


The Normativity of Global Ordering Practices

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This article integrates normative theoretical analysis into accounts of international order by connecting the study of international practice to debates about the nature and moral purpose of states' social association. Combining English School and social practice theory with insights from scholarship on colonialism, race, and empire, we conceptualize international order as a dynamic, contested, but often stable and durable, set of patterns of practice and show how they set ethical reference points and privilege certain claims over others in relation to legitimate agency and morally appropriate conduct. To allow for a grounded normative analysis of global ordering practices, we connect actors' capacity to exercise creative normative agency to debates about legitimate membership and morally appropriate conduct in international society. We highlight the normative significance of historical context for the study of international practices and illustrate our theoretical arguments with examples from various ordering practices, including international law, war, diplomacy, and economic practice, where actors frequently draw on foundational values to construct normative claims about inclusion and exclusion. At the same time, agents' creative capacity to alter existing and create new rights and obligations has transformed our thinking, acting, and arguing about the nature and moral purpose of world order.

Este artículo integra el análisis teórico normativo en los estudios sobre el orden internacional, conectando el estudio de la práctica internacional con los debates sobre la naturaleza y la finalidad moral de la asociación social de los Estados. Combinando la escuela inglesa y la teoría de la práctica social con ideas de la erudición sobre el colonialismo, la raza y el imperio, conceptualizamos el orden internacional como un conjunto de patrones de práctica dinámicos y controvertidos, pero a menudo estables y duraderos, y mostramos el modo en que establecen puntos de referencia éticos y privilegian ciertas reivindicaciones sobre otras en relación con la acción legítima y la conducta moralmente apropiada. Con el fin de permitir un análisis normativo fundamentado de las prácticas de ordenación global, conectamos la capacidad de los actores para ejercer una acción normativa creativa con los debates sobre la pertenencia legítima y la conducta moralmente apropiada en la sociedad internacional. Destacamos la importancia normativa del contexto histórico para el estudio de las prácticas internacionales e ilustramos nuestros argumentos teóricos con ejemplos de diversas prácticas de ordenación, como el derecho internacional, la guerra, la diplomacia y la práctica económica, en las que los actores se basan con frecuencia en valores fundacionales para formular afirmaciones normativas sobre la inclusión y la exclusión. Al mismo tiempo, la capacidad creativa de los agentes para alterar los derechos y obligaciones existentes y crear otros nuevos ha transformado nuestra forma de pensar, actuar y argumentar sobre la naturaleza y la finalidad moral del orden mundial.

Le présent article intègre l'analyse théorique normative dans l'ordre international en reliant l'étude des pratiques internationales aux débats relatifs à la nature et à la finalité morale de l'association sociale des États. Combinant l'école anglaise et la théorie de la pratique sociale avec des idées issues de la recherche sur le colonialisme, la race et l'empire, nous conceptualisons l'ordre international comme un ensemble de schémas de pratiques dynamique, contesté, mais souvent stable et durable. De plus, nous montrons qu'il définit des points de référence éthiques et privilégie certaines affirmations plutôt que d'autres concernant la légitimité d'une action et la conformité d'un comportement à la morale. Afin d'obtenir une analyse normative des pratiques de l'ordre mondial fondée, nous relierons la capacité des acteurs à faire des choix normatifs créatifs aux débats concernant la légitimité d'une adhésion et la conformité d'un comportement à la morale au sein de la société internationale. Nous soulignons l'importance normative du contexte historique pour l'étude des pratiques internationales et illustrons nos arguments théoriques à l'aide d'exemples issus de différentes pratiques d'ordre : le droit international, la guerre, la diplomatie et l'économie. Pour celles-ci, les acteurs puisent souvent dans leurs valeurs fondatrices pour construire des affirmations normatives relatives à l'inclusion et l'exclusion. Entre-temps, la capacité créative des acteurs de modification des droits et obligations, et de création de nouveaux, a transformé notre façon de penser, d'agir et de débattre au sujet de la nature et de la finalité morale de l'ordre mondial.

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Introduction

Understanding international order is among International Relations¹ most fundamental topics, central to understanding our shared world, to disciplinary development, and to contributing to policy and practice. The most familiar account is an anarchically organized system of functionally like units where the distribution of material capabilities across those units significantly determines broad patterns of behavior and the (in)stability of order (Waltz 1979). Wendtian (1999) social constructivism moves away from material factors to ideational ones, showing how “cultures of anarchy” produce inter-unit relations characterized by enmity, rivalry, and friendship where, especially among friends, shared understandings, values, and normative commitments provide the basis of order. John Ruggie (1982) argued “embedded liberalism” created authority through combining power with legitimate social purpose, emphasizing the normative character of order. Debates about the present and future of a liberal international order (e.g., Duncombe and Dunne 2018; Ikenberry 2018; Lake et al. 2021) assess the disembedding of liberalism and its associated normativity rooted in principles such as individuality, rights, private property, and rule of law.

Accounts of global order’s normative constitution are therefore strongly contested, but that we need such accounts is not. This article advances ongoing efforts to integrate normative theoretical analysis into accounts of international order’s social mechanisms (e.g., Reus-Smit 1997; Acharya 2018; Wiener 2018; Adler 2019; Price and Sikkink 2021), by connecting practices of global institutional ordering to debates about the nature and moral purpose of states’ social association. Specifically, we aim to theoretically explore and systematically integrate a claim that has been floating around in the backwaters of various sociological approaches to international order: that practices of global institutional ordering are heavily normatively loaded, prioritizing, endorsing, and normalizing historically conditioned normative structures and ethical schemas that favor certain, mostly Western, perspectives, epistemologies, and experiences while marginalizing others.²

We start from the assumption that international order, like any social order, rests on foundational normative principles defining its axiology to “produce a specifiable ‘overall clustering of institutions’ across space and time” (Giddens 1984, 164; Parsons 1971). IR’s most widespread conceptualization notes two foundational principles. The first addresses rightful membership and which political communities hold rights vested in the legal concept of sovereignty. The second considers how members should conduct themselves in their relations. Taken together, these two normative complexes constitute what Reus-Smit (1997, 566; see also Buzan 2004, 167; Dunne 2003, 310) called “constitutional structures.” They are “constitutional” because they define and shape international politics; they are “structures” because they “limit and mold agents and agencies and point them in ways that tend toward a common quality of outcomes even though the efforts and aims of agents and agencies vary.”

Crucially, constitutional principles are not abstract. They reflect basic practices of legitimacy underpinning participants’ negotiations in the international order seeking

accommodation and reconciliation of different social ordering goals and values (Clark 2005; Oates 2017, 202). They are not simply empirical regularities and are strongly contested by alternative assessments of the ethical value of current practice, including radically different accounts of basic practices of legitimacy. Empirical assessments of the relative “strength” or “weakness” of constitutional structures risk missing deep normative contestation because their reference points are currently dominant practice (Wolff and Zimmermann 2016). For example, norm scholarship stresses internalizing values underpinning specific norms as the ideal end-point of a norm cascade (e.g., Finnemore and Sikkink 1998), aligning norm-governed behavior with the values of constitutional structures. Recent work on norm contestation (e.g., Stimmer 2019) suggests behavioral compliance can occur without value internalization. Acharya (2018) shows internalization, localization, and contestation reflects different constitutional visions of global order, even when behavior complies with the norm. Constitutional structures can, therefore, be altered, potentially radically, by behavior and contestation, and this can occur at regional levels. We argue active normative engagement with constitutional structures establishes global order’s nature and enables its moral purpose.

Establishing this claim and showing how far it reaches into analyses of international order start from an English School (ES) account because understanding international order is central to its research agenda, and it has always recognized the inherent normativity of order (Bull 1977). Thereafter, we engage contemporary work drawing on practice theory, picking up questions familiar to neo-liberal institutionalism and theories of norms about how normativity is created and why it functions as it does. We highlight how studying international practice raises questions about the institutionalized normative logics of exclusion and inclusion sustaining distinct configurations of international order. Throughout we stress historical context and processes of resistance and contestation, arguing for their inescapability in studying the practice that makes, re-makes, challenges, and perpetuates international order. Consequently, we address a broad constituency in IR, from the ES and liberal institutionalists typically operating at more “macro” levels, through to critical theorists, political sociologists, practice theorists, and those working on norms who generally focus on specific instances of ordering practice. During a time when integrating what Buzan (2004) differentiates as “theories of norms” and “normative theory” across ES, social constructivism, liberal institutionalism, and practice theory has been an important research agenda, we suggest how this might be done. Normativity needs to return from the margins and take a position center-stage. We set out why this is and how it is insufficiently explored in current scholarship. Normativity offers a way to systematically integrate theorization of institutions and practice theory’s analysis of how practice manifests, sustains, and develops behaviors those institutions mandate.

Accordingly, we contribute to debates across several distinctive, yet interconnected, theoretical perspectives. What ties this together is our claim that global ordering practices are necessarily and inescapably normative. Descriptions of existing global order unavoidably include implicit accounts of how global order ought to be. The gap between “is” and “ought” (global order’s “nature”) and the diversity of global orders—historical and contemporary, successful and unsuccessful (global order’s moral purpose)—make global ordering practices, and how we account for them, inescapably normative.

¹ We follow the standard convention of capitalizing International Relations when referring to the academic discipline.

² We are grateful to an anonymous referee for emphasizing this context to us and for the “floating around in the backwaters” phrasing. We could not put it better ourselves, so have not.

We proceed in three main sections, starting by briefly summarizing why the English School, and especially its concept of “primary institutions,” is our starting point. It captures and consolidates important contributions from other perspectives, particularly practice theory and norms theory, linking them to constitutional structures and their inherent normativity. The Section “Locating Normativity in Practice: Institutions, Global Ordering, and Foundational Exclusion” establishes primary institutions’ normative dimensions in more detail. Drawing on practice theory and pragmatist approaches to normativity, it conceptualizes primary institutions as global anchoring practices generating, maintaining, and transforming normativity when constituting social order. We consider limitations in current practice-based approaches to international order, most notably their inability to account fully for the ethnocentrism, foundational exclusion, and diversity of source stories about the values, costs, and functions of world ordering practices. The Section “Bringing Normativity Back in: Connecting Foundational Values and Global Ordering Practices” connects primary institutions to constitutional structure and deeper-seated values and principles about legitimate agency and morally appropriate conduct. Taking “constitutional structure” beyond abstract meta-values and principles, the Section “Bringing Normativity Back in: Connecting Foundational Values and Global Ordering Practices” shows actors unavoidably exercise creative normative agency³ when engaging with primary institutions to shape, and even transform, understandings of legitimate agency, and morally appropriate conduct in international society. We illustrate our argument by referencing contemporary practice in international relations. This is done in outline in the Section “Locating Normativity in Practice: Institutions, Global Ordering, and Foundational Exclusion” and in more detail in the Section “Bringing Normativity Back in: Connecting Foundational Values and Global Ordering Practices.” Our main source is international law, where practice, norms, and normativity are typically closely clustered and prominent, but we also draw on economic, military, and diplomatic practice, and their interaction with international law, to indicate wider applicability for our claims and approach.

Global Ordering As Institutional Practice

Hedley Bull (1977, 8) defined international order as a “pattern of activity” that sustains “the elementary goals of (...) international society”: security against violence, the sanctity of agreements, and the protection of property rights. To realize those goals, he maintained, states developed a set of institutionalized fundamental “habits and practices,” which Buzan (2004) coined *primary institutions*.⁴ These manifest specific sets of order-supporting intersubjective understandings (Friedner Parrat 2017; see also Buzan 2004, 167–204; Bull 1977, 74). They are socially “evolved” rather than formally designed (Buzan 2004, 167; Keohane 1988), arising from “shared and principled understandings of desirable and acceptable forms of social behavior” (Kratochwil and Ruggie 1986, 764). In this sense, primary institutions reflect historically contingent intersubjec-

tive meanings attached to international society’s basic ordering practices. Debates have revolved around identifying primary institutions, their functions (e.g., Buzan 2004; Schouenborg 2011; Wilson 2012), and interactions with the formally designed institutional complexes studied by regime theorists and liberal institutionalists (e.g., Spandler 2015; Friedner Parrat 2017; Navari and Knudsen 2018). Greater theoretical detail explains primary institutions’ shaping historical developments in “global international society,” including how macro-level political, social, technological, and economic changes contribute to the rise, transformation, and decline of those institutions (Buzan and Schouenborg 2018).

Primary institutions as deep social ordering practices demand normative engagement (e.g., Reus-Smit 1997; Williams 2011; Navari 2018). When Buzan (2004, 1–2, 228–29) placed primary institutions at the center of English School theory, he consciously set aside normative theory in favor of analytical precision. Whilst theorizing the role, function, and evolution of international society’s fundamental institutional ordering practices can set aside normative inquiry on pragmatic grounds of space or skill set, as Buzan (2004) does, this cannot render primary institutional analysis immune to normative assessment (e.g., Dunne 2005; Adler 2005, 181; Williams 2011). Theorists, too, must recognize normative implications of their analytical choices, for example, in accepting (or contesting) the institutional arrangements on which international order rests and the behaviors they study.

We do not advance a specific claim about how primary institutions should look, and what their role and function should be. Instead, when we refer to the normativity (or normative dimension) of primary institutions, we engage foundational normative claims inherent in values underpinning primary institutions and their roles in structuring social relationships. This engagement, we suggest, is vital for three reasons. Firstly, it further establishes ES contributions to theorizing fundamental institutional practices that maintain order in world politics. Secondly, it helps IR scholars from several theoretical traditions better understand institutions’ key role in the normative construction of international order. Thirdly, it develops self-reflexive practice-based approaches to IR theorizing (e.g., Schindler and Wille 2019), connecting studying foundational global order values to debates about (norm) contestation within and among communities of practice (CoP) (e.g., Wiener 2018; Adler 2019; Banerjee and MacKay 2020). Our goal is not to prescribe a singular and compelling account of a future global order. We do, though, challenge claims for the generally progressive nature of the liberal international order through connecting arguments for race and colonialism in that order to how it has been studied through practice, institutions, and norms.

English School theory and accounts of “practice” use sociological and social theory to analyze the mutual constitution of actors as agents through their involvement in dynamic and contested, but often stable and durable, patterns of practice creating forms of order in world politics (e.g., Pouliot 2016; Lechner and Frost 2018; Adler 2019). Such patterns and forms of practice reward and punish agents who comply with or defect from expectations, creating ideas and ideals about privileged or exemplary international ordering practices, and granting practitioners particular status. Practice contains, operationalizes, and reinforces expectations about ethically laudable conduct, raising questions about the normative content of institutions and consequent practices inherent within both the institutions and practices

³The claim that agency is dynamic, transformative, and inherently creative is central to practice theory (e.g., Bially Mattern 2011; Adler 2019; McDonald and McDonald 2020) and its pragmatist methodological foundations (e.g., Joas 1996).

⁴The terms “primary” and “fundamental” institutions are often used interchangeably in English School literature.

studied, and how they are studied, meaning strict normative neutrality is unsustainable.

Whilst affinity between ES and social practice theory is noted (e.g., Adler and Pouliot 2011; Navari 2011; Friedner Parrat 2017, 28), the practice theory “turn” is absent from the most highly developed account of institutions in contemporary English School theory (e.g., Buzan 2004). Neither have practice theorists interested in international ordering fully explored the English School’s historical knowledge and conceptual toolkit. Recent works on continuity and change in international society use practice theory to explain interactional dynamics between primary and secondary institutions (Friedner Parrat 2017; Navari 2018). Central here is a shift from structure to agency. What sustains primary (and secondary) institutions is “individuals and collectives doing the same things, or nearly the same things, over and over again” (Navari 2018, 66). We suggest practice theory can overcome limits to Wendtian constructivism core to Buzan’s ES reformulations, theoretically grounding normative analysis of primary institutions. Practice-based pragmatist understandings of norms and normativity as components and products of interacting practices that are ontologically “processual” and “relational” theorizes how primary institutions such as international law, diplomacy, and great power management establish, enforce, and transform ethical standards via ongoing constitutive processes of global ordering. This recalls Jackson’s (2000) account of international society as a social construct maintained by states-persons, diplomats, international lawyers, representatives of NGOs, and so on. However, the shift to agency rarely properly acknowledges Jackson’s (2000, 6) key claim that “world politics is constitutively normative,” fundamentally defined by the ethics of statecraft.

Our principal claim is consequently two-fold. Firstly, primary institutions constitute actors and regulate behaviors in ethically significant ways. By establishing intersubjective understandings of what counts as an admissible actor, and what is contextually legitimate or appropriate conduct, primary institutions set ethical reference points, privileging certain normative claims over others in international society. Analyzing primary institutions thus *must* connect with constitutional values and principles giving these claims’ status and meaning. This broadly matches practice theoretic claims about the constitutive qualities of social ordering practices. However, English School institutional theorizing typically has not followed this down the route of recasting actors’ ontological status as relational/processual.

Secondly, ideas and beliefs about international society’s nature and moral purpose frame actors’ reasoning, judging, and decision-making. They are not abstract, somehow insulated from and existing prior to social practice. Instead, how actors discursively (re)construct and contest primary institutions (and constellations thereof) in response to specific political events, and moral questions have reciprocal implications for the evolution of international society’s foundational values and principles. This is implicitly recognized in explanatory terms by practice theoretic accounts focused on change (e.g., Hopf 2018; Stappert 2020a). Less recognized is the flip-side of this coin: Foundational values and principles manifesting in institutions are highly specific and rest on historical patterns of practice and epistemological standards imbued with exclusionary, often violent, attitudes. Accordingly, any engagement with the normativity of primary institutions, including agents’ visions about the nature and moral purpose of international society, must recognize the contested historical origins and evolution of established global ordering practices and the costs associated with their

operation. Practice theory neglects international society’s nature and moral purpose, manifested in primary institutions.

Practice theory can provide the ES with a firmer theoretical basis when engaging concepts such as norms, values, customs, and institutions, which were underspecified in the School’s classical texts, while the ES has shown practice theorists how concrete social practices operate in a system of sovereign political communities (Navari 2011). Above all, the ES conceptual centerpiece, international society, provides a framework for connecting practice theory’s typically structural metaphors, such as “fields,” “communities,” and “assemblages,” to theoretically abstract and sectorally or functionally analyzed practices (e.g., Bueger and Gadinger 2018, 108) via conceptualizing interactions across and among different primary institutions of international society. That picks up inconsistency in, even contradiction between, characteristics of specific instantiations of (historically) dynamic constellations of institutional ordering practices (e.g., Schmidt 2021; Williams 2011). It also enables some level of geographical differentiation of these institutions via “regional international society” (e.g., Schouenborg 2012; Stivachtis 2015a), which practice-theoretical accounts seemingly lack.

Friedner Parrat (2017) clearly articulates a practice-based understanding of primary institutions. Drawing on Adler and Pouliot’s (2011, 4) understanding of practices⁵ as socially meaningful patterned actions she conceptualizes them as “reproductive (...) practices that are discursively constructed as pillars of international society” (Friedner Parrat 2017, 628). They are not ontologically “independent things” waiting to be discovered. What is key here is the notion of expectation. As Friedner Parrat (2017, 628) explains, referring to the primary institution of great power management:

Every time we analyze the Security Council resolution requesting that Syria’s chemical weapons are put under international control (...) as a deal between Russia and the United States, we discursively reproduce the expectation that great power management means for great powers to behave responsibly in matters of international peace and security.

Friedner Parrat thus demonstrates the limits of this move. If agents “*expect* nation-states, the international diplomatic system, and great power management to function in certain ways” (2017, 628), then values and normative positions associated with these practices become integral to any account of primary institutions. Sticking with UN Security Council practice over Syria, Ralph and Gifkins (2017) show expectations of great powers’ behavior are influenced by the normative context created by the Responsibility to Protect (R2P). Drawing on practice theory, particularly Frost’s (2009) idea of “ethical competence,” they show how R2P establishes agents’ ethical reference points. These, in turn, require reconciliation of “the most appropriate response to mass atrocity with the need to construct and sustain a collective cosmopolitan consciousness that underpins the core ethic of protection” (Ralph and Gifkins 2017, 632). Interestingly, the absence of sufficient normative assessment of UN Security Council practice leads Ralph and Gifkins (2017, 631) to observe that “the current contribution of practice theory is potentially limited by the conjecture that it operates on a different analytical plane to both norm theory and normative

⁵ Adler and Pouliot’s full definition of practice is “patterned [meaningful] actions that are embedded in particular organized contexts and, as such, are articulated into specific types of action and are socially developed through learning and training.”

theory.” We hope to redress this issue in the next section, showing how the practice of institutional ordering necessarily involves making normatively loaded choices in relation to legitimate agency and appropriate behavior in international society.

Locating Normativity in Practice: Institutions, Global Ordering, and Foundational Exclusion

Getting to grips with primary institutions’ normativity requires theorizing their characteristics as global ordering practices in more detail. Friedner Parrat (2017, 628) rightly notes that “the translation between primary institutions and practices cannot be direct.” But, apart from connecting their existence as practices to norms, beliefs, and expectations in relevant discourses, she leaves open what exactly makes a practice a pillar of international society, and what distinguishes primary institutions from other kinds of (international) practices. Adler’s (2019) study of cognitive evolution gives primary institutions’ further conceptual grounding in practice theory. Adler (2019, 2) argues all social orders “originate, derive from, and are constituted by practices (. . .).” Global order consists of a plurality of international social orders intersecting across space and time. They “cut across domestic, international, transnational, and supranational boundaries,” involving different sets of practices, background knowledge, and CoP (Adler 2019, 137–41). What holds these multiple, overlapping, and interacting international social orders together, making it possible to speak of “international” and/or “order” in the singular, are what Swidler (2001) coined “anchoring practices.” Adler’s (2019, 127–29) description highlights their resemblance to ES primary institutions: They are “more fundamental” than other practices; “define social entities”; “configure, organize, arrange, and stabilize social life around core constitutive rules,” and constitute more specific “epistemic and normative-related practices sustain[ing] regulative practices.”

Primary institutions as anchoring practices explain why certain activities are discursively constructed as *pillars* of order. It also makes room for the “polysemy” of primary institutions (Costa-Buranelli 2015)—the plurality of, and variations in, geographically and culturally bounded and fragmented ordering practices that underpin the ES idea of regional international societies and why the nature and moral purpose of the order are contested over time. Furthermore, it retains primary institutions’ dynamic connection to the secondary regulative practices central to English School accounts of institutional change. Most important to us; however, it helps restore normativity to its proper place.

Adler’s theory is committed to normativity: “all practices that constitute order are normative” (Adler 2019, 130). Normativity is embedded in action. Practice itself is the source of normativity because agents carry and actualize normative background knowledge and value-laden dispositions through activities. Every agent engaged in discursive construction of global ordering practices—such as great power management, environmental stewardship, or war—holds both a view of how that practice is best performed, and how international society more broadly, including its foundational values and principles, ought to look. To capture this normativity, and “to get a firmer grasp of social practices as normatively bounded domains,” international practice theorists see norms as the key analytical component for identifying agents’ “background evaluative standard[s] – or ‘normativity’ for short” (Lechner and Frost 2018,

119; see also Adler 2019, 131). Focusing on norms and appropriate behavior strongly infuses agents’ practice with “oughtness,” but it typically ignores how practices generate evaluative standards when constituting and regulating social order. Practice-theoretical accounts of “normativity” remain primarily descriptive, rather than evaluative. The question normative theory emphasizes—is this order morally better or worse than alternatives?—cannot be bracketed out. Choosing which practitioners and practices to study implicitly evaluates those practices’ background assumptions as more worthy of study and more important to understanding order and ordering. Because the nature and moral purpose of global order are inherently normative, those choices reaffirm a specific account of that nature and moral purpose.

We engage this dimension of the normativity of practice directly. Pratt’s (2020, 65) conception of “normative configurations” reorients analytical focus away from norms toward “how normativity is involved in the constitution of social arrangements and order.” Pratt conceptualizes normativity as arising from interacting practices and processes that establish value orientation and provide agents with ends and means for action (Pratt 2020, 61). Practice and social interaction, not externalized logics of appropriateness and rule-following, generate normativity (Pratt 2020, 66). This firmly grounds the origin and evolution of normativity, including ethically undesirable forms of practice and institutional constellations, in the practice of global ordering itself. Furthermore, it yields a pragmatic, practice-focused conceptualization of primary institutions as interacting practices establishing, enforcing, and transforming normativity through ongoing constitutive processes of ordering in international society.

This means accounts of primary institutions *must* engage with normative issues because they are part of the practices that construct and sustain the nature and moral purpose of international society. To reiterate, by “nature,” we mean normative issues are inescapable aspects of international society because to talk of such a society as constitutive and manifesting in practice-based institutions invokes what that society both *does* and *should* look like. Save for making the exceptionally improbable claim that we live in the best of all possible worlds, there is a gap between *does* and *should* that requires, at the very least, an implicit account of how it might best be bridged. Returning briefly to the example of the UNSC “deal” on Syrian chemical weapons, its characterization as a “deal,” and that “deals” are the way issues of this sort are managed, implies various things. As a “deal,” it invokes a contractual, utilitarian logic, as opposed to an act of altruism. It implies compromise, as reaching a “deal” is about achieving a mutually acceptable outcome that recognizes and reconciles competing and incompatible interests. “Deals” have an expected lifespan and are potentially subject to revision or collapse. More positively, “deals” suggest good-faith negotiations that underpin that time-limited, but likely trustworthy, resolution. Consequently, if implicitly, a “deal” is contrasted with an alternative, superior outcome that may be available in a better world of altruism, consensus, and permanence. Simultaneously, better a “deal” than “no deal,” or a “fudge,” or “diktat.”

By “moral purpose,” we capture contestation over the possible nature of international society. There are multiple possible accounts of that society, and of how to bridge the “does-should” gap, meaning the nature of international society is normatively contestable, necessitating an account of how social structures that manifest in practices, such as institutions, both relate to and instantiate those distinctive accounts, and how it might be possible to normatively assess

those accounts. It is not possible to reduce the question of the nature and moral purpose of international society to a purely empirical one—this is how it is—because evaluative accounts of how it is include accounts of how it should be and some sense of how to get there.

Moral purpose questions necessitate a normative stance on the relative merits of competing accounts of international society's nature and possible ways to bridge the gap. Remaining normatively agnostic involves an epistemological relativism rendering a coherent analytical stance impossible because it requires holding open the possibility that *all* actual or possible, past, present, or future, primary institutional constellations and associated practices are viable potential orders of equal ethical standing. Bald description may be possible, but even taxonomy requires epistemological judgments about the character of different normative claims being made, necessitating judging knowledge claims. Such judgments have normative significance because they rule on the relative standing of the social practices that produce and validate knowledge. The ES has recently returned to the primary institution of the Standard of Civilization, which generally rejected the validity of non-Western/white forms of knowledge as a bulwark of a racist civilizational hierarchy (e.g., Buzan 2014; Cudworth and Hobden 2014; O'Hagan 2017, 2020). The previous relative silence on the Standard of Civilization, or its treatment as a historical artifact largely irrelevant to ordering practices in contemporary international society, represents a scholarly choice about what does and does not warrant analysis reflecting assessment that, in this instance, the role of racism in the Standard of Civilization had been overcome or rendered marginal. That choice has now been revisited, helping to re-establish a normative assessment of the place of race and practices indebted to, invoking, or furthering racialized characterizations of order.

The nature and moral purpose of international society are not ahistorical empirical questions. That does not make empirical description pointless, as accurate accounts of different perspectives on international society's nature and moral purpose are important contributions to our understanding. However, they are not an endpoint, as selecting what to describe and how to describe it matters. The empirical balance of state discourse and practice cannot provide definitive evidence for where consensus lies, or where levels of disputation and contestation are lowest. Subsuming values within norms and interests manifested through practice, as practice-theoretical approaches typically do, produce a normative relativism that sees maximum confluence of state preferences as answering normative questions. In other words, to see the question of Syrian atrocities as a question of, in no small part, the failures of great power management and international legal enforcement, is a normative judgment that this is *a*, even *the*, appropriate normative perspective to take. That is not epistemologically persuasive, as it privileges the claims for the nature and moral purpose of international society in established, dominant understandings of international society as though the contestation inherent in the historical evolution of that society and its primary institutions were of purely descriptive interest.

Any normative assessment of primary institutions must take seriously the non-consensual, often violently coercive, historical backdrop of established global institutional arrangements. The historical narrative about the post-1945 international order frequently emphasizes inclusivity, equality, and progress through rejecting institutions such as the Standard of Civilization. Instead, by embedding institutions emphasizing individual human rights and appealing to val-

ues including liberty, equality, and opportunity through international humanitarian and human rights law and the market, the post-1945 international order reflects universality as the *telos* of global ordering. Tying in with this teleological (hi)story are sociological readings of the globalization of European civilization premised on the control of violence (e.g., Elias 1982; Giddens 1985), as well as grand narratives about the expansion of international society that associate peaceful co-existence and normative progress with the globalization of a vanguard European society and institutions (e.g., Bull and Watson 1984).

What arises is a broadly benign image of the current constellation of primary institutions favoring established actors and the meanings, values, and goals they have attached to specific constellations of ordering practices. Prominent here is Lechner and Frost's neo-Hegelian study of practices of international society and global rights. Proposing a radical internalist perspective over abstract categorizing and description, Lechner and Frost (2018, 6) aim for a "fuller, more coherent understanding of the concrete practices that comprise international relations today." However, rather than exploring the normative construction and social embedding of contemporary global ordering practices, they fundamentally root them in early (European) modernity and the value of "equal freedom," understood as a *telos* attached to ethical status in international society (Lechner and Frost 2018, 127–53). Consequently, discussion of state sovereignty and global rights shields the current constellation of those practices from a far-reaching assessment of how these acquired constitutive and regulatory functions, the costs imposed in putting them in place, and the avenues for contestation they generate. Stappert (2020b, 192) stresses that historical details matter when theorizing international practices "to provide an avenue for critique, and especially as a tool to counter Eurocentrism." Indeed, if practices are temporal processes—repetitive patterns that are permanently shifting and displacing (Bueger and Gadinger 2018, 100)—history, especially legacies of empire and colonialism, becomes integral to studying their normativity. "Equal freedom" understood in the abstract is very different from the reality of "equal freedom" in historical practice, when it was limited to those deemed sufficiently civilized to comprehend what "freedom" was, or needed to be violently "saved" from being unfree and placed on the correct path toward attaining freedom through sovereignty (e.g., Aalberts 2014). "Equal freedom" through decolonization and self-determination after 1945 was strongly contested when it came to the meaning of non-intervention. For example, Cuba's sending of thousands of troops to Angola as Portuguese rule collapsed was presented by Cuba and other non-aligned states as fully compatible with non-intervention because it was an act of anti-colonial and anti-racist solidarity in achieving self-determination for the Angolan people (Quinton-Brown 2021).

ES theorizing and accounts of order drawing on practice theory and processual/pragmatist ontologies of order (e.g., Pouliot 2016; Adler 2019) eschews teleology (e.g., Buzan and Schouenborg 2018). However, by analyzing the practices of those leading these institutions, they unavoidably implicitly endorse the outcomes of this contingent account. Wilson (2012) does this when proposing practice as the empirical basis for establishing a grounded approach to studying primary institutions. Like Lechner and Frost, he suggests "an insider understanding of what those professionally or otherwise intimately involved in IR conceive to be the role, importance, value, and potential for progressive change of institutions" (Wilson 2012, 586). Practice analysis skews in

favor of political elites occupying high offices of the world's principal states, dominating international fora and foreign policy discourses and agendas. Ideas of “pecking orders” in practices (Pouliot 2016) suggest hierarchy within a field of international practice such as diplomacy, but not who or what was obliterated in formulating specific practices constituting and validating “diplomacy” within a, broadly benign, international order. Quinton-Brown (2020) emphasizes the West's role, especially the United States and the United Kingdom, in insisting on “sovereignist” accounts of non-intervention against post-colonial interpretations stressing anti-racism and the moral evil of apartheid necessitating intervention to save people of color.

If we accept the normativity of primary institutions is grounded in interacting practices, then its analysis has to be connected to diversity of experiences and normative actions of communities bound up with global ordering practices, including those traditionally seen as peripheral to the spaces where those practices have originated and evolved. We cannot just say that because, for instance, the United States and the United Kingdom held privileged positions in the post-1945 international order, it is their lawyers, diplomats, and politicians' actions that demand our attention without simultaneously saying that the perspectives of post-colonial states' agents and the members of national liberation movements do not. That makes a normative judgment about the nature of international society: that the contestation over the “is-ought” gap in post-colonial accounts of the link between race and sovereignty is better understood and bridged by adopting Anglo-American perspectives than, for instance, those of frontline states bordering apartheid South Africa. We might choose to study those perspectives and see them as especially consequential, but that choice is neither value nor cost free.

Compliance with expectations of established practice explicitly demonstrates an actor's place in the hierarchical pecking order (Adler-Nissen and Pouliot 2014), implicitly accepting the validity of those practices, including legacies of embedded inequality. Getachew (2019) demonstrates how racism remained central to the post-1919 institutional order in the face of efforts by black intellectuals and political leaders to challenge racial hierarchies and foreground black experiences to undermine the “pecking order” that placed Europeans and their settler colonial offshoots at the system's core. Furthermore, she shows how, in the 1970s and 1980s, reconfiguring practices of global economic management into an ostensibly “private” sphere repulsed post-colonial states' challenge to enduring economic inequality through the New International Economic Order (NIEO). Configuring the “market” as a primary institution partially immunized against “politics” was a neither neutral nor technical move, even as it was portrayed as such, but a means of preserving pecking orders. If membership is one of international society's two foundational principles, appropriate conduct is the other. Acquiescing to the neoliberal removal of global economic redistribution from the appropriate field of international economic and financial management via the United Nations system, consequently protecting colonial metropolises from the NIEO, is one instance of how “appropriate behavior” was used to depoliticize political economy. This brings into doubt claims to progressiveness of a generally benign set of primary institutions delivering international order.

Theorizing how normativity operates in the constitution of global international society thus requires analysis of the *where*, *by*, and *for whom* of international ordering, reaching into world (intellectual) history, and bringing forward

marginalized experiences and perspectives. The ES has started this by, for example, critically reassessing Bull and Watson's story of international society's expansion (Dunne and Reus-Smit 2017), introducing “subaltern institutions” (Williams 2015), and re-engaging the Standard of Civilization as a racialized ordering principle legitimizing practices of inclusion and exclusion (e.g., Stivachtis 2015b; Yao 2019). The “Global IR” agenda (Acharya 2014) alongside important contributions by Hobson (2012; see also Hobson and Sajed 2017), Vitalis (2015), and others revealing IR's neglect of its disciplinary history also expose how international theory has excised non-Western agency, knowledge, and discourse in defending and promoting Western ordering standards and practices. The upshot of those contributions is that if the preferred perspective on global ordering is a practice-based internalist, then analysts cannot be normatively agnostic without complicity in the silences embedded in previous practices.

This section lays the groundwork for a practice-based assessment of primary institutions' normativity. To show how this normativity orders international relations in practice, and how it connects to processes of institutional evolution and change, the next section looks at how institutional arrangements establish and distribute authority, status, functions, roles, and other deontic powers when constituting and regulating global order.

Bringing Normativity Back in: Connecting Foundational Values and Global Ordering Practices

We have shown how bringing normativity back in begins by recognizing that primary institutions draw on and transmit foundational normative claims about the nature and moral purpose of international order. By establishing who or what counts as a valid actor and how such actors should behave in certain situations, primary institutions establish ethical reference points and privilege certain normative configurations over others in relation to agency and social practice in international society. Those reference points are continuously contested because of the multiple accounts of the nature and moral purpose of international society in play at any time and how to bridge the “is-ought” gap and adjudicate on competing visions of global order.

We have already outlined some of the ways this happens, stressing practices around membership and appropriate conduct has given their centrality to the constitutional structures of global order and the role they play in setting which practices “count.” In this section, we unpack further another central issue within international order—the use of systematic and organized military force under the rubric of war and its relationship to international law.

Consider how normative issues permeate international society's struggle to institutionalize the legitimacy of the authority of non-state armed groups involved in revolution, insurrection, or civil war against an established government. Common Article 3 of the 1949 Geneva Conventions (a secondary institution) deals with non-state armed conflict. Its limited applicability is well known, as is the complexity of, and potential for subjectivity in, decision-making in these circumstances, including which aspects of international humanitarian law and other law apply (e.g., Solis 2010, 96–104, 152–54). Making a judgment on the admissibility of “legitimate authority” claims in the use of force is just that—a judgment. It involves complex balancing of multiple factors, which are rarely mutually consistent, against specific circumstances. These may change. For instance,

a non-international (Common Article 3) conflict may become an international (Common Article 2) conflict or vice versa, or a conflict may demonstrate elements of both non-international and international conflicts (Solis 2010, 154–57). Deciding which regulatory rules apply reflects, and is reflected in, how applying the rules constitutes actors with a certain character, including whether and to what extent actors claiming legitimate authority are compatible with established judgments about the nature of international order.

Illustratively, UN General Assembly resolutions recognizing the validity of national liberation struggles by anti-colonial armed movements reflect a normative vision of international society's nature that is radically different from, for example, the normative vision for an international society in Osama bin Laden's "fatwa" calling for "jihad" against the governments of the United States and Saudi Arabia. The diagnosis of the gap between the "is" and the "ought" of an international society predicated on principles derived from post-colonial accounts of anti-imperialism and national self-determination, on the one hand, and a specific account of Salafist Islamism, on the other, are similarly extensive. Practice theoretic accounts referencing either of these or any of the multitude of alternative accounts of legitimate wartime actors and actions, unavoidably invoke associated normative ideals and claims. In claiming, for example, the admissibility of the former vision of international society and the inadmissibility of the latter, analysis must reach analytical conclusions that include, implicitly or explicitly, normative assessment. Rejecting Salafism, for instance, is not a purely technical question of its incompatibility with established readings of the Geneva Conventions because those readings themselves include the sedimented legacy of normative accounts of the nature and moral purpose of international society and of international law as a key primary institution.

Finlay (2010) helps carve out the normative significance of institutional practices. The principle of "moral or legitimate authority" has been a key criterion in international law's attributing the right to wage war (*ius ad bellum*) to sovereign states, a number of entities resembling them, and the UN Security Council (Finlay 2010, 287). Those limitations pose complex questions about whether communities that do not possess such status have moral entitlements to engage in violence, most notably liberation movements such as the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) or the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). According to Finlay (2010, 297), "entities of this kind typically have to fulfill a more demanding moral authority requirement than states do in the current international order." This reflects how actors necessarily rely on normative accounts of authority to make intelligible claims about international law's distinction between justifiable and unjustifiable forms of violence. Both the PLO and the PKK creatively invoke elements of international society's well-established normative script, including the presumptive justice of claims to national self-determination in the face of colonialism; the presumptive justice of claims to equality in the face of oppression based on ethnicity; and their commitment to play a full role as peaceful states in international society. Delegitimizing their claims by challenging the validity or applicability of such claims in the context of Israel/Palestine and Turkey, or rejecting the PLO's or PKK's credentials or ability to fulfill obligations, is a mainstay of state diplomatic practice opposing the admissibility of their claims. The effectiveness of these strategies, by either side, depends on practices embedding legitimate authority claims in normatively powerful decolonizing imperatives legitimizing war for national libera-

tion developed throughout the twentieth century, especially post-1945.

Distributing legitimate authority in armed conflict forcefully illustrates the grave, and sometimes irrevocable, consequences of how secondary institutions—in this case, the Geneva Convention—bestow moral and legal agency on actors. It is also about how primary institutions—in this case, international law—relay international society's normative positions about authority, justifiable behavior, and legitimate agency. It is therefore impossible to provide a theoretically grounded account of key global ordering practices without a philosophical account of the nature and moral purpose of international society.

English school re-engagement with war's role in colonial history recognizes race and racism in both the history it studies and its own record. As Keal (2017) shows, Bull's use of war "in the strict sense" reflected colonial practices defining the primary institution of war to deny status and thus legitimacy to violent resistance to colonial and imperial expansion by non-white and especially indigenous peoples. Restrictions on the conduct of war "in the strict sense" against other European powers were weakened when fighting non-Western peoples because this was not war, and those resisting were incapable of fighting a war "in the strict sense" because they were declared incapable of reciprocating those restrictions. Their own concepts of fairness or justice in war were rejected as irrelevant. This creates legacies visible in current practice at the interface of the primary institutions of war and international law, for example, in presumptive illegitimacy of violence by groups classified as "terrorist" or "insurgent," or state violence that takes forms associated with such organizations, such as indiscriminate surprise attacks in civilian locations. Diplomatic practices applying those labels to whomever a state uses force against, including other states, are ubiquitous, demonstrating the perceived power of the normative appeal to countering terrorism or insurgency in pursuit of a more orderly and just international society. Diplomatic agency creatively ascribes "terrorist" status to state and non-state actors, invoking the normative condemnation of terrorism inherent in international order. That condemnation is, though typically unacknowledged in diplomatic agency, powerfully influenced by older, colonial, and racialized ideas of non-state and non-European forms and users of violence, denying their actual or potential sovereignty. The "terrorist" as outsider, alien, and uncivilized is invoked even when the perpetrator of such acts is, as with Anders Bering Breivik, from within the white, Western, male core. Breaking ideals of "civilized" military conduct utilized extensively in the Standard of Civilization to differentiate permissible from impermissible violence associates Breivik with uncivilized, racialized "others."

Wars of national liberation, anti-colonialism, and secession raise moral issues beyond their conduct because their purpose is to establish legitimate membership of international society as a sovereign state. Buchanan (2004) captures the inherent normativity of the sovereign state. Writing about the (moral) problem of secession, Buchanan (2004, 3) states:

(...) many international relations theorists as well as international lawyers and diplomats say that whether a state grants recognition to a new political entity created by secession is purely a political matter. This is false (...). The choice to recognize or not has moral implications and can be made rightly or wrongly. To recognize an entity as a state is to acknowledge that it has an international legal right of territorial integrity

and this in turn lends strong presumptive support to its territorial claims and thereby presumes the illegitimacy of claims on its territory that others may make. [...] To know what criteria any entity must satisfy to warrant recognition as a legitimate state, we must know what values the international legal order should serve (...).

Besides establishing the centrality of moral reasoning for understanding the practice of statehood, Buchanan's argument reinforces the role and function of primary institutions in constituting and regulating practice. If, based on normative considerations about their aim and purpose, primary institutions (a) establish the conditions in which interaction can take place, (b) attach costs and benefits to various actors, (c) prevent certain political communities engaging in certain practices, and (d) enable non-relativist judgment between competing normative bases on which international society can rest, then the key question is: on what basis do they do so?

Whereas secondary institutions create agencies with capacities for actions, primary institutions enable these agencies to draw upon international society's constitutional structures. Great power management, sovereignty, markets, war, and international law to pick up those mentioned previously, understood as practice-based primary institutions, provide members of international society with the necessary discursive tools for engaging deeper-seated meta values that underpin their social association. Every time actors discursively invoke international law to make a specific legal justification for waging war, identifying certain conflicts as war, recognizing new political entities as sovereign, or categorizing interactions as market transactions, they engage international society's deeper-seated values, principles, and normative ordering goals. In other words, by creatively invoking, applying, and contesting specific conceptions of primary institutions, actors' link concrete, situational practice to international society's underlying constitutional principles.

This creative normative agency is *normative* because it is agency through ideas and values that develop out of a particular context (Acharya 2018, 13, 20). It is *creative* in the sense that it does not operate in support of some more or less settled agent interests, but assumes that the content of agents' normative positions and ideas are themselves produced and transformed through alteration, invention, improvisation, and mutual adjustment to value-conflicts and social differences (McDonald and McDonald 2020, 527–31). And it often develops in response to unanticipated change, in which the results of practice emerge from “agile actors coping with uncertainty” (Katzenstein and Seybert 2018, 80). The idea that agents creatively navigate within structures of constraints and possibilities while creating and altering them in the process is central to the English School's structuration theory of institutional change (Navari 2020). Working out the analytical utility of these claims for thinking about how institutions' normative purpose originates and diffuses within CoP is one way of gaining further insights into the social mechanisms of international order making. We know that CoP “enliven the practice that institutions were created to support” (Bicchi 2022, 33), that institutional structures carry value-laden background knowledge that affects agents' expectations and dispositions to act (Adler 2008, 203), and that normative principles about membership and appropriate behavior make CoPs “hang together” and cohere over time” (Hofius 2016, 940). Enlisting the English School's institutional model of structuration can go some way in clarifying the mechanisms through which this norma-

tivity originates, diffuses, and changes through institutional interaction.

Following the idea of structuration, global institutional ordering is not a one-way process through which international society's constitutional structures simply manifest in/legitimize formalized institutional arrangements (Spandler 2015; Knudsen and Navari 2018). It is a bi-directional feedback process whereby agency fosters structural change and vice versa. This takes place notably when developments in secondary institutional settings directly implicate morally appropriate state behavior and legitimate agency in international society. This process is observable in international criminal law, where international courts and tribunals have developed international law in ways that deeply implicate international society's constitutional structure. Within the Nuremberg Military Tribunal, French and Soviet prosecutors shored up principles of permissible state conduct via a new category of punishable offense—crimes against humanity—and for the first time, judges attached obligations to individuals involving criminal responsibilities, thereby driving a paradigm shift in who holds rights and responsibilities (Sands 2003). Later judgments by ad hoc tribunals for Rwanda and Yugoslavia had equally significant implications for understanding crime, ethnicity, and gender, helping establish conceptions of individuals as both moral and legal agents in international society.⁶ This creative normative agency shows how secondary institutions construct agents—in this case, lawyers and judges—with capacities to use primary institutions (international law) to impinge upon and change normative visions and ideas about the constitutional structure of international society through practice.

In this instance, agents initiated changes reinforcing normative ideals linked to a broadly liberal individualism rooted in a social contractarian account of political authority that creates individuals as rights-holders possessing agency such that they can be held to account for actions, even when actions take place within state-sanctioned and coercive authority structures. The place of the rule of law as central to a liberal international order is reinforced. That places agents at the heart of normative institutional analysis, demonstrating their ability to recast the relationship between authoritative political institutions and human individuals linked to a normatively ideal account of an international society enabling individual human agency understood as universal and equal, existing under the rule of law.

The normative vision and ideas about the nature and purpose of international society constructed through the practice of international courts and tribunals are almost invariably seen as positive, universal, and progressive (Teitel 2011). Fixations on particular notions of justice, crime, and jurisdiction, however, have largely endorsed the development of established, broadly liberal, global ordering practices, thereby reproducing some of the deeper structural inequalities in international society that deny certain communities opportunities to (re)shape standards of appropriate behavior and statehood. Clarke (2020) shows how the institutional design and judicial practices of the International Criminal Court (ICC) have effectively reproduced racialized structures of global domination and inequality. This includes the substantive list of core crimes stipulated in the Rome Statute, which does not adequately reflect “many of the collective interests of global South peoples that are impacted by the structural violence of economic coercion,

⁶ See in particular Darcy's (2014) work on the role of ICCs in the development of international humanitarian law.

resource extraction, global wealth distribution and enforced impoverishment (...)” (Sujith Xavier and John Reynolds, cited in Clarke 2020). Since its establishment, the court has focused primarily on harm and violence in former colonial states in Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America. Other categories of crimes, including colonialism, apartheid, recruitment and support of mercenaries, international terrorism, and illicit drug trafficking, dropped out during the negotiations of the ICC regime (Clarke 2020). This is a good example of how agents’ concrete practices, and the institutional structures that shape them, endorse certain normative-constitutional configurations of international law based on the interests, moral preferences, and identities of international society’s established authority holders.

Our perspective has implications for primary–secondary institutional interaction, and how institutional ordering cannot be insulated from deeper normative questions in the way that some practice theorists seem to believe. Epistemologically, we must remember that agents and their diverse accounts of background knowledge and normativity have had highly uneven access to the institutions through which global ordering practices evolve. Some alternative approaches to international society, which would radically remake the basis of global order, have been completely excised as not just irrelevant, but as inadmissible to any debate. For example, through the concept of “the abyssal line” Santos (2017, 118–35) shows how whole knowledge forms are excised of epistemological validity, and thus normative value. Santos’ focus is indigenous groups, principally in Latin America, and the ways that colonialism questioned or denied their humanity through challenging the admissibility of their knowledge. This exercise in “epistemicide” was repeated elsewhere in the world, often against indigenous peoples, and was central to creating primary institutions such as the market. Concepts such as acquiring rights of control over private property through the application of labor, or the exchange of money arising from labor, developed alongside and in support of colonial expropriation of land from indigenous communities by deeming their land use non-productive and thus invalid (e.g., Gruffydd Jones 2008). Doctrines such as *terra nullius* and rights of enclosure claimed by colonial settlers created patterns and doctrines of property ownership, economic productivity, modes of exchange, and normative ideas of progress that became “naturalized” within primary institutions such that their colonial, racist, and epistemicidal origins are forgotten.

The beneficiaries of these and other constellations of primary institutions of international society have their perspective normatively privileged, and their practice is the one studied. These are the agents who are “professionally or intimately involved” in secondary institutions (Wilson 2012, 518), or are among “the 20,000 people worldwide who are the primary subjects of international ethics,” and of whom only about 1,000 really matter (Jackson 2000, 134). Even self-serving justifications for torture must be taken seriously when offered by people whose position is institutionally privileged, as to do otherwise would be to fail to pursue “an anthropologically sensitive investigation into what involved actors were actually contesting or seeking to transform ... [as part of] the gradual improvisation and institutionalization of new technical and professional skills and standards” (Pratt 2020, 60). This sets aside epistemological assumptions necessary to the separability of “anthropologically sensitive investigation,” the practice being investigated, and the primary institutional context that privileges certain people. The prior practices that define the primary institutional landscape, including epistemological violence onto-

logically characterizing particular social orders as being normatively (in)valid, create an elitism that, seemingly, practice-theoretical forms of inquiry need not engage, or, perhaps, even acknowledge. What they give rise to are “technical and professional skills and standards,” as though these have no history in violence and exploitation. That backdrop is just the “realities” of politics practitioners must work within and analysts must accept, in line with “... reject[ing] the illusory belief that the conduct of statespeople can be judged by applying the theories of moral philosophers” (Jackson 2000, 130), as though that philosophy played no part at all in the normativity of primary institutions. Not only moral philosophers must give way to the standards practitioners set through their practice, but also the experiences, practices, and epistemologies of the marginalized and subjugated, now and in the past.

Whilst we do not have space to discuss in detail secondary institutional practice in other areas, International Monetary Fund and World Bank Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) have similarly been analyzed as recreating colonial-style forms of subordination of post-colonial states’ interests and priorities through comparison to “capitulations,” including associations with racial hierarchy and inequality (Fidler 2000). Anghie (2000) shows how openness to international commerce, a key SAP goal, is deeply rooted in racial and colonial hierarchies and highly normative liberal accounts of the purpose of government.

Treating questions of international criminality, the best means of achieving economic development, or the appropriate standards of good government as technical questions, in which practitioners demonstrate greater or lesser levels of skill and achieve better or worse outcomes for their states, ignore the normativity of anchoring practices in accounts of war, law, economics, and government. These accounts derive from a highly partial account of the historical development of a Euro-centric world that typically minimizes or ignores the violence, slavery, exploitation, and racism of much of that development. IR as an academic discipline has typically participated in that selective memory (e.g., Vitalis 2015).

The normativity of primary institutions is therefore sustained, developed, and transformed in the practice of secondary institutions. They sensitize us to privileged, historically contextual positions of certain CoP and normative configurations when exploring interconnections and processual dynamics between primary and secondary institutions in the construction of global order. International society’s constitutional structures (Reus-Smit 1997) manifesting in “anchoring practices” (Swidler 2001), both linked to rightful membership and appropriate conduct, reveal and conceal inescapable normative claims of legitimacy. So, too, does analysis of how they shape and inform international society’s replication via practice. As Thompson (2013, 135) discusses in relation to race, IR is “aphasic” about its past, demonstrating a “calculated forgetting, an obstruction of discourse, language and speech.” The discourse, language, and speech of agents “that really matter” and who set “professional skills and standards” are, clearly, what practice theory studies, and to not note what is forgotten in that studying replicates that calculated forgetting. The agency of those practicing international relations, and of those studying it, is inescapably normatively loaded.

Conclusion

We have argued for the inherent normativity of primary institutions, understood as historically evolved social ordering

practices. Since Buzan established the concept of the primary institution as a cornerstone of the English School's conceptual framework, much progress has been made in theorizing its nature, function, and contribution to maintaining order at the global level. Recognizing and drawing out the relationship between primary institutions and formal institutional arrangements in which functional cooperation takes place (secondary institutions) is advancing. This work acknowledges the importance of agency for understanding continuity and change in international relations, most notably via social practice. Yet, whether social-structural or practice-based, theorizing primary institutions has side-stepped the full implication of their normative dimension. Practice theoretic accounts have similarly avoided fully recognizing the normativity inherent in practice, because of an unwillingness to sufficiently contextualize the practices that "matter" in the constitutional principles granting agency. These have a history and normativity that enable some agents, disable others, and obliterate yet others.

Our account addresses this shortcoming, showing how primary institutions set contested and inconsistent normative boundaries reflecting international society's deep-seated values and principles about the nature and moral purpose of states' social association. Secondary institutions create agency within this bounded space, but in ways that also challenge, reinforce, change, and confirm those boundaries, often by drawing on normative inconsistency. Creative practice within this space is unequally accessible, with some practitioners constituted as counting for more than others, or even as not counting at all. Those values, principles, and boundaries inescapably include, exclude, and privilege, because they rest on historical assessments and actions with enduring and ongoing legacies that reach into fundamental issues such as the epistemological and ontological conditions of the possibility of international order, and of membership and participation.

In summary, we have offered four contributions. Firstly, transmitting ethical judgments and normative positions between constitutional structures and secondary institutions via the discursive production and reproduction of primary institutions is an iterative process subject to agents' continual normative contestation. Bottom-up and top-down processes of normative transmission infuse one another through social interactions of agents engaged in continuously reproducing global ordering practices, including some that are deeply exclusive and frequently violent. While we may be able to analytically isolate some processes and directions, these are not linear phenomena in which primary institutions simply relay developments at one level in a way that generates observable effects at another. Instead, they are ongoing, multidirectional feedback processes in which primary institutions make possible normative discursive interactions that involve extant norms, rules, and principles, and broader normative conceptions of international society's constitutional structures. The result is an open-ended process in which actors make sense of ethically (un)desirable conceptions of international order in concrete reciprocal relations to others.

Secondly, we firmly integrate normativity into international society's ongoing, dynamic, institutional processes. We do so by augmenting the notion of agency to include the context of ideas, values, and norms that situate actors. In this view, agents who are doing the iterations that sustain international order, to use Navari's terminology, are embedded in and animated by particular normative contexts. Those contexts impinge upon their potential for agency and inevitably influence their choices about the practices that

sustain that order. This cannot be captured by the concept of "interests" understood as functional outcomes of actions that actors rank according to preference.

Thirdly, we embed dynamics in international society's constitutional structure in ongoing processes of practice that sustain and challenge primary institutions. Changes in constitutional structures have typically been understood in terms of exogenous shocks or tipping points, often major alterations associated with the settlement of conflicts when states engage in institutional bargaining processes about overarching new framework agreements for ordering relations among them. The constitutional agreements reached in the Peace of Westphalia 1648, the Congress of Vienna 1815, and in San Francisco 1945 have been explored in this way (e.g., Osiander 1994; Ikenberry 2001; Bobbitt 2002). Tying in with those historical accounts is a hierarchical, top-down conceptualization of change in which alterations in deep-seated ordering principles affect the more immediate governing structures and rules (Reus-Smit 1997, 566; see also Buzan 2004, 167; Friedner Parrat 2017). This essentially removes constitutional structures from agents' everyday practice.

Instead of treating constitutional values as analytically prior to primary and secondary institutions, our iterative, processual understanding of normativity makes considerations about the nature and distribution of roles, rights, and authority part and parcel of sustaining international order via primary institutions. Our account opens room for studying more systematically fine-grained normative changes, developments, and alterations in global constitutional principles resulting from ongoing institutional practice. That is likely to be a case-by-case assessment, but it should help identify "turning points" in international society other than the familiar list of 1648, 1815, 1919, 1945, and so on. Our iterative, processual understanding, at first glance, could usefully augment Buzan and Lawson's (2015) account of the confluence of institutional innovation, modes of production, and ideologies of progress that created modern international society during the "long nineteenth century."

Fourthly, thinking analytically about the normativity of primary institutions is not only about pushing specific normative conceptions of international society; neither is it aligning normatively charged institutional practice with cosmopolitan governance, as has often been the case in English School theory (e.g., Hurrell 2007). Instead, it is about theorizing fundamental global ordering practices as enabling members of an ethically diverse international society to *engage* and *mediate* normative questions about the purpose of their social association rather than *resolve* value-conflicts. International society offers nothing even approximating a definitive resolution of those constitutional differences through institutions. As shown, there is no simple answer to the question of who possesses moral authority in an armed conflict, which political community has a legitimate claim over territory, or who sets the hierarchy of crimes the ICC must adjudicate. Analogous to those dilemmas, there is no single, pre-constituted substantive source enabling actors to draw on primary institutions such as international law to mandate "right," "good," or "just" courses of action. This complexity, and resultant indeterminacy, is not the result of a lack of effort to explore, empirically or philosophically, the "true" normative proposition underpinning a primary institution and its practice. Instead, it manifests a central and inescapable feature of a globalized social system that, at least analytically, spans the entire human population: The competing epistemologies, ideas, moral claims, and preference structures the world's diverse human

communities hold, have held, and will hold in relation to key social, ethical, and political questions.

Recognizing the inherent normativity of institutional ordering practices connects debates about normative structures in international relations to moral philosophical accounts of ethical practice. As Jamie Gaskarth (2011, 433) rightly observed, studying institutions requires that “we pay attention to individuals as moral agents and begin to acknowledge their role in constructing and constituting social practices.” Those individuals include not just those who practice within those institutions, but those whose practice produces knowledge of and about those institutions. An account of primary institutions that takes normative agency seriously can narrate the relationships between normative structures and individual social practice, making room for integrating structural debates about ideas, values, and principles that define how the global institutional order is constituted and how individuals perceive themselves, their roles, and their decisions when sustaining that order.

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