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On 17 June 2011, the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) passed a resolution expressing grave concerns about discrimination and violence on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. The resolution, proposed by South Africa, passed on the basis of a 23–19 vote. It called upon the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to examine the laws and policies of states concerning the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) persons. As a result, the UN High Commissioner has been actively engaged in support of LGBT rights, which led to the creation of a dedicated website, UN Free & Equal (www.unfe.org), to disseminate information about such rights and promote a greater awareness of them.

However, such a resolution was not accepted by all member states, with a number of countries from Africa and the Middle East voting against it. A map posted on the UN website indicates that five countries impose the death penalty for same-sex consensual relations, while numerous others mandate imprisonment for such activities (UNFE n.d.). The position of some of these states, for instance Iran and Saudi Arabia, is that homosexuality is morally wrong according to the teachings of Islam, the religious tradition that frames their legal codes. Other states, such as Uganda, have argued that the promotion of homosexuality is an effort by the ‘West’ to interfere in their society.

This is just one instance of the kinds of moral, legal and political dilemmas that exist in the current world order. On the one hand, there exists a robust international legal structure to promote human rights, which includes an institutional framework designed to advance rights in different ways. On the other hand, there are well-developed historical, religious and moral views that stand in opposition to such legal structures. Importantly, it is not just religious traditions like Islam or African cultural norms that stand in opposition to such global human rights institutions. The US has refused to sign the Treaty on the Rights of the Child because its military recruitment system recruits teenagers under the age of 18 (through visits to high schools). Various Christian groups in the US also argue that the UN is an institution designed to undermine not only American sovereignty but also its moral beliefs concerning issues like abortion.

These are only a few of the issues that illustrate important problems in the international legal and political order. What kind of authority structure is most legitimate for addressing such issues? Should institutions at the international level be more authoritative than domestic authorities?
there universal rights that no state should be able to violate? What is the
source of those rights? Can rights that arise from a particular modern-day
liberal context be applied globally? What responsibilities do the states
have to enforce rights, especially outside their own borders? What kinds of
rules should govern the global realm? And what happens when those rules
are violated?

This book will focus on these and other related questions. The questions
have been addressed in different ways by ethicists, lawyers, political and
social scientists, and a host of others. This book demonstrates how inter-
national political theory (IPT) uses political theory – a body of normative
and ethical theory that concerns itself with politics – in order to explore
these global issues.

**International political theory**

Before defining IPT, it is useful to say a few words about the theory and its
uses in the social and political world. One of the most important functions
of any theory is to provide a critical perspective on what we think to be
‘normal’ in political life. Social and political theory interrogates this
normality in a number of ways:

- demonstrating the heritage of the ideas we think are new
- revealing the assumptions that underlie our political practices
- forcing us to think through the consequences of our political practices
- holding up clearly articulated standards against which our political
  practices can be evaluated
- connecting disparate locations and traditions in conceptualizing our
  politics.

These functions can disabuse us of the assumption that our politics should
go on as they have while also helping us to refine existing arrangements
such that they are more just and peaceful for all peoples.

The most common sort of theories encountered in the social and politi-
cal sciences are explanatory ones, for example theories of comparative
politics or international relations (IR), which use social scientific modes of
analysing data such as hypothesis formation, testing and falsification.
Robert Keohane (2009), a leading IR theorist, has argued that this sort of
time is the ‘vocation’ of the political scientist, playing upon Max Weber’s
idea of the vocation of the politician (Weber 1994 [1919]). IPT has a
similar aim to this sort of political science theory – informing political
practice by raising important questions about its assumptions and conse-
quences. But unlike political science, IPT uses historical narratives and normative argument to raise questions about political life.

This book adopts the following definition of IPT:

IPT includes 1) justificatory arguments for certain types of authority, rights, rules and responsibilities that apply to individuals and communities qua political agents in a political order structured by the sovereign state system; and 2) critical and historical investigations of how individuals and communities qua political agents shape and are shaped by authority, rights, rules and responsibilities of a political order structured by the sovereign state system.

Why these particular themes? Authority and rules have been central to organizing political life in domestic contexts, and they have, as a result, been the central preoccupation of political theorists since the classical period. The two concepts are often addressed together; for instance, an authority creates rules to govern, but is also bound by those rules if it is to be a political order that is just. The focus on these concepts within IPT challenges the idea that neither rules nor authority have any relevance at the global level. When great powers run roughshod over international law, it would seem that naked power is the most important concept for understanding IR. But while this may be true at times, even great powers find themselves subject to various kinds of rules and their power only works if it is considered to have some legitimate authority status.

Rights and responsibilities result from the exercise of authority and the implementation of rules. Individuals have the responsibility to live according to the rules that authorities establish. At the same time, when authority structures violate those rules, individuals have rights to ensure that they will not be subject to the whims of those authorities. At the global level, these notions of rights and responsibilities are more complicated, primarily because the very status of authority and rules at the global level is more open to question. But, we also speak of states having responsibilities, for example the responsibility to protect, and rights (non-intervention). Individuals also have certain responsibilities – such as not to kill outside the boundaries of organized military activity, that is, not be a terrorist – and rights, as in the UN Declaration on Human Rights.

As the above definition suggests, IPT can operate in two ways, both of which will be used in this book. One is to provide justificatory arguments for particular configurations of authority, rights, rules and responsibilities. For instance, one might argue that only through an international office, like that of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, can universal rights be advanced. To make this claim, one must clearly present an under-
standing of rights, universality and the nature of international authority. In
the chapters that follow, I present different justificatory arguments drawn
from historical and contemporary figures. I do not necessarily advance any
single justificatory argument on these themes, but seek to provide an over-
view of some of the most important.

Two, IPT is about putting into particular contexts the types of positions
and principles that are operative in the international order. This second
function is not a directly normative one, in that it does not advance justifi-
catory arguments. Rather, it tries to reveal why we have the assumptions
about the world in which we live. So, for example, IPT can reveal how
competing assumptions about what is ‘natural’ might provide greater
understanding of why some believe that homosexual conduct should not
be legal because it is not ‘natural’; indeed, proponents and opponents of
LGBT rights often turn to science to support their justificatory claims. In
opposition to this view, one might examine the history of sexuality to
reveal a multiplicity of sexual identities that can help locate arguments for
and against LGBT rights. In this sense, IPT is not about justifying anything
but is instead about revealing how individuals exist within and make
claims about the world in some deeper context.

IPT, then, allows us to advance and understand normative arguments
about world politics. By normative, I mean that IPT is concerned with the
norms, rules and laws that govern political life (see Box I.1). One might
note that the term ‘normative’ privileges its alternative ‘empirical’ by
setting up a world in which investigations of how the world ought to be are
distinct from investigations of how the world actually is. This distinction is,
admittedly, a contested one; some have argued, for instance, that a true
social science is inherently normative, especially in the issues it wishes to
engage and the conclusions to which it comes as they might have some sort
of political relevance in the world around us (Smith 2004). One extreme
version of this argument would be that all social and political analysis is
ethical. This book does not assume this, for it posits that certain concepts
and methods address the world of ‘ought’ more than the world of ‘is’.

The ‘international’ in IPT is also important to explain. First, unlike in a
domestic political community where theorists either share a set of norma-
tive standards at the outset or speak to the same set of political practices,
at the international level there is much less agreement on who ‘we’ are,
what ‘we’ do, and what assumptions ‘we’ share. The historical narratives
that inform international political practice become much wider and more
global. The normative standards employed by participants in international
politics and observers reach into a broader diversity of traditions. Yet, such
political critique and theorizing is most certainly taking place. Political
theorists and political philosophers are turning their attention to internat-
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ional matters, international legal scholars are asking more fundamental questions about the relationship of law to politics, and IR theorists are realizing that their work has an inherent normative component that they are struggling to articulate.

In addition, unlike political theory in a domestic context, IPT assumes that individuals are not the only agents. This means that states, persons, companies, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), terrorist organizations and religious traditions can all be subject to investigation. This distinguishes IPT from those theories that assume only the individual person is the subject of concern. Certainly, all politics is about people. What IPT emphasizes is that people cannot be considered as individuals, but can only be understood in terms of the political communities of which they are a part. Moreover, those political communities become ‘agents’ that can be held responsible and even sanctioned for their actions in the international realm. This focus on multiple agents differentiates IPT from certain kinds of moral philosophy that address only the individual person (Box I.2).

Related to these points is the question of why the term used here is ‘international’ rather than ‘global’. As used in this book, IPT theorizes politics in a world in which states retain the ability and responsibility to use coercive force in pursuit of interests, justice and order. Moreover, the sovereign state

BOX I.1 Norms, rules and laws

Norms are those assumptions about the proper behaviour for agents with a particular identity. Norms can be regulative (telling us what to do) and constitutive (telling us who we are). The concept of a norm is etymologically linked to the idea of normal, although normal has a much more general set of assumptions that may not be the same for everyone.

Rules are related to norms, but rules differ from norms in that they are consciously constructed, whereas norms arise from social interactions over time and may not have any specific origin. Rules are guidelines about how a group of individuals ought to act. Rules can be formal or informal depending on their origin and the context in which they function.

Laws are rules that arise from a political structure, either domestic or international. Domestic laws arise from a legislative process, while international laws arise from a much broader set of political interactions. Laws generally have sanctions attached to them when they are not obeyed, although this is not necessarily the defining feature of laws, since rules and norms may also have sanctions attached to their violations.

system is one in which no single agent can claim to be the sole legitimate authority, which some IR theorists claim makes the system formally anarchic (Waltz 1979), although others would contest this view (Lake 2009). Importantly, certain cosmopolitan theorists argue that the sovereign state system is not the morally preferable way to orient world politics (Caney 2005), while others argue that there is movement towards a larger global political community (Hayden 2005). This book explores cosmopolitan theory but it does so in the context of an international order that remains tightly bounded by the power of sovereign states to structure the international order in their interests. Much takes place outside or in response to this structuring, but it remains a central background condition. So, for instance, the UNHRC resolution described above takes seriously the fact that different communities have different traditions and moral standards, but also acknowledges that international institutions are constructing new authority systems and will have greater say in those communities.

Another clarification to make is that this book, while drawing on the past, is concerned with the present. There is in this work a dialogue between the past and the present. The question of what constitutes the history of ideas and how it should relate to current political concerns and needs has long been one of debate (Skinner 2002). But, at the same time, IPT can only engage with this history from a particular perspective, one shaped by our presence in the modern-day international order. One may approach that history to discover why we have the system we have today (Keene 2005), how we can see alternatives to the system we have today (Lang 2009a), or in order to appreciate what we unconsciously assume

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**BOX I.2 Agency**

Agency, at its most basic level, is the ability to change the world around oneself. But agency is more complicated than this; a tornado can change the world, but we do not normally say that tornadoes have agency. Instead, agency requires a certain level of intentionality, which is then connected to our ability to hold agents responsible. Sometimes, agency arises from a formal process, as in a contractual situation when someone acts as an agent for someone else, or in a political situation, where a government formally recognizes individuals or groups as agents, either citizens or corporations. Agency is also understood in the social sciences in relation to structure. In this understanding, structures are institutional arrangements within which agents operate. In IPT, the idea that there are multiple agents relies on these ideas of agency, drawing on the moral, political and sociological.

*See:* Arendt 1959; Lang 2002; Wendt 1999.
from the past (Bain 2007). All these approaches to the past are instances of IPT, because they are driven in part by concerns of the present, concerns which the authors believe are best addressed by turning to specific thinkers or the broader history of ideas.

Some of the historical theorists on which I draw in Chapters 1–3 – John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill – have been the most systematic interpreters of the themes explored here. These individuals are often located within a broadly defined ‘liberal’ tradition. But, this book is not informed only by the liberal tradition, for the thinkers explored in Chapters 4–7 see important limits on the liberty of the individual, limits that arise from the constraints imposed by nature (Aristotle), the centrality of material need (Karl Marx), the challenge of political violence (Hugo Grotius), and the constitution of the individual through their place in national and global communities (Georg Hegel). In this text, then, the problem of liberty for natural persons, states and other agents will be a core concern, although it will be addressed through the ideas of authority, rules, rights and responsibilities.

This book assumes that the current international order can be described as one that is broadly liberal, so it is logical to use these thinkers and the themes they found to be central. The general presumptions of statehood, international human rights, international economics and war revolve around themes that arose in 19th-century liberal thought. International law, as the language through which international affairs take place, best captures this latent liberalism (Koskenneimi 2001). Realist theorists, whom one would assume are most often opposed to liberalism, accept key tenets of liberalism as the political structure that great powers should safeguard in their own political orders (Morgenthau 1960). Naturally, not all states are liberal, nor are all international interactions liberal; rather, the point here is that a vague liberalism operates in the background of our shared global life, a liberalism that is rarely articulated but is often the point of intense criticism.

In the international realm, dilemmas relating to authority, rules, rights and responsibilities are constantly arising; the UNHRC resolution noted above is an example of just such a dilemma. This book will not resolve this dilemma or the others presented here, but it will give you a way of approaching these questions that should give you some confidence to make judgements. This does not mean giving you factual information, although it will point to where you can find some of that information. Rather, it will identify theorists who have considered related problems in the history of political thought. In so doing, you will recognize that while the details of a particular problem are novel, the basic moral and political questions that underlie it are not new.
Four strands

The body of literature that I draw on here does not arise from any one approach or disciplinary background. I suggest that there are four disciplinary strands that constitute the field of IPT: political theory, IR theory, international legal theory, and moral philosophy. Admittedly, some of the authors I cite here may not think of themselves as contributing directly to IPT. Rather, I am using these broad traditions of thought to highlight some of the concerns and backgrounds of those who have written important works that address the problems of politics and ethics at the international level.

Before describing these individual strands, it is important to note that some theorists do see themselves as contributing directly to IPT. Chris Brown has helped shape the field in important ways, first by posing the idea of communitarians against cosmopolitanism (1992), then by exploring the nature of rights and justice within a sovereign state system (2002), and recently by developing an account of international affairs that draws on the Aristotelian conception of judgement (2010). Others have sought to draw on a wide range of intellectual resources to make contributions to IPT, ranging from Terry Nardin’s (1983) use of Michael Oakeshott to Molly Cochran’s (1999) use of John Dewey. Toni Erskine (2008, 2009) has sought to develop an account of international ethics that she calls normative IR theory. This approach straddles the cosmopolitan and communitarian elements of much of IR theory and moral philosophy, but proposes ways to negotiate that space. David Boucher (1998) has explicitly employed the history of political theory to engage explanatory theories of IR. Kimberly Hutchings (1999, 2010) has creatively combined feminist thought and theorists such as Hegel to develop her understanding of IPT.

Others might also see their work as part of IPT. The list of resources in the next few pages suggest that rather than narrowly delimiting the field of IPT, one effort of this book is to highlight scholarly work that can contribute to IPT by engaging with issues of normativity at the international level.

Political theory

Traditionally, political theorists have tended to address their analyses to specific, bounded communities. As noted above, IPT differs from political theory, in that it engages some of the core questions of political life but in the context of a world in which the boundaries of the state can neither contain nor protect citizens from wider political practices (Box I.3).

Political theory, as a formal disciplinary activity, can be located as a response to the ways in which the general study of politics changed into political science. However, to say that the study of political theory is
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somehow new or a 20th-century invention would be absurd. The point here is that something called ‘political theory’ as distinct from other ways to study politics did not arise until the 20th century. In the early and mid-20th century, the study of politics sought to become more ‘scientific’, which meant trying to find causal explanations of individual behaviours that can be turned into law-like generalizations. Alongside this effort at finding causal patterns, political scientists sought to remove normative judgements about political life and instead engage in purely descriptive or explanatory accounts. These efforts to become more scientific in the study of politics are sometimes categorized as the rise of ‘behaviourism’ or ‘positivism’ (Hollis 1994). In response to these changes, a number of thinkers tried to rescue what they believed to be the preferred mode of study, that is, reading classics of the past for insights into the present, especially because these texts did not assume a rigid scientific approach nor did they banish normative or ethical theory from their study of politics. As a result, in the mid-20th-century American context, thinkers such as Leo Strauss, Hannah Arendt and Eric Vogelin ‘invented’ a particular tradition to resurrect some classical thinkers (Gunnell 1987, 1993). Some approaches to IPT have mirrored this approach by turning back to the classics of political theory for insights into the international realm, in critical and sympathetic guises (Boucher 1998; Brown et al. 2002; Jahn 2006a; Keene 2005; Pangel and Ahrens 1999; Williams 1992).

Some political theorists address the international dimensions of political life (Derrida 1992, 2001; Habermas 2006; Rawls 1999). In some cases,
International political theory figures from the mid-20th century have become important sources for reflection on the international. For instance, the work of Carl Schmitt has become an important inspiration for a number of thinkers (Agamben 2005; Hooker 2009; Odysseos and Petito 2007; Slomp 2009a). Hannah Arendt has been a source for others who wish to reflect on the international realm (Hayden 2009a; Lang and Williams 2005; Owens 2008).

International relations theory

IPT arose in part from trends in IR theory, although IR theory initially sought to distinguish an international order from a domestic one, a process that partly undermined the potential for a truly international political theory to develop. IR theory turned away from substantive normative issues towards questions of epistemology and ontology in the mid-20th century (Box I.4). The anarchic nature of international politics certainly reinforced this tendency, but it does not entirely explain it. As this section will suggest, however, the narrative about IR that has excluded ethical and political theory can be challenged from different perspectives. This section highlights contributions to IPT from within the major IR theories: realism, liberalism, constructivism, critical theory and poststructuralism.

Box I.4 ‘Debates’ in IR theory

Some IR theorists understand the history of IR theory as structured around a series of debates. The first debate was between idealist or utopian thinkers and realists, launched by the critical readings of interwar scholarship from E.H. Carr and Hans Morgenthau. The second debate emerged in the 1950s and 60s, and posed behaviouralists against ‘classical’ IR theorists. This paralleled the rise of political theory in the context of political science mentioned above, although this debate took on an Anglo-American cast. Those writing from Britain, particularly Martin Wight and Hedley Bull (actually an Australian) took the classical approach of more history and law, while Americans tended to the more behaviouralist tradition, captured in the work of James Rosenau. The third debate resulted from the efforts of poststructuralist theorists to interject more critical perspectives on IR theory, focusing on debates in modern and structural theory. The idea that the field has progressed through these debates, however, is more problematic. It does not necessarily capture the full range of thinking in the field. The recent historical studies of Brian Schmidt (1998) and Duncan Bell (2009) have demonstrated very different theoretical heritages for the study of IR theory, both of which more clearly locate the place of normative issues.

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