *on the many*, for ‘all theories are “for” someone and naturalising the social world mystifies power through an hegemonic discourse’ (Kratochwil, 2007: 25). Academic intervention therefore has a political effect and works beyond academia, influencing societal change, cultural narratives and strategic framing about how to see the world in the making (Onuf, 1989). Whether acting in public or in a more exclusive intertextual space, therefore, practising scholarship is about ‘change’. Notably, academic intervention always reflects a position of privilege and responsibility. This includes both types of academic practice, that is, critical discursive intervention, for example, when engaging with other ‘learned citizens’ or their work; and direct discursive intervention, for example, when acting in support of ‘struggling citizens’. Assessing the effect of academic intervention means taking account of the position of *privilege* which is enabled by scholarly access to knowledge. The position of privilege is constituted by norms as social facts. It involves distinct *societal conditions* that are enabled or constrained by *access* to education in the widest possible sense, including facilitative and enabling conditions of learning and practising scholarship. In turn, the position of *responsibility* reflects the scholar’s awareness of the potentially powerful effects that are generated by using their privileged knowledge.

The position of responsibility is constituted by ethical values, such as, for example, acknowledging the power of knowledge with regard to constituting public goods such as norms, institutions or order. It follows

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<sup>1</sup> Note that this reference to the public follows an agonistic definition which centres on the practice of contestation and the fundamental contestedness of norms (as opposed to the Habermasian definition of the ‘public sphere’ that sets the legitimate boundaries for discursive intervention). The next section will discuss this distinction in more detail.

that taking account of the political power of scholarship therefore involves the principled normative task of dedicating appropriate attention to the step of foregrounding the researcher's moral standpoint and purpose prior to an academic intervention (Haverland and Yanow, 2012). This task echoes, to a certain extent, Max Weber's emphasis on context and ethical principles which were developed in *Politics as Vocation* (Weber, 1919). As Weber notes, the context of a project matters<sup>2</sup> as much as an agent's awareness of two kinds of ethics as the key moral principles.<sup>3</sup> Famously, Weber centres on two kinds of ethics, i.e., the 'ethics of responsibility' and the 'ethics of conviction'. Notably, the 'ethics of responsibility pays attention only to the actual consequences of what is done' (Owen and Strong, 2004: xli). This implies that an ethics of conviction that is *not* sustained by an ethics of responsibility represents an insufficient condition for practising politics as vocation. Weber's perception of the two ethics thus highlights a politician's responsibility regarding the potential effects of her or his decisions, for as he stresses, 'it does no good in politics to say you did not intend the (unfortunate) consequences of your action' (Owen and Strong, 2004: xli).

Weber's insistence on the relational effect of these two principles offers an important cue with regard to this chapter's argument for foregrounding the epistemological standpoint and intention prior to engaging in the practice of academic intervention. It acknowledges the use of scholarship as a powerful tool towards societal change. As critical IR scholars have pointed out, putting the principle into practice can be achieved by way of 'foregrounding epistemological assumptions' and 'logics of enquiry' (Jackson, 2008; Haverland and Yanow, 2012). That is, all academic interventions are by definition public interactions by those holding an academic position, regardless of whether these are practised in the very space of academic institutions or in other thinking spaces. Against this backdrop, it is remarkable that the political effect of these interventions has so far rarely been made explicit (Abraham and Abramson, 2017). Addressing this gap involves foregrounding the epistemological standpoint and, relatedly, the

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<sup>2</sup> As Weber notes, given his profession as a political economist, his research customarily begins with the external conditions of the research object. For the lecture on *Science as Vocation*, these are set by the respective academic contexts. In turn, for the lecture on *Politics as Vocation*, this context is set by the state. See Weber's *Science as Vocation* lecture on 7 November 1917 (page 1, translated print edition, Owen and Strong, 2004), as well as his *Politics as Vocation* lecture where he argues that 'the modern state is an institutional form of rule that has successfully fought to create a monopoly of the legitimate physical force as a means of government within a particular territory' (Weber, 1919: 38).

<sup>3</sup> The responsibility that mattered for politics (and politicians), he argued, came in two types: '(O)ne he calls the "ethic of responsibility," the other the "ethic of conviction"' (Owen and Strong, 2004: xli).

methodological approach and method vis-à-vis other scholars and/or those who are in struggle.<sup>4</sup> To fill the research gap, therefore, this chapter identifies the two positions from which academic interventions are practised and illustrates their effect with reference to Kratochwil's *Praxis*.

## An agonistic reading of *Praxis*

Before analysing Kratochwil's academic interventions based on an agonistic reading of *Praxis*, this section turns to that method in some more detail. As Royer notes,

agonists agree on three fundamental points: First, agonists do not only stress the ineradicability of conflict (although they do so, of course) but insist on the ethical and political value of certain forms of struggle, competition and conflict; secondly, agonism is based on the fundamental value of human plurality as a constitutive element of social and political life; and thirdly, agonists share a tragic vision of political life. By stressing these three fundamental elements, agonists have developed distinctive insights into the nature, the role and the purpose of politics and, indeed, a constitutional order. (Royer, 2019: 6–7; citing Wenman, 2013: 28–58)

To simplify somewhat, if an agonistic approach rests on the assumption that 'conflict is a form of justice' (Havercroft, 2017: 101), and the assumption about the conflict–justice relation builds on the expectation that, as moments of contestation, conflictive discursive encounters help reveal 'difference' in opinion or point of view, then an agonistic reading of the work of others leads straight into the 'messy midst' of doing theory. Given the underlying assumption that conflict entails the dynamic potential for enhancing justice in global society, the objective consists in identifying conflictive engagements and exploring the normative conditions and constructive potentials for change towards enhancing 'justice' (in this context read as putting the record straight). In this regard, political agonism 'offers a particular interpretation and understanding of the nature, the role and the purpose of politics. As a critique of more "conventional" political theories, it challenges consensus-oriented and rationalistic versions of liberal and democratic thought from a radically democratic perspective' (Royer, 2019: 6).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Compare here also the methodology of 'grounded normative theory' that intends to 'theorise with those who are in struggle' (Ackerly et al, 2021).

<sup>5</sup> Royer is here drawing on Conolly, Tully, Honig, Mouffe and Wenman respectively.



An agonistic reading of Kratochwil's academic interventions reveals his notable disdain for scholars who shy away from 'messy details' (Kratochwil, 2018: 15). This applies especially to those self-proclaimed IR theorists who claim to advance ever more parsimonious theories or methodological approaches (or both) with every other paper they produce. Instead, he contends, the more veritable goal of doing theory does not consist in providing a better 'picture of the whole' based on a more compelling new theory or, low and behold, yet another novel methodological approach (Kratochwil, 2018: 15), but in engaging with the messy details instead. This regularly leads him to a starting point in the 'midst' in order to provide 'systemic reflection on the observations of various disciplines' (Kratochwil, 2018: 18; Kurowska, 2020). The meta-theoretical stance for that endeavour is that of 'thick' constructivism and its 'ontological assumptions concerning human action – or *praxis* to use the classical concept' (Kratochwil, 2018: 18–19). He likens his preferred 'mode of presentation' as coming 'closer to a painting in which the picture includes also elements which are not directly part of the central "theme"' (Kratochwil, 2018: 5).

The approach which often matches Tully's concern with digging out the cultural practices swept underneath the 'blanket of modernity' in order to recognize diversity (Tully, 1995) comes to the fore in Kratochwil's interventions in *Praxis*. As he notes,

[n]ot surprisingly, calls for supplying a new 'picture of the whole' can be heard everywhere. There are the visions of a cosmopolitan order based on the reform of existing institutions, which have captured the imagination of some international bureaucrats, academics, and 'mission junkies' (public or private). Networks and global civil society also invent new projects for the political agenda. Finally, there are the attempts to capture our present predicament by means of the familiar grand narrative of realism concerning the 'rise and decline' of states, nations, civilizations, or whatever.

I do not want to engage here these different speculations, which ... often rely more on seductive but highly problematic metaphors of a telos promising emancipation and redemption, rather than on actual analysis. Instead, I want to call attention to another flaw in those interpretations, which is even more striking. Virtually all the 'visions' take for granted that the Western conceptual baggage is appropriate for providing orientation, even though it clearly prevents us from even seeing, or 'naming,' some of the fundamental ruptures or transformations that are occurring in front of our eyes. (Kratochwil, 2018: 15)

The remainder of this section turns to Kratochwil's engagements with other IR colleagues' theoretical writings.

Responsible academic intervention begins by detailing the research objective and identifying the purpose of this intervention, for example, as a means to counter injustice, inequality or ‘ignorance’ (Kratochwil, 2018). With *Praxis*, Kratochwil offers a prime example of how to operate in acknowledgement of the two principled positions. His central point about ‘acting and knowing’ (Kratochwil, 2018) represents an exemplary contribution to addressing ‘academic intervention’ as a critical long-term project insofar as it aims to bring knowledge to bear in order to counter ignorance, especially about the Western narrative which has dominated IR in the 20th century. Zooming in on Kratochwil’s academic interventions facilitates a detailed understanding of how each of the practices addressed by *Praxis* (that is, constituting, changing, showing, guiding, sanctioning, punishing, remembering and forgetting, knowing and doubting, acting, as well as judging and communicating) offers a distinct focus on academic intervention by doing critical theory (Kratochwil, 2018: chapters 2–11). As observers and commentators have frequently noted, Kratochwil’s academic interventions are marked by poignant intertextual interaction with (at times self-declared) IR theorists (Welsh, 2020).

Notably, these interventions also reveal that Kratochwil is not out to make an argument for more or better theory. Instead, *Praxis* represents a book-length treatise engaging with ‘international studies’ in order to identify ‘transformative changes’ in the larger context of world society. Kratochwil is less concerned with IR as a discipline. Instead, his interdisciplinary endeavour decidedly ignores the constraints posed by the often quite narrow, paradigmatically defined disciplinary boundaries of IR theory. Instead, Kratochwil argues, IR scholarship would benefit from a wider perspective on a larger scale. This involves ‘redrawing the boundaries of the established disciplines’, including comparative politics, international law, economics and political theory (Kratochwil, 2018: 7). As Kratochwil summarizes, for example,

although our hopes in a comprehensive ‘theory’ of international relations have been disappointed, perhaps interdisciplinary research is able to provide a new map that would enable us to orient ourselves more successfully in this turbulent world. Thus we could perhaps be true to our conviction that all true knowledge has to be theoretical, while letting go – for the moment – of the idea of a general theory of international relations. (Kratochwil, 2018: 17)

In detail, with these intertextual academic interventions Kratochwil engages in the purposeful task of holding his realist learned colleagues to account. This is exemplified by addressing the effect of the textual academic interventions of others and thereby pointing out the lamentable consequences

of ‘writing’ as ‘doing’. For example, in *Praxis*, each chapter begins with an elaboration of how and on what grounds Kratochwil aims to engage with his learned sparring partners. He then proceeds with holding them to account against their own claims.

Through his very academic intervention, he then continues to frame his exploration into different dimensions of international studies. As an example of this practice, compare Kratochwil’s presentation of a learned colleague’s erroneous reference to Hume in ‘Knowing and Doubting’ (Kratochwil, 2018: chapter 9). Here, the colleague’s claim is presented against the background of common standards of academic intervention that are quite widely shared in the epistemic community that is constituted by a certain type of IR scholarship. Kratochwil begins his intervention by reminding his readers that

debates in IR frequently exhibit a certain artificiality. Precisely because they often lack the necessary philosophical background, IR scholars often use the writings of one of the founders of a school in their field as a ‘proxy measure,’ or they select one philosopher as their more or less unquestioned authority, so that his insights can now be ‘applied’ to the discipline. What then takes up most of the discussion is who in the discipline said what, and placing the different participants in the ever more finely subdivided spaces of a quadrant (actually drawn out in a table or implied). (Kratochwil, 2018: 350)

With this context established, in the subsequent paragraph he then offers an example of this kind of strategic presentation that he clearly views as manipulative framing. To do so, he summarizes the learned colleague’s claim that is made ‘in a recent book, which wants to “reclaim causal analysis” in IR’ and whose author, in order to do that, ‘identifies the “Humean syndrome” in a variety of writers in IR and claims that the dangers of this Humeanism can only be mastered if we return to a “causal ontology” and allow for “more holistic” (or more varied) explanatory accounts’ (Kratochwil, 2018: 351).

Against this background, he then critically highlights some shortfalls, noting that

since apparently rational choicers, as well as reflexivists of various stripes, have symptoms of this disease, only ‘scientific realists’ seem reliable as they have acquired the necessary immunity. The latter are basing their arguments largely on Roy Bhaskar’s ‘realist’ philosophy of science – nobly suppressing the fact that their guru had left their camp long before his untimely death. Kurki’s analysis then sits uneasily with her own analysis of Aristotle and the latter’s notion of a variety of ‘causes’. (Kratochwil, 2018: 351)

Following from this account of a learned colleague's claims, Kratochwil identifies the other's misleading effect on their readers, for which in the following his own academic intervention will hold the other to account: '[I]n constructing as a sparring partner a Humean "theory" that never was – picking and choosing bits and pieces from Hume's writings – distortion is rampant and develops its own dynamic, instead of providing a fuller and "more holistic account" of knowledge and human action' (Kratochwil, 2018: 351). Picking up from the intervention, Kratochwil then turns to laying out the parameters that will guide his own academic intervention in reply:

I shall here use Hume as my guide in advocating a fuller (causal) account for the analysis of praxis without giving the material or efficient cause the pride of place. For this I use Humean texts as my basis, instead of relying on a specific interpretation of a follower (or critic). I do this because I believe that Hume provides the only well-articulated approach to the study of the social world and its historical character that does not fall victim to most of the errors which the ontological tradition brings along in its conceptual baggage. (Kratochwil, 2018: 352)

And so it goes.

## Conclusion

As the illustrative agonistic reading in the previous section shows, Kratochwil's academic interventions are undertaken with an almost palpable urge – and often with gusto. The analysis follows Kratochwil's own sensitizing reading of the field to locate specific conflictive claims. Once these conflicts are located, he then zooms in on these thinking spaces to contest them by taking a different, usually philosophically more sophisticated, vantage point. And, finally, he zooms out beyond disciplinary boundaries to present novel questions to the social sciences, thereby effectively re-contextualizing specific issue- or problem-based research questions from the disciplinary context in IR to the more general scale of the social sciences.<sup>6</sup> Zooming in on Kratochwil's numerous academic interventions and probing them against Robert Cox's seminal claim that theory is 'always for someone and for some purpose' (Cox, 1981: 128) demonstrates the important contribution of principled academic interventions. They make a powerful point about the very purpose of academic research, namely, to advance enlightenment by 'putting the

<sup>6</sup> For the sequence of these methodological steps, compare Blumer (1954), Bueger (2014), Bueger and Gadinger (2015), Hofius (2016) and Wiener (2018).



record straight'. As Kratochwil has pointed out tirelessly, this does not translate into presenting 'facts' and 'simple solutions'. Instead, it requires thinking through and making sense as a dynamic process that involves reconnecting past trajectories with present questions. This project, then, developed from a clearly defined, principled starting point which led him to engage with what is 'underneath' the surface, recalling trajectories of thought, recovering philosophical thought and marking new thinking spaces. The effect of these interventions leads beyond this point, of course. For through his work, Kratochwil has progressively advanced novel ways of doing IR theory through contesting the claims of others.

This concluding paragraph returns to the three guiding questions raised in the introduction against the backdrop of Kratochwil's scholarship, especially his most recent book on praxis:

1. To what end and for what purpose do scholars engage in academic research (*motivation*)?

As noted in the introductory sections, to those who acknowledge the position of privilege and responsibility, the motivation for academic intervention includes a number of aims such as countering injustice or inequality. To Kratochwil this aim is mediated through engagement with the text of others in order to hold them to account, and then to move on from there by accounting for a world that is less universal, lean and value-free and more driven by the constructive force of the messy multiplicity that emerges and that is ultimately constitutive for offering novel options.

2. How do we identify our respective standpoint as researchers vis-à-vis the real world (*coming from somewhere*)?

As Kratochwil highlights in his 'observation' about the state of the art of critical theory after 25 years in IR, 'critical theory has always pointed out that the "view from nowhere" is impossible' (Kratochwil, 2007: 25). So where then do we go to begin from 'somewhere'? Kratochwil warns against the temptation to construct a 'tradition', as it is likely to become a lead story that carries undeclared conceptions, terms and categories, the origins of which are most likely lost in translation. Instead, he advocates an approach that engages right from 'the midst', beginning with observation. And, given the 'multiplicity' underlying both perceptions of the real world and constructions of theories, inevitably, research then must begin from observing observations. According to *Praxis*, the observations ought to begin from observing praxis as emerging from the middle and laying out the effects with regard to rethinking theories and understanding change in the wider world.

3. Do academics acknowledge their privilege of accumulating knowledge and recognize the social responsibility to use it (*academic intervention*)?

Engaging with this ethical question about the purpose and effect of theorizing, as a practice of academic intervention, is of central concern to Kratochwil. It is expressed most clearly in his dismantling of academic power games and the related structures that are reconstituted by the crude one-upmanship of battles over epistemological preferences. This final quote may summarize the point:

Andrew Moravcsik, articulating the objection of many ‘mainstreamers’, that the main difference between, for example, constructivists and the adherents of mainstream approaches (counting at least some of their constructivists and exponents of critical theorising) is that the latter believe in testing while the others go about their business in a somewhat woolly-headed fashion, is getting the story precisely wrong. (Kratochwil, 2007: 30; quoting Moravcsik, 2003: 131)

Clearly, to Kratochwil, responsible academic intervention consists in contesting and scrutinizing the temptation of others to generalize in order to manifest ‘the view from nowhere’. Therefore, he has taken on scholars who are either oblivious about the responsibility that comes with academic intervention or who fail (or refuse) to realize that their respective epistemological standpoints require foreclosing. As this chapter highlighted, research positions not only come from ‘somewhere’, they also always rest on a position of privilege and therefore, relatedly, of responsibility. As illustrated with reference to *Praxis*, this chapter argued that over the decades, Fritz Kratochwil’s steadfast academic interventions have consistently shown that and how this privileged position of the few comes with a responsibility to generate, facilitate and communicate knowledge to the many.

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