

# Week 8—Values: Theory and practice in IR

## Assigned Readings

Dunne text: Toni Erskine, “Normative IR Theory,” (ch. 13)

R. B. J. Walker (1995) “International Relations and the Concept of the Political,” in Ken Booth and Steve Smith, *International Relations Theory Today*, Oxford: Polity Press

William Wallace (1996) “Truth and Power, Monks and Technocrats: Theory and Practice in International Relations,” *Review of International Studies*. Vol. 22

# Rob Walker, IR, and Political Philosophy

# Rob Walker

- Recasts the idea of *the political* in IR theory
- Seeks to reveal normative (political) character of *all* theory



- things are never simply what they are
- All theories are normative (express some understanding of “what and where political life should be” Walker, p. 308)
- especially true of theories that claim to be non-normative (e.g. neorealist)

# Walker's Inside/Outside Story

## INSIDE

- Politics as something that happens inside the state
- An “authentic” statist community
- A space of specific normative ideals

## OUTSIDE

- A non-political non-space (a negation of normal assumptions about political life)
- A “discourse of absence made possible by a prior discourse of presence” (Walker, p. 308)

This False Dichotomy Largely a Result of Misreading  
Allegedly Core IR Thinkers, but especially...



# Best Represented in the work of Martin Wight

- English School of IR (1960)
- Realist by “default”
- Politics “inside” the state concerned with the “good life”
- IR theory concerned with what’s “outside”
- IR a theory of survival



# IR & The Bee Gees



“Whether you’re a brother or whether you’re a mother, You’re stayin’ alive, stayin’ alive. Feel the city breakin’ and everybody shakin’, And we’re stayin’ alive, stayin’ alive. Ah, ha, ha, ha, stayin’ alive, stayin’ alive.”



# Purpose of Walker's Critique?

- To expose the way in which the inside/outside reading freezes a historically & culturally particular version of politics into a permanent universal that conditions all possibilities
- This conception of politics is so pervasive that even its possible negation or change is seen as an extension of itself

# In his own words...

“Although theories of IR are certainly concerned with the transformative character of contemporary events, the terms used to capture these transformations — interdependence, integration, regime, world order, globalization and so on — betray the enormous authority of spatial imagery in this context. As with the images drawn from the experiences of *polis* and state, of boxes that can be called home, of a secular substitute for eternity in the unchanging sovereignty of states, it is far from clear that they capture the dynamics and fluidity of contemporary political life with much conviction” (p. 314).

Or a bit more succinctly...

“State sovereignty works because it has come to *seem to be* simply there, out in the world, demarcating the natural orders of here and there” (Walker, p. 322)

# Echoed in “post modern IR” Richard Ashley 1986

- IR theory still grounded in modernist and structuralist logic that “treat[s] the given order as the natural order”

So if the Inside/Outside story is not real in any empirical sense, where did it come from?

- A product of discursive practice
- E.g. born of language
- Hints at Walker's postmodern affinities
- And yet...



# He claims not to be Postmodern

- Even seeks to distance himself
- Rejects identity politics as an extension of existing “politics of little boxes”
- But is there any way out?
- Isn't IR (by Walker's own account) inescapably normative?

# Walker in Wider Context

- Helps to reorient IR theory after what Steve Smith calls its “bizarre 40 year detour from normative issues”
- but this can be a misleading claim

- IR never as non-normative as it seemed

E.g. Behaviouralists attacked traditionalists for being *too* normative

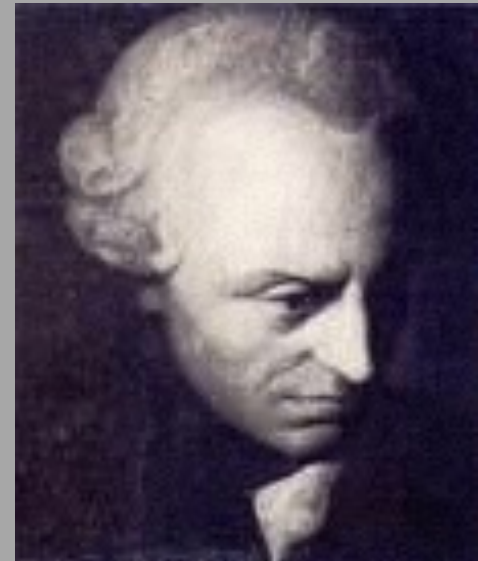
- and normative theory alive and well in what are now known as Neo-Kantian approaches

# Neo-Kantian IR (aka) “Normative Theory”

- Major figures: Mervyn Frost, Morris Cohen, Onora O’Neill, Charles Pogge, Charles Beitz, & Friedrich Kratochwil
- Embraces idea of a “split” between world of fact (non-normative) & world of theory (normative realm of rules & principles)
- constructivism seems premised on a similar distinction

# Immanuel Kant, 1724-1804

- Holds that there is a single true account for all moral considerations
- Cosmopolitan theory: humanity an *actual* community divided artificially by state boundaries





- Privileges justice over particular political & moral ideals
- Appeals to abstract notion of right

# Deontological argument

- Particular form of liberalism
- morality of action based on rules
- a rules-based ethics that commands obedience (e.g. a duty to protect human rights)
- Above all a theory about justice
- Indebted mostly to Kant for philosophical foundation
- But general ideas very familiar to modern liberals

# Should vs. Must

Categorical imperative vs.  
hypothetical imperative