



3rd tem workshop 2018-2019

The Study of Norms and Practices in International Relations

24-25 April 2019

Seminar Room 3, Badia Fiesolana

Organised by Jennifer Welsh (McGill/EUI) and Chris Reus-Smit
(Queensland)

Credits: 10

Register [online](#)

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Overview

This workshop is designed to build on students' foundational knowledge of social theories of international relations (such as Social Constructivism, the 'English School', and some branches of Post-structuralism) by discussing in greater depth how we study 'social facts' in contemporary world politics. The main focus will be on the study of norms and practices, two phenomena that have preoccupied IR scholars over the past two and a half decades. The workshop begins with reflections on the different directions IR scholars took – and could have taken – in the early stages of constructivist research in IR (Session I). It then moves on to look at how norms research has evolved from a focus on 'how norms matter' to how norms are contested and re-constituted in world politics (Session II). The next session will focus on the development and evolution of the so-called practice turn in IR (Session III). We conclude the workshop with a discussion of two recent attempts to embed the study of norms and practices in deeper, and broader, cultural 'universes'.

Requirements

This workshop is designed for Ph.D. researchers who have already had a more general course in International Relations theory. It will assume some basic knowledge of social theories, and will require in-depth reading of articles and book chapters. ***The course will only deliver benefits if those attending complete, in advance, the required readings.*** Those who take the workshop for credit will be required to submit a Reading Journal shortly after the course – roughly 2000-2500 words in length (no longer) – which summarizes the insights gained from each of the four sessions. This Reading Journal is to be submitted to Monika Rzemieniecka, assistant to Professor Welsh, by no later than **April 30** (monika.rzemieniecka@eui.eu). In addition, just prior to the workshop, we will identify two students to offer preliminary reflections (no more than 5 mins) for each of the sessions and the questions identified.

April 24

9:00-9:15 – Welcome and Introductory Remarks (JW/CRS)

9:15-10:45 - Session I: Studying 'Social Facts' in International Relations

Early work by IR Constructivists grappled with three main issues: how to build on the insights that social facts 'both structure actions and are structured by actors'; how to think about explanation and causation in social theory; and how to move from the meta-theoretical premises of constructivism to a concrete research agenda that would enable scholars to observe and evaluate social facts. In this first session, we look at two different approaches to thinking about what norms are and how they might matter: one by social theorist Friedrich Kratochwil, and the other by US IR scholars Kathryn Sikkink and Martha Finnemore, and Nina Tannenwald.

Key questions

According to Kratochwil, what approach to explanation can we/should we adopt when analysing norms and other social facts? Should we distinguish between 'understanding' and 'explaining'?

What kind of claims does Tannenwald make about the effect of the so-called nuclear taboo? Does she 'prove' that norms matter?

Compare (and contrast) Tannenwald's account of the mechanisms through which norms operate, with Finnemore and Sikkink's arguments about which norms matter, and under what conditions.

Overall, are Finnemore/Sikkink/Tannenwald/ convincing in their efforts to integrate normative contexts with rational choice? What might Kratochwil say about their attempt to specify ideational causal claims?

Readings

Kratochwil, Friedrich, 'How Do Norms Matter?' in Michael Byers, ed., *The Role of Law in International Politics: Essays in International Relations and International Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), ch. 3

(NOTE: the first part of the chapter is more about international law, while the second half deals more explicitly with questions of social theory and causation.)

Finnemore, Martha and Kathryn Sikkink, 'International Norm Dynamics and Political Change', *International Organization*, Vol. 52, No. 4 (1998), pp. 887-917.

Tannenwald, Nina, 'The Nuclear Taboo: The United States and Normative Basis of Nuclear Non-use,' *International Organization*, Vol. 53, No. 3 (1999), pp. 433-468.

10:45 – 11:15 - Coffee Break

11:15 – 13:15 - Session II: Norms

Norms are most commonly defined as standards of appropriate behaviour for actors with a given identity (Katzenstein, 1996). While the initial phase of research on norms focused on how norms develop (through the so-called life cycle) and whether/how they exert influence, more recent scholarship has built on the insight that the meaning of norms can change through practice and contestation. The questions that emerge relate to how we can/should observe contestation (e.g., what are the types of contestation? whose contestation matters?), and to the effects of contestation on the robustness and reconstitution of norms.

Questions

How does the notion of contestation challenge more linear ideas of the norm life-cycle?

How would you assess Deitelhoff and Zimmerman's proposed indicators for measuring norm robustness? Do they help us in understanding US contestation of the torture norm?

How do norms scholars characterize the relationship between discourse and practice in the contestation of norms? When is behavioural contestation more likely to occur?

What is the primary difference between 'explanatory approaches' and 'exploratory approaches' to norms research?

What are the normative implications of Wiener's argument that we should understand differentiated access to 'norm validation'?

Readings

Deitelhoff, Nicole and Lisbeth Zimmerman, 'Norms Under Challenge: Unpacking the Dynamics of Norm Robustness', *Journal of Global Security Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (2019), pp. 2-17.

Schmidt, Averell and Kathryn Sikkink, 'Breaking the Ban? The Heterogeneous Impact of US Contestation of the Torture Norm', *Journal of Global Security Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (2019), pp. 105-122.

Paddon Rhoads, Emily and Jennifer Welsh, 'Close Cousins in Protection: The Evolution of Two Norms', *International Affairs* (forthcoming 2019). PDF provided.

Wiener, Antje, *Contestation and Constitution of Norms in Global International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 1-16; pp. 27-49. (If you have time, also read Chapter 7 on the 'torture convention'.)

13:15–14:30 - Lunch

14:30 – 16:30 - Session III: Practice Theory

Practice theory is based on a simple insight: that the social meanings that constitute social life emerge principally through ‘doing’. In contrast to traditional constructivist arguments that meanings evolve through cognitive and linguistic processes, practice theorists hold that norms, for example, develop through routinized actions, or practices. This view is said to resolve the old dichotomy between the ideational and the material, because practices are both material and ideational. And it is said to move beyond the agent-structure problem, as practices are both things agents do and agents encounter practices as social structures. We are interested here in two recent advances in practice theory: Emanuel Adler’s theory of cognitive evolution, and Silviya Lechner and Mervyn Frost’s institutionalist conception of practices.

Questions

What are the strengths and weaknesses of existing practice theory in IR?

How do Adler’s and Lechner and Frost’s theories seek to move beyond this established work?

In Adler’s theory, practices are linked to cognitive evolution, and both are harnessed to a new approach to the study of order in world politics. How successful do you think these moves are?

Lechner and Frost are critical of current approach to practices in IR, and they call for an approach that sees practices as institutions structured by common rules. How persuasive is their argument and approach?

Readings

Adler, Emanuel, *World Ordering: A Social Theory of Cognitive Evolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp.1-44.

Lechner, Silviya and Mervyn Frost, *Practice Theory and International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp.1-61. (*available on the SPS book shelf*)

16:30-16:45 – Questions/Reflections on Day 1

19:00 – Dinner at San Domenico Pizzeria

April 25

9:15-11:15 Session IV: *Beyond Norms and Practices*

Constructivism has been dominated by the study of norms, and practice theory is a recent attempt to shift this focus. But are both inherently limited, presenting only partial insights into the meaningful world humans navigate? This final session explores two recent attempts to embed the study of norms and practices in deeper social theoretical frameworks. Christian Reus-Smit argues that norms always exist within larger, more complex cultural universes, and the challenge is to understand how these universes condition social action. Friedrich Kratochwil, who has contributed to the development of practice theory in IR, argues, nonetheless, that we need to focus instead on 'praxis', the form of knowledge concerned with acting and choosing.

Questions

Reus-Smit argues that the constructivist focus on the causal effects of single norms is deeply problematic, and he calls for a focus on the broader universe of meanings that real actors navigate. How persuasive do you find Reus-Smit's critique?

Focusing on broader universes of meanings poses methodological challenges. How does Reus-Smit address these challenges in his project?

In shifting the focus to praxis rather than practices, Kratochwil turns our attention to social life as fundamentally rule and norm governed. This challenges, at the deepest of levels, any attempt to treat rules or norms as intervening variables. What are the implications for the study of international relations and how compelling is Kratochwil's argument?

In recent years, there has been a widespread push for IR scholars to avoid metatheory. But Kratochwil pulls us directly back onto this terrain, insisting that we think afresh the ontological and epistemological foundations of our inquiries. Can IR scholars avoid the kind of engagement Kratochwil calls for?

Readings

Reus-Smit, Christian, *On Cultural Diversity: International Theory in a World of Difference* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp.1-15, 119-154, 187-221.

Kratochwil, Friedrich, *Praxis: On Acting and Knowing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp.1-46, 391-426.

11:15 – 11:45 – *Coffee*

11:45 – *Wrap-up Discussion*

12:30 – *Close*