## Contents

Introduction: The ‘Enormous Creative Potential of Practical Reason’ 1

### Part I The Challenge – Poststructuralism and IR’s Responses

1 Inside/Outside: Walker, Ashley and the Poststructuralist Critique of IR 15

2 Overcoming the Poststructuralist Critique? Ontology and Epistemology in the Constructivist Theories of Wendt and Kratochwil 40

3 Constitutive Political Theory: Mervyn Frost and the Role of Norms in International Political Theory 72

### Part II The Solution – Constructing Normative Reason

4 Beyond Coherence: Rawls’ Conception of Public Reason 93

5 Contemporary Moral Foundationalism: Buchanan’s Conception of Normative Reasoning and the Role of Institutions in Political Justification 118

6 Philosophical Constructivism and Critical Constructivism Combined: Kratochwil’s Account of the Conditions of Practical Reasoning and the Rawlsian Conception of Public Reason 143

7 The Concept of the Reasonable in International Political Justification: A Rejoinder to the Poststructuralist Critique 182

Conclusion: Poststructuralism and Beyond 244

Notes 246

References 276

Index 280
Introduction: The ‘Enormous Creative Potential of Practical Reason’¹

This book is concerned with constructivism in international relations. Specifically, it is concerned with the ability of a constructivist account of the structure of normative reasoning to ground a theory of international relations capable of overcoming the poststructuralist challenge to the traditional foundations and methodology developed and adopted by the discipline of IR. While the book begins with a detailed analysis of this challenge and a consideration of the means by which IR has attempted to answer it, this is primarily an account of the conditions of international relations analysed through the lens of international political theory, but one which incorporates crucial theoretical features developed within the more mainstream discipline of IR. Ultimately, what I set out to do is to dispel the idea that the disciplines operate in necessarily distinct spaces (and that they can therefore effectively speak past one another) and instead offer an account of international relations grounded on a conception of normative reasoning capable of ‘combining’ the various elements and theoretical tools of each discipline, which I consider crucial to a true understanding of the nature of world politics.

I intentionally leave the word ‘constructivism’ unqualified above. There are two broad accounts of the nature and conditions of international relations which can properly be called ‘constructivist’:

1. Social constructivism, which I argue constitutes one of the means by which the discipline of IR sought to respond to critical challenges to the assumptions and methodological commitments around which it had traditionally oriented itself. The two positions I consider herein are the ‘conventional’ constructivism of Alexander Wendt (which I consider to characterise IR’s attempt to respond to its critics while remaining
2 Overcoming Poststructuralism

essentially loyal to the key ontological and methodological commitments it had long adhered to) and the more ‘holistic’ form of social constructivism (and accompanying theories of social epistemology and normative reasoning) developed with much sophistication by Friedrich Kratochwil.

2. Philosophical constructivism, originating within the discipline of political theory and most closely associated (in its contemporary political form) with the work of John Rawls. While I ultimately consider certain concepts drawn from the framework of Rawlsian constructivism to be the most effective means of grounding a legitimate account of international relations, I also consider that there are crucial elements of a cohesive and complete account of the nature of international politics, in particular the characteristics and structure of normative, practical and institutional reasoning in IR, which cannot be understood through the lens of philosophical constructivism alone. For this reason, my book advocates a response to the challenge of poststructuralism built around the most fundamental concepts employed by Rawls, but with the vital addition of those elements of Kratochwil’s and others’ theories which I consider to be crucial to a ‘complete’ understanding of the characteristics of practical reasoning in the context of international relations.

While theorists such as Kratochwil and Rawls are essentially concerned with the same subject matter – the nature and conditions of practical reason as a means to the construction of normatively significant and justified structures in domestic politics and international relations – it is striking that neither engages with the other’s position to any great extent. This, I believe, can in large part be attributed to the fact that, traditionally, the disciplines of International Relations and political theory (even where the latter spoke to international considerations) have essentially operated as if the other did not exist. Perhaps consciously, the methodologies and research agendas of the distinct disciplines, with their respective focuses on positivistic analyses and philosophical explanations, were historically almost prima facie unable or unwilling to engage one another. Explaining and understanding international phenomena was the preserve of International Relations, normative justificatory theory and philosophical conceptions of right and justice the hallmark of political theory.

More recently, as Wendt and Snidal observe in an important 2009 article, a degree of synthesis and amalgamation has occurred among
the ‘international disciplines’. This is the case, claim Wendt and Snidal, due to the shedding of the ‘intellectual prejudices’ of political theorists and philosophers ‘in favour of domestic politics’ (which, they claim, rendered international normative considerations an afterthought of ‘subsidiary works’ as opposed to the ‘great ones’ concerned with domestic issues) – meaning that a far greater focus has been afforded to international questions than was previously the case, as well as the more recent emphasis on the role of ideas and ideational factors in international social structures, the introduction of ‘explicitly normative concepts such as appropriateness and legitimacy’ into the IR lexicon and the acknowledgement of ‘the role of scholars not merely as observers of world politics but as critics and, through ideas, even shapers of international outcomes’ among IR theorists (meaning that ‘the level of theoretical sophistication within IR is much higher now than it was four decades ago’). Thus, claim Wendt and Snidal, a genuine International Theory has emerged, oriented around the ‘distinct disciplinary communities’ of IR, International Political Theory and the resurgence of theoretical work in International Law.

The lingering problem, however, and the raison d’être behind Wendt and Snidal’s piece, is the fact that ‘different theoretical communities are not engaging each other in ways that could be mutually productive’. Thus, they claim:

In contrast to the at least sporadic trade (and warfare) between theoretical approaches that takes place within the discipline-defined boundaries of IT, serious engagement across disciplines is almost non-existent. Thus, instead of one set of conversations around an international issue among normative, positive, and legal theorists, there are three separate sets of conversations going on, each within its own, relatively self-contained, disciplinary ‘silos’. These silos constitute the primary universe of discourse about the international for their members, defining expectations both professionally (in the sense of the prominence of journals and presses and thus the incentive structure for publication), and intellectually in the sense of what constitutes good work or ‘the literature’ in a given domain (i.e. even if good work outside the silo bears on the problem).

Wendt and Snidal do acknowledge the fact that, in contemporary debates, there is ‘some fluidity’ between discourses, particularly ‘at the level of individual scholars’. However, ‘significant intellectual
impediments remain’, evident in ‘citation patterns that continue to be heavily weighted toward work in one’s home discipline’. Thus:

While we do not imagine that the diversity of [International Theory – i.e. its positive, normative and legal elements] can be reduced to a single conversation, or that this is even a desirable goal, there is nevertheless something important for these fields to talk about: the areas where their concerns overlap.

The areas of overlap between the supposedly distinct elements of ‘International Theory’ – positive, normative and legal – are of crucial importance for my book. Given the inherent nature of contemporary international relations, it does not appear to me to be possible to truly understand and theorise about world politics without a sophisticated understanding of the ways in which the normative, legal, institutional and practical elements of international relations are connected. My most fundamental claim herein is therefore that the ‘distinct’ elements of theorising about international relations, and their inherently intertwined nature, can be properly understood and (equally importantly) legitimately justified through a complex conception of practical reason within the context of international normative structure. Kratochwil develops such a conception; Rawls provides the philosophical framework within which the conception can be embedded, contextualised and, crucially, afforded a robust normative justification.

I do not claim that this book unlocks the key to a truly unified ‘International Theory’ (to employ Wendt and Snidal’s claim). I primarily approach the study of international politics from the perspective of political theory. What I set out to consider, however, is the most effective means of overcoming a particular challenge to the theoretical analysis of the nature of international relations – namely, the challenge of poststructuralism. I want to consider the ways in which IR has attempted to speak to attacks on its most fundamental assumptions (both substantive and methodological) in order to ascertain whether the discipline of IR contains the tools necessary to overcome such challenges. This will involve, initially, revisiting the challenge pronounced by poststructuralism – and by Richard Ashley and R.B.J. Walker in particular – to the discipline of IR in the 1990s and the (at the time) radical responses offered by IR in an attempt to overcome this attack on the very heart of the discipline (namely, the very foundations by which IR assumed that its theoretical knowledge could be
deemed authoritative) which I consider through a comparative analysis of conventional and critical constructivism. My argument is that, although the poststructuralists presented the discipline of IR with a far-reaching and ultimately devastating challenge, it did little to move beyond that challenge to a constructive account of how a consideration of international relations ought to proceed in a legitimate and justifiable manner (‘from deconstruction to reconstruction’, to coin a phrase adopted by Friedrichs and Kratochwil). The paucity of reconstructive poststructuralist theory can clearly be attributed to the deconstructive method which characterises the approach. If one challenges the very possibility of authoritative and legitimate theoretical knowledge in an absolute manner – as Walker and Ashley essentially set out to do – one is left with little by way of resources by which to ground reconstructive possibility aside from ‘anti-foundationalism’ (as Walker and Ashley themselves expound) or else the pragmatism of theorists such as Friedrichs and Kratochwil. While the latter are not themselves poststructuralists, the piece in question seeks to move beyond ‘epistemological deadlock’ (which, it claims, adequately captures the state of the debates regarding social-scientific methodology) through the identification of a sound pragmatic approach to the ontological and epistemological issues thrown up by the conclusions of post-positivistic theory:

We suggest that a coherent pragmatic approach consists of two elements: the recognition of knowledge generation as a social and discursive activity, and the orientation of research toward the generation of useful knowledge.

Therefore, a ‘pragmatic’ approach to the question of anchoring the foundations of theoretical knowledge requires an intersubjective understanding of the production of knowledge and requires that questions of practicality (i.e. how to generate practically beneficial theoretical knowledge) drive the research agenda. Friedrichs and Kratochwil claim that if the idea that the categories of knowledge are conditioned by the reason of the observing subject is accepted, questions of epistemology must be engaged:

Insofar as the subject is deeply implicated in the constitution of the object, it is impossible to derive concepts and theoretical assertions directly from ‘the facts’. If the objects of experience are not simply ‘out there,’ to understand the world we have to reflect on the categories we use.
Since it is clear that these categories are part of the human mind and not a property of the objective world, ontological realism is in trouble and an epistemological alternative is required. Any such alternative will highlight the constitution of what we perceive as the world through our cognitive endowment and conceptual instruments.\(^\text{17}\)

The assertion that the commitments of a social-scientific methodology which privileges the status of an independent and objectively discernible set of facts and logical propositions can no longer be legitimately sustained is akin to the conclusions of Walker’s and Ashley’s poststructuralism, which (as we will see in Chapter 1) ultimately proclaims the impossibility of any legitimate foundation for knowledge. For Friedrichs and Kratochwil, however,

questioning conventional methodology has nothing to do with ‘nihilism’ [i.e. in a theoretical sense]. Instead, it obliges us to critically examine alternative criteria that can lend force to our assertions. It is a fallacy to assume that without universally valid, timeless, and unshakeable foundations ‘everything becomes relative’ and ‘anything goes’.\(^\text{18}\)

This is a critical point and one that feeds into the substance of my book. Given the work that has been undertaken in IR and political theory over the last two decades to dispel the idea that either social or moral ‘facts’ exist independently of the agents who participate in both action and observation (whether by poststructuralism or alternative versions of critical theory), the idea of constructivism, which in both senses listed above is premised on the idea that a sufficiently sophisticated and inclusive conception of practical reason can offer a legitimate alternative to the traditional categories of foundationalism (both normative and ontological), assumes primary importance. I do not claim that constructivism is the only plausible solution to the problems with traditional IR theory identified by poststructuralism. Other forms of reconstructive normative theory (such as contemporary moral foundationalism\(^\text{19}\)) are viable rejoinders to the poststructuralist challenge in their own right. My claim, however, is that the aim of philosophical constructivism – that is, to construct a robust and legitimate account of the nature and conditions of world politics through sophisticated conceptions of the justifying power of practical reason – imbes the theoretical model with a philosophical rigour and normative legitimacy which, in my contention, most forcefully transcends the challenge of poststructuralism.
I want to explore the idea that the very conditions of practical reasoning, and a conception of reasonableness more broadly, can do a tremendous amount of work in unlocking the essence of international relations. Such requires, I believe, a complex understanding of how the various strands of reasoning about practical issues in world politics – the legal, institutional and moral questions which face any true form of International Theory – can be combined within an appropriate philosophical framework which can present a reconstructive alternative to the anti-foundationalist conclusions of poststructuralism. My central contention is that the conditions of practicality, and an appropriate conception of reasonableness, can provide a legitimate justification for a conception of normative reasoning which combines a Rawlsian account of the idea of public reason with a Kratochwilian account of practical reason (the latter incorporating novel arguments as to why legal, institutional and moral reasoning can be subsumed within the ambit of practical reasoning with norms). By structuring a conception of normative reasoning in this way, I claim, a sophisticated understanding of international relations can be constructed through robust and legitimate means, with the potential to account for the complex ways in which the various elements of normative reasoning (legal, institutional, moral, practical) interact and cohere within a cohesive and justificatory philosophical framework.

I do not claim to offer a comprehensive trans-disciplinary analysis of international politics, law, morality and structure. Nor do I present a unified account of the realisation of all normative facets of international political theory (e.g. a categorical expression of principles of political justice; a fully developed theory of human rights). Nor, finally, do I suggest that the account of normative reasoning I explore and espouse herein is the only means by which to transcend poststructuralism. What I set out to achieve is a reanalysis of a particularly vociferous challenge to the traditional discipline of IR, and the responses inspired by such a challenge which I consider to most adequately capture a true understanding of the nature of world politics, from the perspective of contemporary debates. In particular, I want to consider the nature of contemporary international relations from a standpoint at which it is possible to combine a philosophical constructivism with a holistic social-constructivist account of the conditions of practical reason, in order to present a viable theory which combines important elements of the various theorists I consider, in order to ground a ‘combined’, trans-disciplinary, constructivist response. My claim that the ideas of reasonableness, public reason and the conditions of practicality provide
Overcoming Poststructuralism

the driving force behind a legitimate and appropriate account of the nature of international relations leads me to consider the conceptions of reasonableness and normative reason which form the subject matter of my book in close detail. A deep and detailed analysis of these elements of constructivism will, I believe, ground a sophisticated understanding of the most fundamental nature of contemporary international relations and, as Friedrichs and Kratochwil state, will ‘release the enormous creative potential of practical reason and make it work for international relations scholarship’.

Chapter-by-chapter outline

It may be helpful to set out in brief overview the various theoretical approaches I examine in each chapter as I articulate and attempt to find a robust solution to the challenge of poststructuralism.

In Chapter 1 I set out, in detail, the poststructuralist positions (primarily those of Ashley and Walker) which, I say, represent a far-reaching, viable challenge to the fundamental tenets of traditional IR theory. I set out the challenge in detail and consider the various theoretical techniques employed by traditional IR, which poststructuralism seeks to deconstruct. I also consider the antifoundationalist conclusions which Walker and Ashley draw in light of the challenges and critique they expound.

In Chapter 2 I go on to consider IR’s most cohesive response to the challenge of poststructuralism – namely, the social constructivism of Alexander Wendt. Wendt’s constructivism did much to challenge the structural-determinist assumptions on which the classic doctrines of IR – such as Realism and Idealism – were predicated. However, the fact that he attempted to combine a ‘holist ontology’ with a commitment to a scientific methodology means that Wendt’s theory exemplifies a ‘conventional’ form of social constructivism – he challenges the deterministic elements of traditional IR theory from within its own methodological and epistemological frames of reference. This falls short, I claim, of truly overcoming the poststructuralist challenge. I then go on to consider the ‘critical’ constructivism of Friedrich Kratochwil. Kratochwil challenges Wendt’s commitment to a conceptual distinction between ontology and epistemology, opting instead for an intersubjective understanding of the creation of structure and meaning in international relations. Kratochwil’s theory is, I claim, genuinely far-reaching and contains far more critical potential by which to move beyond the stultifying disciplinary and methodological constraints which IR imposed on
itself (even in responding to challenges to precisely these disciplinary and methodological constraints). However, the great benefit of considering these responses to poststructuralism from the perspective of political theory (or, rather, from a perspective which can offer trans-disciplinary analyses) is that, through such a perspective, it becomes clear that the problem with Kratochwil’s theory in itself is that it cannot provide an appropriate philosophical framework by which claims to moral authority can be afforded adequate justification beyond the context of normative structure. Given that, as I claim, a conception of normative reasoning must be contextualised and justified through an appropriate philosophical framework, it becomes imperative to broaden the remit of analysis and consider potential responses to the poststructuralist challenge provided by political theory.

In Chapter 3 I do just this – I consider the ability of a constitutive political theory, expounded by Mervyn Frost, to ground a robust, critical theory by which to transcend poststructuralism’s nihilistic conclusions. Frost’s normative theory is anchored around what he calls the ‘settled norms of contemporary international relations’ (claims to sovereignty; human rights, etc.), from which, he claims, an appropriate background theory can be derived which can offer a deep understanding of the nature of contemporary international relations. Frost argues that his chosen theory – the ‘constitutive theory of individuality’ – is the best and most coherent ‘fit’ with the most fundamental norms of contemporary international life, and is thus the most appropriate and justified means by which to ground an understanding of world politics. In the chapter I consider whether an understanding of international relations premised on, and derived from, the ‘settled norms’ really offers the most robust means by which to overcome the challenge of poststructuralism. I conclude that a ‘coherence-based’ form of philosophical justification does not contain the theoretical and critical strength required to truly circumvent the challenge expounded by Walker and Ashley.

Chapter 4 opens Part II of my book – an analysis of various positions on the nature and conditions of normative reasoning. In Chapter 4 I consider the ability of philosophical constructivism (specifically, Rawlsian political constructivism) to provide robust and legitimate means by which normative structure in international relations can be contextualised and justified. As stated above, my crucial claim is that the driving forces behind political constructivism are the related ideas of reasonableness and public/practical reason. The chapter comprises an extended exposition and consideration of Rawls’ account of reasonableness, and the idea of public reason, in his Political Liberalism and
Overcoming Poststructuralism

The Law of Peoples (concepts which will be familiar to any scholar of Rawls but which is vital groundwork to what follows herein). Rawls’ ideas of reasonableness and public reason arguably represent the most sophisticated and fully developed accounts in the contemporary literature, and any analysis of contemporary political constructivism (Rawls’ term for the freestanding form of philosophical constructivism he develops in Political Liberalism and The Law of Peoples) should (and usually does) begin with an analysis of Rawls.

I then go on in Chapter 5 to consider the critique of Rawls, and the institutional conception of human rights, adopted by Allen Buchanan. Buchanan’s theory provides a sophisticated and comprehensive understanding of human rights theory which develops out of a consideration and critique of Rawls’ ideas in The Law of Peoples. Crucially, Buchanan offers the key insight that, given the status of human rights in the contemporary legal and practical landscape of world politics, any comprehensive understanding of the nature of international relations must include an institutional component as part of its justificatory element, with an appropriate conception of institutional reasoning and sophisticated social epistemology. These arguments for an institutional justificatory component are convincing, and I certainly wish to take them seriously and explore means of adopting them herein. However, I ultimately argue that the normative basis for Buchanan’s theoretical model functions in a foundationalist manner and assumes the acceptance of various liberal predicates on the part of his intended audience. While there is much value in an analysis of Buchanan’s theory, and while Buchanan’s foundationalist moral assumptions will certainly appeal to his explicit target audience (i.e. those who already accept the unjustified moral claims he asserts in developing his conception of normative justification), I ultimately contend that a combined constructivist conception of normative reasoning, backed by a sophisticated account of the concept of the reasonable, grounds a more robust and (in wide international terms) legitimate means by which to overcome the charges laid at International Relations by poststructuralism.

The final account of normative reason I focus on (in Chapter 6) is that of Kratochwil. The chapter is challenging (as any consideration of Kratochwil’s complex theoretical position would be) but extremely fruitful. I consider in close detail Kratochwil’s conception of practical reasoning which, based as it is on the conditions of reasoning with intersubjective norms, and the contextualising presence of topoi, commonplaces and analogies, subsumes conceptions of legal, moral and institutional reasoning within its general ambit. Kratochwil’s account
Index

Ashley, Richard, 5, 6, 8, 15–16, 17, 35–7, 40, 43, 50, 70
and the ‘celebratory register of freedom’, 37–9
and the critique of logocentrism, 20–3, 27–9, 59, 239
and intertextuality, 26–7, 239

Buchanan, Allen
and critique of Rawls’ conception of public reason, 10, 119–31, 141–2, 144–5
and the Modest Objectivist View, 131–41
and social epistemology, 135–41, 167, 172–3, 177

constitutive theory, 74–89
constructivism, 1–2
conventional, 1–2, 44–9
critical, 1–2, 61–71
political, 2, 94, 182, 187–8, 216–17, 229

Friedrichs, Jorge
and engaging with epistemology, 5–6

Frost, Mervyn, 66
and constitutive theory, 9, 74–89

Kratochwil, Friedrich
and critical constructivism, 1–2, 6, 8–9, 43–4, 58, 59–60, 63–5, 69–71, 72–4, 145, 146, 170–1
and engaging with epistemology, 5–6
and norms, 9, 32, 43, 64–6, 68, 72, 74, 75, 89, 145–6, 150–6, 158–63, 168, 179–81, 182–3, 184, 187, 242–3

and practical reason, 4, 7, 10–11, 18, 145–6, 150–69, 179–81, 182–4, 186–7, 216, 229, 238–9, 242–3
and pragmatism, 5, 59–60, 148–9
and the role of topoi in normative and legal reasoning, 10–11, 152–3, 154–63, 179, 187, 242–3

McKinnon, Catriona
and critique of Rawls’ conception of reasonableness, 11, 188, 189–91, 193–8, 201, 212–13, 218–20, 240, 241
and the personal bases of self-respect, 11, 188, 200–12, 218, 219, 241, 242

O’Neill, Onora, 108–13, 226, 227
poststructuralism, 5, 6, 8, 15–39, 40, 43, 50, 59, 70, 93–4, 239, 244

Rawls, John
and Kratochwilian practical reason, 7, 11, 182–4, 186, 216, 217, 229–30, 238–9, 242, 243
and political constructivism, 2, 94, 182, 187–8, 216–17, 229
and public reason in The Law of Peoples, 9–10, 95, 113–17,
Index 281

reasonableness, 97–101, 182–243
reasoning
legal, 151–6, 157, 158–9
limitations on, 224–35
with norms, 145–69
public, 93–117, 169–73, 178–81
Roberts, Peri
and ‘the constraints of practicality’, 12, 220–4, 238, 242, 243
and limitations on reasoning, 12, 188, 201, 204, 224–9, 236–8, 239–40, 241–2, 243
Scanlon, Thomas
and motivational limitations on reasoning, 12, 228, 229, 230–5, 240, 242
Snidal, Duncan
and ‘International Theory’, 2–4
Walker, R.B.J., 5, 6, 8, 15–16, 17, 35–7, 40, 43, 50, 70, 143
and the ‘celebratory register of freedom’, 37–9
and the critique of logocentrism, 19–20, 22–3, 27, 29–31, 59, 93–4, 239
and intertextuality, 19–20, 24, 25, 29–34, 239
Waltz, Kenneth, 26–9, 44–5, 47, 48
Wendt, Alexander, 1–2, 46–8
and causation and constitution, 53–61, 63, 65, 66–7, 89
and ‘International Theory’, 2–4
and ‘scientific realism’, 42, 49, 50–3, 54–61, 63,
and social constructivism, 1–2, 8, 17, 42–3, 45, 49, 62, 63