Beyond the Linguistic Analogy:
Norm and Action in International Politics

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Abstract

Like the domestic analogy before it, the linguistic analogy – the tendency to see the norms of international society as akin to the rules of language – is a pathology of international thought. This paper dissects the sources of this inappropriate guiding metaphor in the study of international society and suggests an alternative approach to understanding the efficacy of international norms.

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I.   Introduction

The title of this paper was chosen to resonate with the 'domestic analogy,' a widely recognized pattern within international thought. According to Hedley Bull, the 'domestic analogy' is:

> …the argument from the experience of individual men in domestic society to the experience of states, according to which the need of individual men to stand in awe of a common power in order to live in peace is a ground for holding that states must do the same. The conditions of an orderly social life, on this view, are the same among states as they are within them: they require that the institutions of domestic society be reproduced on a universal scale.[1]

Hidemi Suganami calls the domestic analogy: "presumptive reasoning that holds that there are certain similarities between domestic and international phenomena; that, in particular, the conditions of order within states are similar to those of order between them; and that therefore those institutions which sustain order domestically should be reproduced at the international level."[2]

First identified by scholars such as C.A.W. Manning, the domestic analogy has been the focus of much critique by international relations scholars. First, the tendency to view international politics through the lens of domestic politics is seen as intellectually dubious. On the one hand, this criticism has been put forward by those who seek to maintain international politics as an autonomous sphere of academic inquiry. But even those who are not committed to carving out a secure disciplinary niche for the subject of international politics tend to criticize the domestic analogy for its historical myopia. The domestic analogy is put forward as a solution to international violence and disorder by proponents who seem temporarily to forget the very real history of violence and insecurity *within* states, especially protracted civil conflict. Second, the domestic analogy is seen as problematic from the point of view of practical politics. The argument here is that international society does not display the level of solidarity required to sustain adherence to institutions of a kind that are common within domestic societies. What international society needs, it is argued, are order-maintaining institutions appropriate to the thin moral consensus that exists at this level. Third, the domestic analogy is seen as morally problematic by many international relations scholars because it is often marked by an admixture of hegemonic and emancipatory aspirations. Proponents of the domestic analogy have rarely demonstrated the political maturity required to tease these two strands apart.

Like the domestic analogy before it, the linguistic analogy is a pathology of international thought. Unlike the domestic analogy, it affects international *theory* rather than world order proposals. We can usefully paraphrase Suganami's description of the domestic analogy as follows: the linguistic analogy is presumptive reasoning that holds that there are certain similarities between normative phenomena in international politics and the social phenomenon of language; that, in particular, the manner in which the rules of language enable and constrain speakers within a linguistic community can be taken as a model for how norms influence the behaviour of states; and that therefore those methodologies appropriate to the study of linguistically-mediated social phenomena can be reproduced in the study of international society.

Traces of the linguistic analogy can be seen in many areas of international theory, most obviously amongst those theorists who make 'discourse analysis' an explicit part of their intellectual toolkit.[3] It can

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[1]   Hedley Bull, "Society and Anarchy in International Relations," in Kai Alderson and Andrew Hurrell (eds) *Hedley Bull on International Society* (London: Macmillan, 2000), p. 81.

[2]   Hidemi Suganami, *The Domestic Analogy and World Order Proposals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 1.

[3]   See, among others, David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Security*, rev. ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998); Jim George, *Discourses of Global Politics: A Critical (Re)Introduction to International Relations* (Boulder: Lynne Reinner Press, 1994); R.B.J. Walker *Inside/Outside*: International Relations as Political Theory (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Roxanne Doty, "Foreign Policy as Social Construction: A Post-Positivist Analysis of US Counterinsurgency Policy in the Phillippines," *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 37, no. 3 (1993), pp. 297-320; James Keeley "Towards a Foucauldian Analysis of International Regimes," *International Organization*,

be seen in Ruggie's suggestion that 'international regimes are akin to language' and amongst contemporary theorists of international security who ground their approach on Searle's notion of 'speech acts.'[4] Lawyers have long sought to justify the importance of international law by conceiving it as the *language* of diplomacy.[5] Historians, too, make use of this metaphor. In the preface to his magisterial work of the European international system 1763-1848, Paul Schroeder writes as follows:

> By 'international system' I do not mean what is usually meant by political scientists, i.e. the number of major international actors in permanent, regular contact and interaction with each other, and the distribution of power among them…. Instead, 'system' in international politics means here essentially what I understand Michael Oakeshott to mean by the constituent rules of a practice or a civic association: the understandings, assumptions, learned skills and responses, rules, norms, procedures, etc. which agents acquire and use in pursuing their individual divergent aims within the framework of a shared practice. Examples of a 'system' in this sense are *the structure, grammar, and rules of a common language*; the rules or understandings involved in playing a game or practicing a profession; and, in this case, the rules and understandings underlying the practice of international politics. [emphasis added][6]

As I will argue, this pattern of presumptive reasoning carries some troublesome connotations within it. Of course, many writers who avail themselves of the linguistic analogy do so for expository purposes only. But it is nevertheless important to flag these tendencies as a warning. It is incumbent on norm-oriented international relations scholars to make explicit their attitude toward the linguistic analogy. Better yet, students of international society should seek ways to understand norms without invoking methods and metaphors drawn from language.

This paper is composed of two sections - one negative, one positive. The first section is a brief overview that explains where the linguistic analogy comes from and what it hides. The second section outlines an approach to international norms that circumvents the faulty logic of the linguistic analogy.

II.   The Linguistic Analogy: An Overview

In broad-brush terms, the argument in this section runs as follows: the linguistic analogy - defined here as the tendency to view the norms of international society as akin to the rules of language - is misleading because it attributes to international institutions a durability and a capacity to order social reality which they simply do not possess. Because this is likely to be misinterpreted as a mere restatement of orthodox realism, I want to emphasize at the outset that the linguistic analogy is an important response to deeply problematic features of traditional international relations scholarship. This traditional scholarship focuses on the gulf separating international society and the state. Such 'islands' or

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vol. 44, no. 1 (1990), pp. 83-105; Mark Neufeld, "Interpretation and the 'Science' of International Relations," *Review of International Studies*, vol. 19, no. 1, (1993), pp. 39-61; Jutta Weldes, "Constructing National Interests," *European Journal of International Relations*, 2, No. 3, (1996), 275-318.

4   J.G. Ruggie, "International Regimes, Transactions, and Change: Embedded Liberalism in the Postwar Economic Order," in Stephen Krasner (ed.), *International Regimes*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 196. To be fair, Ruggie also notes that there are important dissimilarities between international regimes and language, an insight which is not always followed by other constructivists. Ole Waever, "Securitization and Desecuritization" chapter 3 in Ronnie D. Lipschutz (ed.) *On Security* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 46-86; Barry Buzan, "Rethinking Security after the Cold War," *Cooperation and Conflict*, vol. 32, no. 1 (1997), pp. 5-28.

5   Martti Koskenniemi's critical analysis of the foundations of international law is a recent (and radical) variation on this theme. See Martti Koskenniemi, *From Apology to Utopia: The Structure of International Legal Argument* (Helsinki: Finnish Lawyers" Publishing Company, 1989).

6   Paul W. Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics, 1763-1848* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. xii.

'degrees' of governance as *do* exist in the international system are implicitly measured against the strong standard of the state, often leading to an overly pessimistic view of their influence in international life. Much of the intellectual energy displayed in the field of international relations over the past thirty years has centered on the search for a more adequate theory of international norms. This section situates the emergence of the linguistic analogy by providing an overview of the history of normative international relations theory. It then turns an eye on the linguistic analogy's assumptions and implications.

Charting the Norm Debate

Simplifying for the sake of clarity, it is possible to depict the history of the 'norm debate' in international theory as moving through four main phases. In the first phase, the debate over the role of norms in international politics was understood to be a struggle between 'morality' and 'expediency'. These debates took place primarily between liberals and realists. Liberals believed that the more damaging features of international anarchy might one day be ameliorated by improving the normative framework of world politics (implying that norms were effective in moderating state behaviour), and on the basis of this belief devoted their intellectual energies to formulating and advocating the improvements they deemed necessary. Realists rejected these claims. While not dismissing international norms outright, they argued that norms were at best a minor influence, that many supposedly 'moral' norms contained a heavy dose of self-interest, and that an excessive preoccupation with normative issues could prove a dangerous distraction from the hard truths of power politics. Other classical traditions can also be positioned in relation to the same underlying debate: Marxists too understood international 'morality' to be a cloak for the self-interest (the self-interest of the capitalist classes).

It is important to emphasize that even during these early debates scholars recognized the need for a 'third way' between these two extremes. Writers in the Grotian vein argued that international politics was more than the clash of interests, that states not only impact on one another but also form amongst themselves something akin to a society. Although generated by self-interest and at points overwritten by self-interest, the society of states has its own distinctive values, rules, and social institutions. As evidence for the existence of this international society, the Grotians pointed to the operation of international law, the traditions of the diplomatic system, the exercise of Great Power management, rules limiting the international use of force, and the self-conscious maintenance of an international balance of power.[7] Although influential in the English-speaking periphery of the discipline, the Grotian perspective never entered fully into the intellectual climate of IR's American heartland.

The second phase can be dated from the advent of regime theory in the 1970s. Regime theorists explained the existence of international rules by way of the instrumental role that common norms play in the pursuit of state interests. Because norms are pursued by rational, self-interested actors, this approach has been described as 'rationalist' in character. Robert Keohane sums up the contractual tenor of this analysis as follows:

> Institutionalists do not elevate international regimes to mythical positions of authority over states: on the contrary such regimes are established by states to achieve their purposes. Facing dilemmas of coordination and collaboration under conditions of interdependence, governments demand international institutions to enable them to achieve their interests through limited collective action.[8]

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[7] See Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society* (London: MacMillan, 1977) and Kai Alderson and Andrew Hurrell (eds) *Hedley Bull on International Society* (London: Macmillan, 2000).

[8] Robert O. Keohane, "Institutionalist Theory and the Realist Challenge after the Cold War," in David A. Baldwin (ed.), *Neorealism and Neoliberalism: The Contemporary Debate* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), pp. 273-4.

This perspective has proved very influential.[9] 'New' liberals and 'new' realists alike argued that: a) norms matter; and b) they are a product of (rather than a constraint on) the self-interest of states. For realists norms are imposed by the strong (whom the norms favour) on the weak (who, in turn, follow them out of a rational interest in avoiding punishment). For liberal institutionalists, international norms are public goods: common norms help self-interested egoists overcome collective action problems.[10] In an important sense institutionalism merely restated long-standing themes first highlighted by the Grotians, but this restatement made a number of distinctive contributions: it effected a shift in the discipline away from the often inconclusive debates between classical liberals and classical realists (a shift that the Grotian writers had attempted but had failed to achieve); it introduced a degree of analytic clarity previously lacking in discussions of the normative elements of international society; it provided a robust explanatory framework, supplanting an older tradition that had started with *already* socialized actors and hence had tended toward circular explanations (any inconvenient fact could be subsumed under the residual category of cultural influences) and which broke down completely when faced with questions of conflict and change; it could claim a certain elegance in its attempt to explain both conflict and cooperation within a single conceptual framework; it brought the study of international relations into closer contact with other strands of political and social thought also influenced by the 'new institutionalism'; and - for good or ill - it provided the analysis of norms in international society with apparently firm foundations in the mathematical formalism of rational choice theory.

Although the linguistic analogy can be found occasionally in Grotian writings and elsewhere, it comes into its own during the third phase of the norm debate. This phase got underway in the late 1980s as the rationalist approach to norms came under sustained challenge by social constructivism. Constructivism is a loose cluster of approaches that argue for the pre-eminence of normative factors in international politics.[11] Although constructivists debate endlessly over the nature of international 'reality,' the conditions under which shared norms and meanings matter in world politics, whether the appropriate level of analysis is states or individuals or language itself, as well as whether the ultimate goal of constructivism is better social science or the critical subversion of established discourses, they are united in their criticism of rationalist interpretations of international norms. "Norms," write Kratochwil and Ruggie,

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[9] For good recent overviews of regime theory"s contributions see Hasencleaver, Andreas, Peter Mayer, and Volker Rittberger. *Theories of International Regimes*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); and, Marc A. Levy, Oran R. Young and Michael Zurn, "The Study International Regimes," *European Journal of International Relations*, 1(1995), pp. 267-330

[10] Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in World Political Economy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984). More generally see Edna Ullman Margalit, *The Emergence of Norms* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977).

[11] In addition to the works already cited in footnote # 3, key texts include: Nicholas G. Onuf, *World of Our Making: Rules and Rule in Social Theory and International Relations* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1989); Freidrich Kratochwil, *Norms, Rules,, and Decisions: On the Conditions of Practical and Legal Reasoning in International Relations and Domestic Affairs*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Martha Finnemore, *National Interests in International Society*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996); Audie Klotz, *Norms in International Politics: The Struggle Against Apartheid*, (London: Cornell University Press, 1995), Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Good collections of essays include: Peter J. Katzenstein (ed.) *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996); Yosef Lapid and Friedrich Kratochwil (eds.) *The Return of Culture and Identity in IR Theory*, (Boulder: Lynne Reinner, 1997). The following are a sampling of useful articles: Emanuel Adler, "Seizing the Middle Ground: Constructivism in World Politics," *European Journal of International Relations*, vol. 3, no. 3 (1997), pp. 319-65; Jeffrey T. Checkel, "The Constructivist Turn in International Relations Theory," *World Politics*, vol. 50, no. 2, (1998), pp. 324-48; Alex Wendt, "Anarchy Is What States Make Of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics," *International Organization,* vol. 46, no. 2, (1992), pp. 391-425 and "Constructing International Politics," *International Security*, vol. 20, no. 1 (1995), pp. 71-81.

may 'guide' behaviour, they may 'inspire' behaviour, they may 'rationalize' or 'justify' behaviour, they may express 'mutual expectations' about behaviour, or they may be ignored. But they do not effect cause in the sense that a bullet through the heart causes death or an uncontrolled surge in the money supply causes price inflation.[12]

Constructivism has been an important development in the study of international norms for at least three reasons. First, it has brought rules and institutions *in themselves* (rather than as reflections of material interests) back into focus. Secondly, it has re-emphasized the proposition that international institutions are the products of human activity and hence subject to change. In both these respects, constructivism elaborates on notions that had long been central to the Grotian perspective. The third contribution, however, is more distinctive. Unlike the Grotians, constructivists draw our attention to norms that shape action even while they remain transparent to the authors of those actions. The Grotians had long recognized the importance of tacit norms and unspoken rules, e.g., the rules of the game governing superpower conflict during the Cold War. But the notion that behaviour could be patterned by constraints *of which actors themselves are unaware* is alien to this tradition.

Unfortunately, constructivism - or at least prominent strands within it - pose a threat to norm-oriented international relations scholarship. This threat arises because constructivism has become so firmly intertwined with the use of the linguistic analogy. Linguistic metaphors are invoked to justify the study of norms in international society, to argue that the norms of international society are productive rather than merely constraining, and to justify a particular methodological approach to the study of international norms more familiar in textual interpretation. Although deeply sympathetic to constructivist goals and arguments, I find the linguistic analogy itself problematic.

We are currently located in a fourth phase, one characterized by eclecticism. New interpretations are emerging that take partial account of constructivist arguments but on the whole remain true to rationalist presuppositions. In general, actions are understood as the *resultant* of consequentialist calculations and non-consequentialist imperatives.[13] Individuals *can* act against common norms - whatever these may be - but it is personally and perhaps politically costly to do so. We find this approach in the suggestion that norms and ideas can facilitate bargaining, reduce the costs of reaching an agreement, or contribute to equilibrium by making some bargaining solutions more salient than others (these arguments stay very close to the rational institutionalist perspective outlined above).[14] We see it at work in accounts of international law which hold that law is broadly efficacious because it is costly to violate – "at bottom, all norms and obligations are 'political'; their observance or deliberate violation are political acts, considered as part of a nation's foreign policy and registering cost and advantage within that policy."[15] Goertz and Diehl elevate eclecticism to the status of a methodological principle when they stipulate: "to demonstrate the positive impact of a norm, it is necessary to control for self-interest."[16] In general, eclecticism is marked by a turning away from meta-theory toward an application of normative theory to concrete case studies.

Contemporary eclecticism on the role of norms in international society is problematic. Partly this is because contemporary eclecticism merely bolts sociological elements onto essentially economic modes of analysis. More importantly, contemporary eclecticism neglects its own micro-foundations in the drive to produce empirical results. The linguistic analogy is not so much avoided as suppressed. The danger

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[12]   Friedrich Kratochwil and J.G. Ruggie, "International Organization: The State of the Art on the Art of the State," *International Organization*, vol. 40, no. 4, (1986), p. 767.

[13]   For general statements of this kind of logic see Jon Elster, *The Cement of Society: A Study of Social Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, *Rediscovering Institutions: The Organizational Basis of Politics* (New York: Free Press, 1989).

[14]   See Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane (eds) *Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions, and Political Change* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

[15]   Louis Henkin, *How Nations Behave: Law and Foreign Policy*, 2nd ed., (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), p. 51; more generally pp. 49-87.

[16]   Gary Goertz and Paul F. Diehl, "Toward a Theory of International Norms: Some Conceptual and Measurement Issues," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 36, No. 4, (1992), p. 644.

here is not that the resulting incoherence will spark a reaction - such a reaction is inevitable and probably even desirable - but rather than this reaction will target not only overly-eclectic approaches but also norm-oriented international relations research in general.

Why the Linguistic Analogy is Misguided

There are many reasons to be dissatisfied with the linguistic analogy. Here are seven of them:

(1)   The linguistic analogy does not take sufficient account of the *shallowness* of international norms. If I were to make up entirely new rules of grammar, or decide that when *I* play chess the king will be permitted the same range of movement as the queen, I would no longer be speaking English or playing chess. States, in contrast, are still playing the game of international politics even where its conventions are broken or new ones invented. Indeed, historically, it is the breaking of previously accepted norms that is a far more important mechanism of normative change in international society than is the twentieth-century pattern of multilateral negotiation. The rules of international society lie very close to the surface. They are subject to much more strategic manipulation that the linguistic analogy would suggest.[17]

(2)   A related point: the linguistic analogy does not take sufficient account of the *stakes* involved in international norm-formation. Whereas the discursive rules making speech acts intelligible are not responsible for any loss of life or property entailed by these vessels of intention, the content of international norms impact directly on the fortunes of states, individuals, corporations, and peoples. Because this impact is direct and highly visible, especially to those negatively affected, there is much less room for the free play of signification that lends credence to political interpretations founded on the linguistic analogy. The engine-room of 'international social construction' is powered by both norms *and* interests, symbols *and* strategies. While it is wrong for international relations scholars to focus exclusively on the latter, it would be equally wrong to underplay the power-political dimensions of international norms. To understand the social dimension of international politics we need to understand the politics of international society.

(3)   It is an article of faith amongst proponents of the linguistic analogy that a clear distinction can be drawn between 'causal' and 'constitutive' relationships, with language serving as the realm in which 'constitutive' relationships are most clearly visible. Conceptually speaking, this distinction is not nearly as clear and self-evident as constructivists would have us believe. Worse yet, there is a significant degree of confusion in the use of these terms. "Identities are the basis of interests," writes Alexander Wendt.[18] But what does 'identity' signify here? Does it refer to being a state as opposed to a non-state actor, as legally defined by the category of sovereign statehood? Or is it a more substantive concept used to designate the most important collective values which inform societal perceptions of the national interest? Given the latter understanding, examples of which include notions of 'America as leader of the free world' or current – bitter - debates over Israel's identity as a secular or religious state, state identities are undoubtedly an extremely important *causal* influence on state interests. But it is not clear that norms delineating what it means to be a sovereign state impinge quite as strongly or continuously on concrete policy outcomes.

(4)   The linguistic analogy tends to efface an important methodological distinction between a *norm*, which exists as a behavioural claim on social actors, and a *norm formulation*, which is a statement

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[17]   See the discussion on the two dimensions of structure in William H. Sewell Jr. "A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency, and Transformation," *American Journal of Sociology* vol. 98, no. 1 (1992), pp. 1-29. See also Robert Wuthnow, *Meaning and Moral Order, Explorations in Cultural Analysis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

[18]   Wendt, "Anarchy," p. 398.

about what norms are currently in force and about what demands they place on actors.[19] Limiting our attention to the sphere of discourse can lead all too easily to a confusion between the propositional content of norm *formulations* and propositions about *norms*.

(5) A second methodological point: as far as cultural artifacts go, foreign policy documents are rather impoverished. They only rarely benefit from a close textual reading. Many factors - the demands of political partisanship, the rapid pace of political developments, the natural limits on reflection imposed by the need to solve pressing practical problems, the fact that politicians have to play to multiple foreign and domestic constituencies, the bureaucratic compromises that so often lie underneath final verbal formulations - mitigate against looking at foreign policy documents as 'foundational texts' imbued with multiple levels of meaning and productive of a broader social sensibility.

(6) More substantively, the linguistic analogy is problematic because it collapses the diversity of norms that operate within international society. For instance, it tends to flatten out distinctions between legal norms, norms which are not legally binding but which bear some of the hallmarks of international law ('soft law'), expressions of principle that figure prominently in the rhetoric of particular politicians, or that are characteristic of a particular period or national foreign policy tradition, and commentators' interpretations of the normative state-of-play. Because the linguistic analogy draws our attention to *meaning* it neglects the institutional framework within which, and through which, this meaning is transformed into concrete normative claims on state actors. For contingent historical reasons, this 'translation' is today effected largely through the institution of international law. Something of the specificity of contemporary international society is lost if we look on law as one more realm of discourse in which is inscribed a particular image of the society of states. This is part of what international law is and does, but not all.

(7) The linguistic analogy is problematic because it abandons the search for causal mechanisms through which international norms emerge and are consolidated. For proponents of discourse-oriented analysis, this criticism is a *non sequiter*. For critics, it is a knock-down punch because the stating of causal relationships is seen as the *sine quo non* of social science. This is a big issue and a full discussion would take us far afield. My own position is this. I am sympathetic to the view - characteristic of proponents of the linguistic analogy - that 'how is it possible?' questions are just as legitimate as 'why is it that?' questions. Moreover, I would agree that answering these two types of questions calls for different methods and different standards of proof. However, in contrast to many who make use of the linguistic analogy to ground their inquiry into international society, I am not willing to abandon questions of the latter type. The main reason for this reluctance is that I can see no way to license attempts to answer 'what is to be done?' questions without knowledge of causal mechanisms - however provisional, incomplete, and uncertain. Because the linguistic analogy casts international relations scholars in the role of *grammarians* of international political discourses (albeit discourse understood broadly enough to include not only words and figures of speech but also regularized practices of international intercourse), it leaves precious little ground on which a persuasive case can be built up for or against particular courses of action, either on pragmatic or on normative grounds.

These seven criticisms are suggestive of the kinds of problems that await us if we study international society through the lens of the linguistic analogy. They are listed in no particular order, and I make no great claims to originality on any single point. Nor should this list be taken as exhaustive. In particular, there are three significant omissions. It is quite common to critique constructivism (broadly construed) on either of the two following grounds: a) it denies the existence of the real world, or b) it lacks rigorous methodological standards. Both criticisms are ill-informed. A more subtle critique runs as follows: the linguistic analogy is misguided not because of what it *says* but because it is wrong to ground

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[19]   Georg von Wright, *Norm and Action: A Logical Inquiry* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), p. 93.

social theories on presumptive or analogical reasoning in the first place. I do not include this in the above list because I believe all social theories to be grounded *to some extent* on guiding metaphors. This is a crucial point. It is precisely the fact that such metaphors are unavoidable that makes finding a way to talk seriously about the norms of international society *without* invoking the linguistic analogy such an important task.

III.   Beyond the Linguistic Analogy: The Primacy of Practical Reason

        In this section I present an alternative account of the role of norms in international life that dispenses with the linguistic analogy. I elaborate this approach in response to the three basic questions that any account of international norms must answer: (1) how do norms influence actions; (2) why do actors choose to follow norms; and (3) how do norms change?

How do norms influence actions?

        To answer this question we must revive the category of practical reason.[20] Aristotle provides a convenient starting point for this discussion, defining practical reason as deliberation that concerns "the things brought about by our own efforts, but not always in the same way,… e.g. questions of medical treatment or of money-making."[21] Practical reason corresponds roughly, though not exactly, to what we might today refer to as the sphere of instrumental rationality. "For a doctor does not deliberate whether he shall heal, nor an orator whether he shall persuade, nor a statesman whether he shall produce law and order, nor does anyone else deliberate about his end. They assume the end and consider how and by what means it is to be attained."[22] Decisions in business, politics, or military affairs are pre-eminent examples of practical reasoning. In these spheres of life, as Clausewitz put it, "the light of reason is refracted in a manner quite different from that which occurs in academic speculation."[23]
        Aristotle explained practical reasoning by way of an analogy to theoretical reason, the main difference being that practical reason culminates in an action rather than a proposition.[24] Aristotle is by no means clear on this issue, but one interpretation of what he had in mind is a syllogism that transmits the motivational force of its premises to the action which serves as its conclusion, just as a valid logical deduction preserves the truth of its premises into its conclusion. To use G.H. von Wright's example, a practical syllogism might look something like this:

> I want to make the hut habitable
> Unless I heat the hut, it will not become habitable.
> Therefore, I must heat the hut.[25]

True, it is rare that a chain of practical reasoning is spelled out quite so explicitly, much less in syllogistic form. But it is equally true that part of what happens when we deem an action to be reasonable is that we

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[20]   Cf. Friedrich V. Kratochwil, *Rules, Norms, and Decisions: On the Conditions of Practical and Legal Reasoning in International Relations and Domestic Affairs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press). Although I follow Kratochwil's lead in focusing on the category of practical reason, my own argument differs significantly from his. In his own work, Kratochwil makes much use of the linguistic analogy critiqued in this paper.

[21]   Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, Book III, chapter 3, p. 1112b. Text used is J.L. Akrill, *Aristotle"s Ethics* (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), p. 81.

[22]   ibid.

[23]   Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 113.

[24]   See *De Motu Animalium* chapter 7. This selection is also included in Akrill, *Aristotle's Ethics*.

[25]   G.H. von Wright, *Practical Reason* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), p. 3.

grasp the line of thought leading from the agent's desires through the (perceived) facts of the case to the act in question.[26]

Several important points fall out immediately. First, it is quite clearly wrong to make a sharp distinction between 'ideational' norms and 'material' interests. Both should be understood as reasons for action, as premises in an imputed practical syllogism. Secondly, neither norms nor interests nor any other reason for action can be understood as a cause in a deterministic sense. To be a *real* choice, a decision must be made *between* rival alternatives. Therefore, acts are performed for one set of reasons *and in spite of reasons for acting otherwise*. Mechanistic explanations of human action are only appropriate as metaphorical descriptions of aggregate behaviour.

Third, the idea that practical reasoning is a kind of internal dialogue, rather than a calculation, highlights the *complexity* of decision-making. True, sometimes we speak about reasons for acting in simple terms, often in terms reminiscent of the balancing of physical quantities or forces. Such choices we characterize as a kind of mental tug-of-war. Joseph Raz refers to the kinds of reasons for acting that figure prominently in decisions of this type 'first-order' reasons.[27] The defining feature of first-order reasons is that they can be traded off against one another. This is what we mean when we say that we act 'on the balance of reasons' and it is the *only* kind of reason included in rational choice models. But not all reasons are of this type. As Raz points out, some reasons for acting *exclude* other considerations from the decision-making process. Alliances, for instance, are pre-commitments. A treaty of alliance enters into the balance of reasons for or against intervening in armed conflict, but it also does more than this. It excludes, or ought to exclude, considerations that would otherwise arise in the absence of the pre-commitment. Philosophers talk about second-order reasons 'trumping' other considerations - not because they are intrinsically more powerful than other reasons but because they decide the issue independently of the strength of the first-order reasons already on the table.

Norms are a lot like promises, i.e., standing commitments to act in particular ways or refrain from acting in particular ways should a given set of conditions arise. As such, norms simplify decision-making. By abbreviating potentially long chains of practical deliberation, norms provide standing reasons for action, ready-to-hand answers to the question 'what is to be done?'. Norms are *informative*, whereas first-order reasons are not. As Wittgenstein put it, "a rule stands there like a sign-post."[28] Moral norms tell us how to behave in light of our values. Legal norms tell us what we ought to do in light of the law. Social norms tell us what we ought to do to the extent that we care about what other people think. Pragmatic norms, or maxims, tell us what we ought to do in light of the way the world works. Norms also influence decision-making by shifting deliberation onto another plane. In addition to asking what we would most like to see happen, we must also ask how the situation at hand is to be described, which norms apply, whether we face conflicting obligations (and if so, how we are to resolve them).

This discussion helps us to understand the complex and non-additive ways that norms and interests interact in concrete decision-making contexts. Consider the following example. According to Ronald Reagan's memoirs, the decision to encourage Japan to accept 'voluntary export restraints' in the early 1980s was arrived at as follows:

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[26]   Since the 1950s, there has been a resurgence in philosophical interest in the notion of practical reason and related topics. I have found the following general works useful: G.E.M. Anscombe, *Intentionality* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1963), R.M. Hare, *Practical Inferences* (London: Macmillan, 1971); G.H. von Wright, *Norm and Action: A Logical Inquiry* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963) and *Explanation and Understanding* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971); Robert Audi, *Action, Intentionality, and Reason* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

[27]   Joseph Raz, *Practical Reason and Norms* (London: Hutchinson of London, 1975). The rest of this paragraph owes much to this source.

[28]   Ludwig Wittegenstein, *Philosphical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, 3rd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1953), p. 39 [remark # 85].

As I listened to the debate, I wondered if there might be a way in which we could maintain the integrity of our position in favour of free trade while at the same time doing something to help Detroit and ease the plight of thousands of laid-off assembly workers.

The Japanese weren't playing fair in the trade game. But I knew what quotas might lead to; I didn't want to start an all-out trade war, so I asked if anyone present had any suggestions for striking a balance between the two positions. [George Bush] spoke up:

'We're *all* for free enterprise, but would any of us find fault if Japan announced without any request from us that they were going to *voluntarily* reduce their exports of autos to America?'

… I liked George's idea and I told the cabinet that I'd heard enough and would make a decision…[after a strong hint was delivered to the Japanese government, Japanese exports of automobiles to the US market were strictly limited on a 'voluntary' basis from 1981 to 1987].[29]

Whether or not this vignette is historically accurate, it exemplifies the kind of practical reasoning that is typical in political deliberation. Here, first-order reasons provide *prima facie* (i.e., defeasible) reasons for acting. National economic interest and domestic political advantage provided first-order reasons for Reagan and his cabinet to consider imposing quotas on Japanese automobile imports. The first-order reasons put forward against the imposition of quotas amount to a two-part value statement: national integrity in foreign policy is a good thing, and so is free trade ("We're *all* for free enterprise," enthuses George Bush).

Reagan and his cabinet are in the uncomfortable position of having to choose between two contradictory courses of action, both backed by good reasons. When faced with a conflict among rival first-order desires we try to determine, either quantitatively or qualitatively, their relative strengths. The technical tools of decision analysis formalize this otherwise intuitive process of 'weighing up the options.' If the balance of reasons tips toward one side or the other, we have grounds for action. But if the two sides are equal, if the reasons for acting are incommensurate (as in this case), or if we are uncertain about our ability to gauge them accurately, then we must look for additional reasons to act that will defeat or otherwise qualify first-order reasons for action (this process can be seen in the second paragraph of the example we are discussing). The statement 'the Japanese weren't playing fair in the trade game' suggests a reason - 'they had it coming to them' - that might have justified transgressing the free trade norm, had it come to imposing quotas. But in the end, a clearer second-order reason emerges - the political maxim 'quotas lead to trade wars.' This statement expresses a general belief about the international political economy, it is a pragmatic rule-of-thumb. The option selected here, threatening Japan with unilateral action if it did not impose 'voluntary' export restraints, redefines the decision so that the first-order reasons for acting can be attained while the second-order reasons for not acting can be circumvented.

The key to understanding the role of norms in political decision-making is to start with the logical structure of intentional action. In this sense, the perspective outlined here is akin to rational choice theory. Where it differs is in its recognition of a rich diversity of reasons for action, not all of which can be smoothly traded off against one another. In short, there are a number of different ways in which norms affect decision-making, it is fruitless to search for the one *essential* mode through which this influence is exercised.

Why do actors choose to follow norms?

In the previous section we described what it means for norms to influence decisions once actors choose to act normatively. This does not yet explain *why* actors choose to follow norms. This is a crucial question. Indeed, it is the fact that there is a fair chance that actors will *not* choose to act normatively that

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[29]   Quoted in Peter H. Lindert and Thomas A. Pugel, *International Economics*, 10th ed. (Toronto: Irwin, 1996), p. 141.

distinguishes social rules from, say, natural laws. Although people follow norms for all sorts of different reasons, three categories stand out.

There is no mystery about the first category. Some norms approximate first-order reasons to behave in particular ways, and take their place alongside other first-order reasons for acting. These beliefs are held so deeply that they become part of who we are or who we want to be. We call them our values. Values are 'first-order reasons' because, like personal tastes and objective interests, they are convenient places to stop if asked to account for one's actions. The question *why* we are disposed to act on particular first-order reasons is an interesting one - certainly in the Western intellectual tradition self-examination is itself a valued activity - but to query first-order reasons in a decision-making context is to move the discussion beyond the realm of the practical. The tough choices involved in balancing morality and expediency arise where norms approximate first-order reasons for action.

Second, many norms have force because, although they are not in themselves values, they are tied more or less directly to first-order reasons for acting. Rules alone do not *make* a game. To be a game, there also has to be a value or an interest or an enjoyment factor that makes following the rules worthwhile, and against which these rules can be judged, critiqued and (potentially) modified. In social life we commit ourselves to rules, and hence feel bound by them, because we can see that, over the long term, they will provide the most practicable framework for realizing first-order objectives. As Hedley Bull put it in the context of international law, "the importance of international law does not rest on the willingness of states to abide by its principles to the detriment of their interests, but in the fact that they so often judge it in their interests to conform to it."[30] This interest-oriented explanation for why actors follow norms allows plenty of room for institutionalist concerns. However, it is worth making three points that are not often made within the institutionalist literature. First, the relationship between norms and self-interest is conditional and subject to change. One has to be careful not to confuse change that results from change in first-order reasons for action with change that results from changing contexts of action. Both are possible whereas only the latter is intelligible to the game-theoretic foundations of institutionalism. Second, the 'interests' served by norms should be understood to include all first-order motivations. These first-order motivations include values as well as material interests. An agent might value altruism and therefore perceive an 'interest' in promoting explicit norms or social institutions that cultivate altruism in himself and in others. However, and this is my third point, even where agents adopt norms for instrumental reasons, the logical status of the norm remains that of a second-order reason for acting. What is crucial here is that norms, even those grounded by their contribution to the achievement of first-order desires, are not themselves first-order reasons, to be balanced against other considerations at the point of decision. Most rational choice interpretations of norm-governed behaviour make the mistake of obliterating this key distinction.

Beyond instrumental reasons for following norms, some norms exert an influence 'unconsciously.' It is in these cases that norms seem to construct rather than constrain actors. And it is here that the linguistic analogy gains its purchase. But although linguistic rules are a good example of what it means to follow a norm unconciously, they are not necessarily the best prototypes of this genre of norms. Instead, it is possible to argue that we follow norms 'unconsciously' in the same way that we shift gears while driving 'without thinking about it': in each case, the unconscious activity is part and parcel of an act or activity that *is* intended. To deal with this issue fully we have to move beyond the Aristotelian paradigm that construes practical reason as a kind of logical dialogue conducted internally.[31] This model of practical reason can be deeply misleading because it implies that any decision that cannot be represented as a judicious weighing of options or a deduction from the general to the particular is in some sense a derangement or a deviation.   But practical reason is not like that. "Practice has a logic which is not that of the logician," writes Pierre Bourdieu.

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30   Bull, *Anarchical Society*, p. 140.
31   This theme is developed at length in Roy Edgly, *Reason in Theory and Practice* (London: Hutchison & Co., 1969).

… This has to be acknowledged in order to avoid asking of it more logic than it can give, thereby condemning oneself to wring incoherences out of it or to thrust a forced coherence upon it… This practical logic - practical in both senses - is able to organize all thoughts, perceptions and actions by means of a few generative principles…only because its whole economy… presupposes a sacrifice of rigour for the sake of simplicity and generality.[32]

In judging the reasonableness of a course of action, we demand neither rigid consistency nor complete knowledge. Instead, we demand *consonance*. Consonance, in its technical, musical sense means 'a simultaneous combination of tones accepted as being in a state of repose.' Analogously, we deem an act to be reasonable if it is in keeping with those considerations that present themselves as relevant in the course of our deliberations. We deem an actor to be reasonable if he or she acts on a set of beliefs and dispositions that in some sense conform to one another and are attuned to the types of situation that the actor is likely to encounter.

The beliefs that are relevant to practical reason are not rigidly systematic but rather exist as a loosely interconnected web. Particular constellations within this inferential network are activated by the task at hand. All norms are molecular, not because norms are internally complex (though sometimes this also is the case) but rather because norms are intrinsically *incomplete*. They are *always* dependent on other norms, beliefs, and practices to define key terms, to delineate their conditions of application and scope, to name the state of affairs that actually obtains, to specify how the behaviour called for is to be carried out, and in various other ways to 'fill in the gaps' required for concrete enactment. As a consequence, practical reason is embedded in a social matrix: the reasonableness of alternative lines of action is always judged against the backdrop of extant rules, practices, power relations, and ways of talking about the world.

Consider 'multilateralism' as an example of an international norm. John Gerard Ruggie has written persuasively that multilateralism is the central norm of late-twentieth century international society.[33] Searching for an appropriate definition, Ruggie suggests the following: "multilateralism is an institutional form which coordinates relations among three or more states on the basis of 'generalized' principles which specify appropriate conduct for classes of actions, without regard to the particularistic interests of the parties or the strategic exigencies that may exist in any specific instance." This is a linguistically expressible norm-formulation, to use von Wright's phrase, *not* a norm. Any verbally articulated 'norm' is a linguistic *representation* of the entire ensemble of social practices, explicit rules, and ways of talking about the world that make actions appear self-evidently appropriate to particular settings.

The normative phenomenon of multilateralism is much richer and more complex than a straightforward definition can capture. In the first instance, multilateralism is an institutionally-embedded 'ready answer' to foreign policy problems. In the words of Ann Swidler, "a culture is not a unified system which pushes action in a consistent direction. Rather it is more like a 'tool kit' or repertoire from which actors select differing pieces for constructing lines of action."[34] The word 'schema' or 'template' better conveys what is going on at this pre-deliberative level. Drawing on the literature in cognitive psychology, Deborah Welch Larson summarizes four effects of such schemas.[35] First, schemas influence the initial encoding of information; second, where information is lacking, schemas operate to fill in the missing pieces; third, schemas help participants to grasp the essential features of situations and suggest concrete actions; finally, schemas help policy-makers to select from the available policy alternatives by generating expectations about how other actors will react to various policy options. Peter Katzenstein captures this level nicely when he contrasts German and Japanese responses to international crises:

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[32]   Pierre Bourdieu, *Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 86.

[33]   John Gerard Ruggie, *Constructing the World Polity* (New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 109.

[34]   Ann Swidler, "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies," *American Sociological Review*, vol. 51, no. 2, (1986), p. 277.

[35]   Deborah Welch Larson, "The Role of Belief Systems and Schemas in Foreign Policy Decision-Making," *Political Psychology*, vol. 15, no. 1, (1994), pp. 24-5.

'[w]hat do other European states and the United States think and want?' is the first question in Bonn and Berlin; but 'what will others think?' is not the first question to cross the mind of Japanese bureaucrats.[36] The former is multilateralist at a level that the latter is not.

Multilateralism is also *more* than this. It is embedded in extensive, concrete treaty provisions. The pattern of these formal commitments gives rise to legal rights and obligations. Lawyers reason with norms, and determinations of rights and obligations hang on what the treaties (and other sources of international law) actually say on specific matters. This becomes especially important as the positive law in a particular issue area becomes more complex and where forums of dispute resolution become increasingly judicial, as can be seen in the role of the European Court of Justice in European integration.[37] This claims neither too much nor too little for international legal obligations. It does not claim too much, because legal definitions are always in contention with non-legal definitions of the situation and because, furthermore, legal discourse is amenable to strategic manipulation. It does not claim too little, because it recognizes that legal discourse is highly structured and contains standards of validity which are not infinitely malleable. International law does not influence the risks a government is willing to run to pursue a policy objective, but it does help to ensure that any potential costs are paid in full. This (partial) autonomy arises because of the existence of a transnational interpretive community which Schachter has called the 'invisible college of international lawyers' with its own (highly sophisticated) norms of interpretation and argument.[38]

Finally, the discourse of multilateralism paints a picture of international society. Such representations have an important communicative function. The expression of multilateralism as a norm of international society registers in concrete form the degree of consensus that exists among states about their common values. Moreover, the existence of formal norms shape the signals that states send and receive. Striking a bilateral deal meant something different in the 19th century than it does now; mobilizing troops without communicating to one's neighbours the reasons for military action is far more threatening where confidence-building norms have been explicitly articulated. Representations also indirectly influence what actions can reasonably be undertaken. The image of international society embodied in multilateralism lends coherence to actions and institutions that would otherwise appear disparate and disjointed. Problem-solving that 'fits' within the narrative of multilateralism is far likelier to succeed than efforts that render this narrative incoherent.

How do norms change?

As a social phenomenon, norms are paradoxical: they are both a source of social stability over time and a locus of rapid change (think of fads and fashions). How can we account for this puzzling dichotomy? A useful framework can be found in the insight that social change results from the confluence of three distinct processes: innovation, selection, and institutionalization.[39]

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[36] Peter J. Katzenstein, *Cultural Norms and National Security: Police and Military in Postwar Japan*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 27.

[37] J.H.H. Weiler, "The Transformation of Europe," *Yale Law Journal*, vol. 100 (1991), pp. 2403-83; Laurence R. Helfer and Anne-Marie Slaughter, "Toward a Theory of Effective Supranational Adjudication," *Yale Law Journal*, vol. 107, no. 2 (1997), pp. 273-391.

[38] Oscar Schachter, "The Invisible College of International Lawyers," *Northwestern University Law Review*, vol. 72, no. 2, (1977), pp. 217-226.

[39] See Hendrick Spruyt, *The Sovereign State and Its Competitors: An Analysis of Systems Change* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996) and Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change," *International Organization*, 52(4) 1998, pp. 887-917. Although similar to these approaches, my own point of view chimes much more closely with that of Robert Wuthnow in *Communities of Discourse: Ideology and Social Structure in the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and European Socialism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989). These perspectives should be sharply distinguished from various attempts to import evolutionary models into the social sciences. On evolutionary approaches to

There are a number of different avenues to normative innovation in international society. Although there is little point in searching for a general theory of the *emergence* of new norms and social ideas, some observations are possible. First, it is worth noting that because norms are molecular, new norms rarely emerge fully-formed. More typically, norm formulations or conceptual schemas that are appropriate to one area of social life are transposed into other areas. Alternatively, the scope or content of a widely accepted norm changes as the result of shifting meanings of key terms within it. Although clearly 'ideational' or 'discursive' causes are very important at this level, material resources are not irrelevant. A certain amount of slack or 'free play' is required for innovation to occur. In societies or during periods where such slack is not available, innovation is less likely. Finally, it is worth pointing out that 'state actors' (however one wishes to define that term) are rarely the *source* of new ideas. More often, new norms gain ground domestically either as a result of the emergence of a vibrant intellectual movement or a new social group. Intellectuals, non-governmental groups, or other members of 'civil society' are key innovators in domestic as well as international society. However, highlighting the role of such actors at this stage does not mean that they 'cause' international norms. What is determinative of the ultimate fate of an idea is not where it comes from (interesting and important as this question is), but rather what happens to it after it has emerged.

The second set of processes to consider are the myriad ways in which social environments select for certain institutional forms. At one level, social ideas have to 'fit' with the way the world actually works in order to have any chance of being taken up by important social actors. The recalcitrance of the social and material world to our efforts to operate within it or manipulate it is the first screen that any conceptual innovation must pass. Second, social actors will tend to support and promote new norms and institutions that work to their advantage or at least do not work overtly against them. This 'self-interest' screen has long been the mainstay of political analysis but it operates much more subtly than pluralist models of political life tend to suggest. For one thing, prevailing norms and institutions are themselves important ingredients in how self-interest is perceived and conceptualized. Also, actors can be expected to think strategically and with foresight about the way the world is likely to evolve and adapt accordingly. This leads to recurrent patterns of unintended consequences that can be grouped under the notion of 'threshold effects.'[40] The third set of screens are symbolic. New norms and institutions that 'fit' within existing narratives and conceptual frameworks are more easily instantiated than those that challenge the coherence of the whole.

The crucial set of processes come under the heading of institutionalization, since institutionalization is what accounts for the stickiness of international norms. Here too there are two dimensions to be considered seriously. The first is the material dimension. Because the norms of international society are bound up with concrete arrangements for distributing resources and exercising authority norms have the ability to reproduce themselves over time, even in the face of resistance. But there is also a symbolic dimension to the resilience of international institutions. The centrality of this (elusive) area, summarized but not explained by the label 'legitimacy,' is an important theme within various 'dissident' voices in international relations. It is an area that international relations scholarship has underplayed in the past and it deserves to be the focus of much more sustained conceptual and empirical investigation in the future.

The picture that emerges of international normative change is much richer than the structural realism's power-political tectonics or neoliberalism's interest-based bargaining. It is also more fractured

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international change see Ann Florini, "The Evolution of International Norms," *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 40, no. 3, (1996), pp. 367-373.

[40] Formal models are particularly appropriate for such mechanisms. For a good general introduction see William H. Kaempfer and Anton D. Lowenburg, "Using Threshold Models to Explain International Relations," *Public Choice*, 73, No. 4, (1992), pp. 419-443. Much of the classic work in this vein can be found in Thomas Schelling, *Micromotives and Macrobehaviour* (Toronto: McLeod, 1978). Good empirical evidence exists for the existence of "tipping points", predicted by formal models of convention change. In addition to the discussion in Sikkink and Finnemore, see Gerry Mackie, "Ending Footbinding and Infibulation: A Convention Account," *American Sociological Review*, vol. 61, no. 6 (1996), pp. 999-1017.

and contingent. Because it focuses on the confluence of three distinct processes it cannot provide truly predictive statements about international social change. But this weakness is not a liability. For one thing a more historically-attuned approach is a useful corrective to the search for strongly predictive social theories. Second, there is still plenty of room within this conceptual framework for contingent, *local* generalizations to be made. It is in the ongoing dialogue between such local generalizations and the historical record that a fuller understanding of the social world emerges. Finally, the tripartite schema sketched above provides a loose framework of questions for understanding specific cases of institutional stability and change. Faced with an example of institutional stability it suggests that we ask three cross-cutting sets of questions: is there a steady flow of new ideas, and if not, why not? What aspects of an institution's material and symbolic environments reinforce or select for the current regime? Finally, how do existing institutions affect those environments, 'tipping the playing field' in their favour? Faced with an instance of change, the innovation-selection-institutionalization framework suggests that it is worth asking where the ideas came from (but tells us that origins do not account for consequences); it tells us to look for changes in the symbolic and/or material environment that opened up room for a new institution to emerge and caused a particular one to flourish; and, finally, it suggests that we pay close attention to the strategies of institionalization that have been pursued by social actors by which the new social institution have become entrenched. Although this framework cannot ground a robust predictive theory of international institutions, it does perform the two basic tasks of social science rather well: it (a) assists us in discerning which, if any, of the schemas of interpretation and templates of action that make up our current conceptual toolkit are ill-fitted to international reality and (b) helps situated actors to make sense of their own experiences.

To summarize, there is nothing metaphysical about the way norms structure social life. Norms enter into decision-making as parts of the ensemble against which the wisdom of particular courses of action are judged. We rarely focus our attention on the walls of the house we dwell in because we are at home in them and we conform our daily life to the setting they provide. But subtract the walls, and it would be hard to explain our daily peregrinations. It would be strange to say that the walls of a house *cause* us to place no more than three full-size sofas in our living room. Rather, we would say that given its layout and how we envision comporting ourselves in the living room, three sofas would be too many. If our desire to have three full-size sofas is very strong indeed, we might contemplate knocking down the wall separating the living room from the dining room. Change is always possible, as long as we are willing to bear the costs and inconvenience and effort required. These drawbacks pretty much sum up the reasons for the stickiness of *social* structures too, though here there is an added constraint of complexity. Perhaps a better architectural analogy would be the city. A city, its physical layout, its buildings, its transportation networks, the geography of its shopping neighborhoods and its seedier areas, both structure day to day activity and grow out of that activity. Cities are shaped by decentralized activities of numerous individuals. Local decisions ripple outward, interact with other local decisions, create new and unanticipated patterns of activity. The forces shaping patterns of growth and decline in cities are complex; they can be known only imperfectly. Hence we experience them as constraints, or, at least, as considerations, that lie outside the scope of our discretion.

Our knowledge of international society should be more like our knowledge of city streets. This knowledge exists at a number of different levels. At one level, our familiarity with our neighbourhood allows us to meet most practical needs 'without thinking.' We have no use for a map in order to get to the corner store. Maps are a kind of abstract knowledge, helpful for certain purposes. They come in handy when we want to record and systematize local knowledge, especially when we want to relate it to other bodies of local knowledge, when we want to navigate areas that are unfamiliar to us, and when we are passing knowledge on to new generations. At a further level of abstraction, we might also wish to know something about patterns that are characteristic of urban growth in general. A city is certainly shaped by 'forces' that can be discerned and studied on a comparative basis. Understanding these patterns allows us to understand why a particular city is as it is, deepens our appreciation of what is unique about it, helps us to anticipate (however imprecisely) where it might be heading, and, if we are in the town planning department, suggests what kinds of interventions might nudge its ongoing development along a desired

direction (while at the same time reminding us that our ability to shape such a complex evolving system is limited). But knowing these patterns is not the same thing as knowing the city. A city arises as these patterns unfold in a concrete setting, over a number of years, and in response to the concrete actions of countless individuals. To know a city in the present is to know its past, or at least to see the outline of this past as it is embodied in the present. It is the interaction of the general and the particular, the past and the present, that gives the city its character and makes it worth knowing at all. Much the same could be said of the social institutions that structure international politics.

IV.   Conclusion

Our social world has two principal dimensions to it - the symbolic and the material. These two strands of social life are intertwined in any given institution at any given point in time. Each has its own internal logic, its own means of reproduction and each contains within itself fissures, weaknesses, points where change is possible. If we were attracted by jargon, we might be tempted to call these two facets of social life 'mutually determinative' or 'co-constitutive.' But this would be to suggest too close an articulation between them. The kind of coupling that we see in social life is looser, less gravitational than it is ecological. We are not talking about two stars locked in an endless dance of mutual attraction but rather a symbiotic ecosystem composed of two species, independent but mutually reliant. Each population draws on different sets of environmental resources, grows or declines at different rates, but - crucially - the health and vitality of one population is crucial to the fecundity of the other. Max Weber understood this, though the metaphor he used to describe it - the famous 'switchman' metaphor - has misled generations of scholars. Instead of the unfruitful debate over the relative priority of material and ideal interests, we should focus instead on the kinds of dynamics that inhere in the symbolic dimension of social life, the kinds of dynamics that inhere in the resource dimension of social life, and the dynamics that characterize points of intersection between them.

Although it is not my intention to introduce one more paradigm into the already crowded lexicon of international relations theory, it is worth listing some of the disciplinary implications that adopting the kind of approach sketched here in place of the linguistic analogy would hold:

(1)   The framework offered here is rich enough to encompass multiple perspectives yet rigorous enough to avoid the problems associated with more eclectic approaches. By cementing the micro-foundations of international norms, it opens the way for a much-needed methodological pluralism in the study of international society.

(2)   The second advantage of the above approach is that it shifts attention decisively away from the question of whether international society is 'really' about norms or 'really' about interests. Instead, it suggests that we ought to focus on how power and principle *interact* in concrete settings. Accounts of international society that take both of these dimensions seriously can only enrich our understanding.

(3)   This approach emphasizes history. Proponents of classical approaches within international relations have long criticized the absence of a historical sensibility within positivist IR theory. Unfortunately, the same lack of attention can be discerned in much of contemporary constructivism as well. The approach sketched out here maintains that historically-embedded schemas and conceptual frameworks are central to understanding human action within concrete situations. The implications spill over into pedagogy: one of the aims of a social science education has to be cultivating judgement. In international relations such an education is best delivered through a close study of historical events.

(4)   The approach sketched here is relevant to the kinds of policy concerns that will likely predominate in the 21st century. Today, the important policy questions extend beyond simply how international agreements are negotiated to include how international norms can be effectively implemented, how compliance can be monitored, and whether a fundamental consonance among domestic political institutions and cultures is required to sustain the greatly expanded ambitions of international society in an era of globalization. In other words, we need to understand how and why states *internalize* norms. As long as the guiding metaphor for the study of international norms remains either the state or the contract, our attention is likely to remain focused strictly on behavioural compliance, *not* internalization.

(5)   Normative theory in international politics should cover two important areas that are currently treated as separate and indeed antithetical to one another. It ought to encompass both 'ethical' questions (i.e., moral inquiry into what ideas *should* guide our actions in international politics) and 'sociological' questions (i.e., empirical inquiry into how current ideas emerged and consolidated themselves). The kind of framework outlined above accommodates *both* sets of concerns.

If the kind of approach outlined here were to need a short-hand description, I would call it 'cognitive institutionalism.' It obviously owes much to the English School, and hence can be seen as a methodological contribution to the 'New English School' championed by Barry Buzan. It also shares strong affinities with the modernist constructivism of Alexander Wendt. But more important than these labels is the underlying commitment to think seriously about international society as an irreducible facet of social life whose mechanisms are *not* those of the state, *nor* those of the contract, *nor* those of language. This is the only way that we will come to understand international norms properly.