Universiteit Antwerpen

Parsing the practice turn : practice, practical knowledge, practices

Parsing The Practice Turn: Practice, Practical Knowledge, Practices

Jorg Kustermans, University of Antwerp

International Relations is a social science which studies the relations between more or less bounded polities,[1] which are but a sub-set of all social relations. and are embedded in, what has been called the 'human social world.'[2] As a result, social theories inevitably ground theories of international relations. The so-called practice turn stages its intervention at this foundational level. It re-articulates fundamental social-theoretical concepts in order to re-orient our understanding of the nature and dynamics of international relations.[3] The practice turn in our field finds its direct origin in an earlier movement in social theory, exemplified by such titles as Bourdieu's *The Logic of Practice*, Schatzki et. al.'s *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory*, and Reckwitz's 'Towards a Theory of Social Practices'.[4] Part of the promise of the practice turn is to bring international theory and research in line with these broader theoretical developments.[5]

Practice theory has been championed, applied, and criticised in International Relations. It has been championed on three main grounds: (1) philosophically, because of its promise to overcome entrenched but unsustainable dualisms,[6] (2) theoretically, primarily because of its potential to account for change in world politics,[7] and (3) methodologically, because it helps us observe world

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[1] Iver Neumann, 'International Relations as a Social Science', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 43, no. 1 (2014): 334.

[2] Hidemi Suganami, 'Causal Explanation and Moral Judgement: Undividing a Division', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 39, no. 3 (2011): 725.

[3] Cf. Erik Ringmar, 'The search for dialogue as a hindrance to understanding: the practice turn as inter-paradigmatic research program', *International Theory* 6, no. 1 (2014): 22.

[4] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990). Theodore Schatzki, Karin Knorr Cetina, and Eike Von Savigny, eds., *The Practice Turn in Contemporary T*heory (London: Routledge, 2001). Andreas Reckwitz, 'Toward a Theory of Social Practices: A Development in Culturalist Theorizing', *European Journal of Social Theory* 5, no. 2 (2002): 243-263.

[5] E.g., Rebecca Adler-Nissen, ed., *Bourdieu in International Relations: Rethinking Key Concepts in IR* (London: Routledge, 2013).

[6] Emanuel Adler and Vincent Pouliot, 'International practices: introduction and framework', in *International Practices*, eds. Emanuel Adler and Vincent Pouliot (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 14-19.

[7] Iver Neumann, 'Returning practice to the linguistic turn: the case of diplomacy', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 31, no. 3 (2002): 627-651. Sebastian Schmidt, 'Foreign Military Presence and the Changing Practice of Sovereignty: A Pragmatist Explanation of Norm Change', *American Political Science Review* 108, no. 4 (2014): 817-829. Sebastian Schindler and Tobias Wille, 'Change in and through practice: Pierre Bourdieu, Vincent Pouliot, and the end of the Cold War', *International Theory* 7, no. 2 (2015): 330-359.

politics *as it actually occurs*,[8] paying attention to the so-called *stuff* of world politics., ugly though that signifier is.

Let us provisionally identify practice with 'doings,' with 'what actors do and say,'[9] with *actual* human behaviours.[10] The notion of 'doings' points towards the tangible and observable,[11] in contrast to, for instance, the more ephemeral, and forever imputed, 'preferences' or 'norms.' The point of practice theory is that, *somehow*, we need to keep these 'doings' front and center in our theoretical endeavors. The resulting analyses have been characterised as 'down-to-earth and perhaps unflattering documentary portrayals,' which privilege the 'commonplace' and that which happens 'on the surface.'[12] It is this starting point which is taken to warrant the three promises mentioned above.

Outside International Relations, the most important charge against practice theory has come from without the approach. 'Praxys theorists,' write sociologists Jeffrey Alexander and Jason Mast, 'have blinded themselves to the deeply embedded textuality of every social action.'[13] Alexander and Mast identify 'practice' with the habitual and the everyday and insist that social life equally includes the reflective, the eventful, and the dramatic. Practice theory must fall short of grounding an encompassing social theory because it neglects half of social life's equation.

Within International Relations, the most important charge against the practice turn concerns its inconsistencies. Friedrich Kratochwil[14] warns of the mutually incompatible meanings of the concept of practice. Nicholas Onuf identifies two models of practice in use – a 'rules model' and a 'powers model' – but finds that 'their terms are so poorly specified that the two models collapse into a single

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[8] Christian Bueger, 'Pathways to Practice: Praxiography and International Relations', *European Political Science Review* 6, no. 3 (2014): 383-406. Vincent Pouliot and Jérémie Cornut, 'Diplomacy in Theory and in Practice: Introduction', *Cooperation and Conflict* (forthcoming).

[9] Christian Bueger and Frank Gadinger, *International Practice Theory: New Perspectives* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 3.

[10] Cf. Morten Andersen and Iver Neumann, 'Practices as Models: a Methodology with an Illustration Concerning Wampum Diplomacy', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 40, no. 3 (2012): 461.

[11] Ibid., 470.

[12] Lynch in Friedrich Kratochwil, 'Making sense of international practices', in *International Practices*, 43.

[13] Jeffrey Alexander and Jason Mast, 'Introduction: symbolic action in theory and practice: the cultural pragmatics of symbolic action', in *Social Performance: Symbolic Action, Cultural Pragmatics, and Ritual*, eds. Jeffrey Alexander, Bernhard Giesen, and Jason Mast (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 1.

[14] Kratochwil, 'Making sense'.

incoherent concept of practice.'[15] We find a similar indictment in Erik Ringmar's review of the practice turn, which concludes that 'by meaning anything, practices come to mean nothing.'[16]

This paper suggests that the practice turn lumps together three concepts. A first concept –practice – I define as *all of us doing all of our doings*, the myriad of human behaviours, which is forever going on all at once. A second –practical knowledge – I define as *my and your, and his and her skill at doing what we do*. A third – practices – I define as *the things that we do*, the organized activities that we encounter and participate in. Depending on what concept one has in mind – practice, practical knowledge, or practices – it is a further contention of the paper, different accounts follow with respect to the three promises of practice theory that were identified above. The three concepts deal with social theory's traditional dualisms in different ways. They entail a different theory of change and entail different theories – and types of theorisation – of empirical phenomena.

Methodologically, this paper works on instrumentalist premises. The meaning of (theoretical) concepts is taken to lie in the (analytical) consequences that they bring about.[17] I have no desire to save the practice turn by grounding it in sounder, more valid anthropological assumptions.[18] Rather I will parse the practice turn in order to clarify what it brings, does not bring, cannot bring, and could bring to international theory. A first reason to parse the practice turn is precisely that it has been charged with inconsistencies, foremost with respect to the problem of change, with some arguing that change is endogenous to practice, and others insisting that it is exogenous to it. The confusion here is particularly troubling because the practice turn promises a better handle on the problem of change. A second reason is that critics have questioned the analytical value of the approach. In particular with respect to the tidings of war and peace (in Russia-NATO relations),[19] traditional scholars remark that they would predict much the same outcomes for much the same reasons that a practice-based analysis would.[20] Parsing the practice turn, and relating its component elements to the problems of change and peace, should clarify its potential significance. To parse is to decompose

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[15] Nicholas Onuf, 'Rules in Practice', in *On Rules, Politics and Knowledge: Friedrich Kratochwil, International Relations and Domestic Affairs*, eds. Oliver Kessler et al. (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 116.
[16] Erik Ringmar, 'The search for dialogue as a hindrance to understanding: the practice turn as inter-paradigmatic research program', *International Theory* 6, no. 1 (2014), 6.
[17] Cf. Charles Peirce, *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings (1867-1893)* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 132.
[18] In contrast, maybe, to Janice Bially-Mattern, 'A Practice Theory of Emotion for International Relations', in *International Practices*, 63-86; and to Erik Ringmar, 'How the World Stage Makes its Subjects: An Embodied Critique of Constructivist IR Theory', *Journal of International Relations and Development* 18 (2015/forthcoming).
[19] Vincent Pouliot, *International Security in Practice: The Politics of Nato-Russia Diplomacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
[20] Robert Jervis. 'Review by Robert Jervis.' *H-Diplo/ISSF Roundtable Review of Vincent Pouliot. International Security in Practice: The Politics of Nato-Russia Diplomacy* (2011), 22-29. Available from http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/ISSF/PDF/ISF-Roundtable-2-5.pdf. Last accessed May 22, 2015.

but suggests the intention of re-composition. However, to parse is also to pull apart. The whole is judged crooked although the parts may still prove valuable.

Practice

Ordinary language pits practice against theory. Theory is tidy, whereas practice is messy. 'That might be true in theory,' people tell us, 'but it does not hold in practice.' The theoretical city, for instance, is the city of modernist planners, but the practical city is the city of countless, crisscrossing footsteps of ordinary men and women.[21] Similarly, the theoretical society is a society centered on and sustained by a small set of core values and objects, whereas actually existing society consists of a chain of 'everyday activities' – 'traffic jams, service lines, summoning phones, blackboard notes, jazz piano in a cocktail lounge, talking chemistry in a lecture format'[22] – going on all at once. Practice coincides with *all of us doing all of our doings*. Theory can never do justice to practice.

The concept of practice ultimately expresses a metaphysical intuition. Heraclitus' (apocryphal)[23] dictum that 'all entities move and nothing remains still' summarises the intuition. When critics of the practice turn fault practice theorists for taking insufficient account of extraordinary moments, and more generally of the Sacred, in the social lives of people and groups,[24] they underestimate the quasi-religious significance of this metaphysical commitment. The concept draws attention to the ordinary, to that which happens on the surface, but it does not identify the ordinary with the tepid, or the surface with the superficial. Harold Garfinkel names the continuous chain of everyday activities our '*immortal* ordinary society' and a 'wonderful beast.'[25] Michel de Certeau warned that the sum total of ordinary, urban footsteps constituted 'a force that defies all calculation,'[26] reminding the reader that a 'goddess can be recognised by her steps.'[27] The political counterpart of the (metaphysical) concept of practice is probably the notion of the multitude. The multitude is always in movement. The multitude invites excitement and fear. We (fear to) lose ourselves in the multitude. We hope (or fear) that the multitude will overpower structures.[28]

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[21] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1988), 91-110.
[22] Harold Garfinkel, 'Ethnomethodology's Program', *Social Psychology Quarterly* 59, no. 1 (1996), 7.
[23] Cf. G.S. Kirk, 'III. Natural Change in Heraclitus', *Mind: New Series* 60, no. 237 (1951), 35: '[…] there is nothing in the extant fragments about the flux of all things.'
[24] Alexander and Mast, 'Introduction.'
[25] Garfinkel, 'Ethnomethodology's Program', 7 (emphasis added).
[26] de Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, 110.
[27] Ibid., 97.
[28] Cf. Giorgio Agamben, 'Movement', *Multitudes Web* (2005). Available at http://multitudes.samizdat.net/Movement.html. Last accessed March 03, 2015.

The concept of practice invites a particular sociological argument. Social facts are rendered as fragile accomplishments. They are recognised not to be things, but dissolve into social process. Stability is traded for stabilisation.

> There is no moment in which processes of stabilization and shaping give way to different processes of maintenance and reproduction. Social life is almost never stable enough to simply be taken for granted.[29]

Practice overwhelms particular attempts at social construction. When stabilisation does succeed, on this view, it must 'entail an element of force and violence.'[30] 'The determination of meaning' must involve 'an exercise of force, a violent arrestation.'[31] And even then, practice will eventually 'overflow'[32] any structural patterns that are being imposed on it. '[A]ttempts to tame practice, […], to control its unruliness and instability'[33] must falter. In a similar vein, Alexander Wendt emphasises the originary role of practice – as an ongoing *process* of bodily doings – in the constitution of social meaning, identities and structures.[34] 'Structure,' he writes, 'has no existence or causal powers apart from process.' With Wendt (1992: 413), bodies in movement found and sustain roles,[35] and process ('or practice')[36] (onto)logically precedes structure. Cultures of anarchy ultimately emerge from practice broadly conceived – from *all of us doing all of our doings*. That Wendt ended up identifying 'practice' with inter-state action was always justified on pragmatic grounds.[37]

Practice and change

The concept of practice connotes change. Consider these statements.

> Discourse is being while practice is becoming from which discourses result and to which they eventually succumb.[38]

> Practice-qua-performance is a process; change, not stability, is the ordinary condition of social life. […] Stability […] is an illusion created by the recursive nature of practice. […] New

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[29] Patrick Jackson, *Civilizing the Enemy: German Reconstruction and the Invention of the West* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2006), 39 (original emphases deleted, emphasis mine).

[30] Roxanne Doty, 'Aporia: A Critical Examination of the Agent-Structure Problematique in International Relations Theory', *European Journal of International Relations* 3, no. 3 (1997), 378.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid., 377.

[33] Ibid., 376.

[34] Alexander Wendt, 'Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics', *International Organization* 41, no. 3 (1992): 425.

[35] Ibid., 413.

[36] Cf. Doty, 'Aporia', 376.

[37] Cf. Stefano Guzzini, *Power, Realism and Constructivism* (London: Routledge, 2013), 251-252.

[38] Theodore Schatzki, 'Practice-minded orders', in *Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory*, 44. Neumann, 'Returning practice', 631.

> ways of thinking or doing *necessarily* emerge from the contingent 'play of practice' (Doty, 1997) [...].[39]

> Clearly, change in practice is endogenous – it is the work of practice itself. (Pouliot 2011: 4)[40]

True enough, many observers discern routine behavior in human practice. Theodore Hopf argues that change is exogenous to practice.[41] Bueger and Gadinger accept that practice is at once change and continuity: 'Practices are repetitive patterns. But they are also permanently displacing and shifting.'[42] Erik Ringmar, however, insists that such stance is untenable. 'Practices cannot simultaneously be the origin of one thing – stability – and its opposite – change.'[43]

There are two ways out of Ringmar's paradox. A first way out is to make a distinction between practice as an ontic phenomenon – as the continuous empirical manifestation of *all of us doing all of our doings* – and practice as an ontological concept – where *all of us doing all of our doings* becomes the fount of all social facts. Practice as an ontic phenomenon exists only in our observations, so that some will perceive it as stable and others as fluid. Practice as an ontological concept, however, would entail a clearer bias toward change. Even when we perceive continuity, the concept implies, that perception is largely an illusion. Or when we perceive continuity, we attribute it to sources other than practice. Vincent Pouliot, for instance, argues that the failure of the NATO-Russia relationship to develop into a security community was due to the persistence of material and discursive structures, which trumped the budding practice of diplomacy.[44]

A second way out of the paradox is to insist on the conceptual distinctions that structure this article and to observe how authors shift between concepts. Hopf's is an account of habit as a logic of action, not an ontological reflection on the nature of the human social world. Note also that Adler and Pouliot situate the illusion of continuity in the performance of *practices,* but that they locate the inevitability of change in Doty's 'play of *practice*,' not in the play of practices.

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[39] Adler and Pouliot, 'Introduction', 18.

[40] Vincent Pouliot, 'Author's response.' *H-Diplo/ISSF Roundtable Review of Vincent Pouliot's International Security in Practice* (2011), 4. Available from http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/ISSF/PDF/ISSF-Roundtable-2-5.pdf. Last accessed May 22, 2015.

[41] Theodore Hopf, 'The Logic of Habit in International Relations', *European Journal of International Relations* 16, no. 4 (2010), 545-546.

[42] Christian Bueger and Frank Gadinger, 'The Play of International Practice', *International Studies Quarterly* (2015/forthcoming), 8.

[43] Ringmar, 'Search for Dialogue', 18.

[44] Pouliot, *International Security in Practice*..

Keeping these distinctions firmly in mind, it becomes clearer that the concept of practice does in fact connote change. Said change is theorised either as happening incrementally,[45] or, more often, erratically. Change is without obvious direction; it does not unfold according to a plan. Change is non-telic.

Two further remarks are in order. First, *practice* remains a metaphysical notion (with political implications). From an explanatory perspective[46] the ubiquity of process can strike as something of a truism;[47] politically important, but analytically constraining. Unsurprisingly, therefore, many practice-theoretical analyses will *explain particular outcomes* (events, configurations) with reference to concepts other than practice. With Doty this is the notion of violence, which comes across, in her account, as an outside force imposing itself on practice.

Second, the concept of practice too readily equates process with change. But change and process are not the same thing. Or at least not all change is 'non-trivial change.'[48] Theodore Schatzki makes a similar point.

> […] an event is not the same thing as change. To be sure, every activity is unique and thereby effects a change in, that is, an expansion of, the total stock of events. Not every activity constitutes change beyond this. […] *The realization that many activity events perpetuate existing practices and bundles and effect only negligible changes, if any, opposes the prominent contemporary intuition that becoming – or process – qualifies human life and sociality (when becoming and process are understood as continuous change).[49]*

The concept of practice assumes change to be ubiquitous, but this remains a metaphysical wager. Empirically, change only exists in our assessment of change. To observe that there is forever an 'expansion of the total stock of events,' because *all of us doing all of our doings* is ongoing, does not suffice to prove that change is continuous. To demonstrate that, ontologically, social facts suffer from fundamental instability, is not yet to observe change. The opposite of change is continuity, not stability.

Also theoretically the concept of practice accounts for change less obviously than is sometimes assumed. Even if we assume that *practice* is an important cause of change, this leaves unanswered what type of cause of change it is. Within a traditional typology of causes – efficient, material, formal

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[45] Iver Neumann, *Diplomatic Sites: A Critical Inquiry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1. For a critical take on practice theory's incrementalist bias, cf. Raymond Duvall and Arjun Chowdury, 'Practices of Theory', in *International Practices*, 348.

[46] Doty, 'Aporia', 375.

[47] Marshall Sahlins, 'Two or Three Things That I Know About Culture', *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 5, no. 3 (1999): 399-421.

[48] Neumann, 'Returning Practice', 628.

[49] Theodore Schatzki, 'Where the Action Is (On Large Social Phenomena Such as Sociotechnical Regimes)', *Sustainable Practices Research Group Working Paper 1* (2011): 4 (emphasis added).

and final – *practice* is most adequately considered a material cause. *Practice* is what the human social world is 'fundamentally' made up of. But a material cause is ultimately impotent in bringing about change. Matter is what we work on. Matter can resist or constrain our options for us, but it can never organise change itself. It cannot initiate nor deliberately bring about. With *practice* theorists, matter gains a dynamic, or mucous, quality. It escapes solidity and fixed form.

Maybe *practice* theorists are right. Maybe the self-dynamic force of practice results in radical historical indeterminacy, in directionless change. Maybe the expectation of mastery and direction is a modern illusion. This suggest that an alternative 'theory' of change hides in the concept of practice, whereby change would morph into chance. Chance evokes fear. Earlier people turned chance into a deity and called her Fortuna. One could try to please Fortuna through ritual and cults. Or one could counter Fortuna with virtus, which later became virtue and today is called agency. Ritual and cults are easily recognised as social *practices*. Effective, virtuous agency, for its part, is often considered the product of *practical knowledge*.

Practice and peace

In early applications of practice theory to International Relations, Vincent Pouliot and Emanuel Adler have attempted to theorise security communities from a practice-theoretical perspective.[50] The concept of *practice* plays a central part in their argument. Pouliot explains the *failure* of the establishment of a NATO-Russian security community by arguing that the development of diplomatic 'practice' was hampered by material and discursive 'structures'.[51] Adler explains the *spread* of security communities with reference to a process of cognitive evolution which he lodges in 'practice.'[52] He defines a security community as a community of practice, within which self-restraint has become practical reason and within which cooperative security practices have become background knowledge. The further expansion of such community happens, ultimately, in *practice*.

> The macro mechanism that explains the selection and institutionalization of background knowledge, which determines the practices that become prevalent and diffused, is not environmental fitness, as in natural evolution, but meaning investment. By that I mean the endowment of meanings of identity and interests with authority and naturalness of the kind

that may only come with practice. Communities of practice expand because *recurrent practice* contributes to the institutionalization of a practice.[53]

Through practice – which Adler's case study identifies with a continuous stream of everyday activities: meetings, workshops, exercises – 'knowledge becomes entrenched,' 'communities of practice cross a cognitive threshold and expand preferentially.'[54] Adler describes the process as dynamic and non-linear, but also as self-'reinforcing,'[55] thus signaling that change is endogenous to practice. At the same time, Adler describes the causal power of *practice* in explaining security community expansion as 'potential'[56] only and he understands that, for a security community to become a reality, *practice* needs to be channeled, promoted (by vanguard agents), institutionalised, and received (by culturally attuned audiences). *Practice* needs to be supplanted with agentic and structural concepts to explain just how and where peace spreads. What this shows is the ultimate impotence of the very concept of 'practice' in an explanatory context. Because of its ontological nature, it is a necessary condition for everything (it's always there), but a sufficient explanation for nothing. It draws attention to matter, but cannot, on its own, bring about form.

Practical knowledge

Returning to ordinary language, it is common to associate 'practice' with the world of crafts and professions.[57] One becomes a true crafts person or a valued professional only through practice, through on the job training. Bookish knowledge needs to be supplanted with practical knowledge, with skill developed through experience.

Discussions of practical knowledge will often hark back to Aristotle, who distinguished five 'things by which the soul attains the truth,' or five types of knowledge: 'art [*techne*], science [*episteme*], prudence [*phronesis*], wisdom [*sophia*] and intellect [*nous*]' (1139b15).[58] Of these, *techne* and *prhonesis* are types of practical knowledge, meaning that they concern activity in situations or with respect to outcomes that 'admit of being otherwise' (1140a1-2), respectively making [*poiesis*] and political action [*praxis*]. Aristotle insist on the differences between *poiesis* and *praxis*; the end of the former being to bring about tangible objects, the end of the latter being to have political society fare

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[53] Ibid., 203 (emphasis added).
[54] Ibid., 204.
[55] Ibid., 217.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Kratochwil, 'Making sense', 207.
[58] I am quoting from the recent Barlett and Collins translation of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. Cf. Robert Bartlett and Susan Collins, *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics: A New Translation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011).

well. *Phronesis*, then, is a person's skill to deliberate about what, in concrete situations, will advance the common good. *Techne*, for its part, is a person's skill to 'contrive and contemplate how something […] may come into being' (1140a12-13). Practical knowledge, whatever its object, always concerns a *person's skill – my and your skill, his and her skill – at doing what she's doing*, where it is understood that doing is always concrete doing, doing that pertains to situations that admit of being otherwise.

The concept of practical knowledge originally belonged to 'the realm of ethical speculation.'[59] This becomes obvious from Aristotle's discussion of *phronesis* and *techne*, which is embeddedin a discussion of the contribution of the (intellectual) virtues to sustaining a city where people fare well. The moral promise of practical knowledge has not been lost on international theorists. Evaluating the 'return of practical reason to international theory,' Hayward Alker (1996: 421) opined that this return 'contain[ed] the possibility of […] a new (yet very old) kind of rationality, with enormous, but uncertain healing potential.'[60] Similarly Chris Brown associates prudence with the rediscovery of a proper sense of tragedy and the cultivation of a particular ethical-political attitude.[61] Practical knowledge, David McCourt further writes should help us 'address problems of international political *praxis*.'[62]

The concept of practical knowledge has also migrated from the realm of ethics to that of social theory, where it features in a debate about the logics of action. Social theorists that value the concept seize on the fact that practical knowledge always pertains to concrete doing. 'By practical reasons,' explains Jacob Hintikka, 'I shall simply mean reason in so far as it is occupied with human action, human doing [*praxis*] and making [*poiesis*], and with the results of such action.'[63] Practical knowledge informs – shapes, sustains, directs – practical action. Some social theorists believe that most human action is practical action and that practical knowledge must be central to any *theory of action*. If moral and political theorists argue that practical knowledge should inform practical action (for the benefit of the common good, or, when it concerns *techne*, so that the work of craft becomes more beautiful and sturdy), social theorists observe that practical knowledge *does indeed inform most human action*.

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[59] Chris Brown, 'The practice turn, phronesis and classical realism: towards a phronetic international political theory', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 40, no. 3 (2012): 455.

[60] Alker, *Rediscoveries and Reformulations*, 421.

[61] Chris Brown, 'Tragedy, tragic choices and contemporary international political theory', *International Relations* 21, no. 1 (2007): 5-13.

[62] David McCourt, 'What's at stake in the historical turn? Theory, practice and phronesis in international relations', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 13, no. 3 (2012): 370-392.

[63] in Alker, *Rediscoveries and Reformulations*, 401.

> Most of what people do, in world politics as in any other social field, does not derive from conscious deliberation or thoughtful reflection […]. Instead practices [sic] are the result of inarticulate, practical knowledge that makes what is to be done appear "self-evident" or commonsensical.[64]

Practical knowledge is a skill acquired through experience. It ensures that we know how to go on, it enables us to handle situations. Practical knowledge is social to the extent that is acquired through an irreducibly social process (often of mimesis) and within an irreducibly social environment,[65] but individual to the extent that it accrues to people. Practical knowledge is unevenly distributed. The *phronemos* has gained a lot of practical knowledge. Politically, this allows him to dominate others (in Bourdieusian terms) or, less negatively, authorises him to exercise rule (in Aristotelian terms). The concept of practical knowledge betrays an elitist bias: only a few can ever become prudent, the many will forever be whimsical.

In International Relations the practice turn has largely centered around the concept of practical knowledge. Some contributions flag the ethical importance of the concept. They identify it with prudence.[66] Others flag the explanatory significance of the concept. They engage debates about the logic of action. Some among them stress the habitual and reproductive character of practical action.[67] Others emphasise the creative and improvisational character of practical action.[68] Practical knowledge, in both instances, is neither really *phronesis* nor really *techne*. In International Relations, and in social theory more generally, practical knowledge has come to mean the ability to navigate a social milieu successfully, to secure one's position of power,[69] to manage one's social image,[70] or even to work the bureaucracy skillfully.[71] In international negotiations, practical knowledge means that one exercises power by drawing up 'crafty compromises,' by 'skillfully framing' events, by 'making creative use of' procedures, by soothing the annoyances of other delegates through 'repair

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[64] Pouliot, 'Logic of Practicality', 258. The word practices, as used in this quote, would seem to coincide with action, and is not being used in the specific sense that I will develop in the next section of this paper.

[65] Bueger and Gadinger, 'Play of International Practice', 1, 5.

[66] E.g., McCourt, 'What's at stake.'

[67] Pouliot, 'Logic of Practicality.' Hopf, 'Logic of Habit.'

[68] Bueger and Gadinger, 'Play of International Practice.' Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, 'Situated Creativity, or, The Cash Value of a Pragmatist Wager for IR', *International Studies Review* 11, no. 3 (2009): 656-659.

[69] Erik Voeten, 'The practice of political manipulation', in *International Practices*, 255-279.

[70] Rebecca Adler-Nissen, 'Stigma Management in International Relations: Transgressive Identities, Norms, and Order in International Society', *International Organization* 68, no. 1 (2014): 143-167.

[71] Iver Neumann, 'A Speech That The Entire Ministry May Stand For, Or, Why Diplomats Never Produce Anything New', *International Political Sociology* 1, no. 2 (2007): 183-200.

work,' by 'exploiting' situations, or, when so necessary, by 'resigning to one's losses.'[72] Practical knowledge hovers somewhere between tactical and strategic skill.[73] It is prudence for modern man.[74]

Practical knowledge and change

Practical knowledge is knowledge of the materials that one is working with, or of the people that one is interacting with. It is knowledge of the world that one is operating in, its past and (as a consequence) its possible futures. It is knowledge of social conventions, of the opportunities they offer and the taboos they impose. Some aspects of practical knowledge are without definite object: experience instills a sense of timing and a generalised appreciation of the particularity of situations. Here practical knowledge (*phronesis*) morphs into intellect (*nous*): a situation is grasped. Decisive action becomes possible.

The concept of practical knowledge affords a theory of meaningful change – change from formless into formed matter. The concept wagers that a skilled person can bring about meaningful change, that change can be a product of directed human intervention. 'As for fostering sociotechnical change,' Theodore Schatzki writes

> This is an art born of experience and study. It requires among other things, a knack for timing, insight into likely responses to activities and measures, and a sense of the range of histories and possibilities.[75]

Practical knowledge envisages the possibility of organising change, of taming *practice* without recourse to violence. Nonetheless, the expectation never becomes overtly liberal. A sense of tragedy limits the scope for organised change: 'happenstance and contingency are accorded prominence in the evolution of social affairs.'[76] The idea is precisely that the *phronemos* – the person of great practical knowledge – encounters and works upon an unruly, resistant world. Enforcing change is not possible,[77] only *fostering* change is.

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[72] Rebecca Adler-Nissen and Vincent Pouliot, 'Power in Practice: Negotiating the International Invention in Libya', *European Journal of International Relations* 20, no. 4 (2014): passim.
[73] Jeffrey Alexander, *Fin-de-Siècle Social Theory: Relativism, Reduction and the Problem of Reason* (London: Verso, 1995), 128-217.
[74] Harry Gould, 'Parsing Prudence' (Paper presented at the International Studies Association Annual Conference, New Orleans, 17-21 February 2010).
[75] Schatzki, 'Where The Action Is', 25.
[76] Ibid., 29.
[77] James Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

Some theorists of practical knowledge go further and theorise the impossibility of *truly meaningful* change, precisely because change would depend on the practical knowledge of a particular person.

> The agent engaged in [practical action] knows the world but with a knowledge which […] is not set up in the relation of externality of a knowing consciousness. He knows it, in a sense, too well, without objectifying distance, takes it for granted, precisely because he is caught up with it; he inhabits it like a garment [*un habit*] or a familiar habitat. He feels at home in the world because the world is also in him, in the form of habitus, a virtue made of necessity which implies a form of love of necessity, *amor fati*.[78]

Both accounts – Schatzki's and Bourdieu's – theorise change in terms of *agentic interventions*. This makes sense in light of practical knowledge being an asset or good accruing to people. Both accounts also explicitly signal the limits of *agentic interventions* as sources of change. Schatzki situates those limits partly in the surrounding environment, marked by happenstance and contingency, and partly in the very notion of practical knowledge, which always risks being insufficiently developed. Bourdieu situates the limits of agentic interventions more firmly within practical knowledge: the more developed the habitus is, he seems to imply, the less chance that meaningful change can be brought about.[79] An important reason for that shift from tragedy to fatalism lies in their diverging accounts of practical knowledge. Crucially, Bourdieu is keen to identify practical knowledge with inarticulate knowledge, whereas Schatzki allows for representation – 'a skill born of experience and *study*' – in practical knowledge too, and insists that practical knowledge should not collapse into common or background knowledge.[80]

A tension between possibility and reluctance supplements that between tragedy and fatalism. Sometimes practical knowledge brings about form where first there was formless matter. At other times practical knowledge helps retain a certain form in spite of material evolutions. The *phronemos* does not only recognise that change is difficult to impose on an unruly world. He also understands that the world itself can change, from its own accord. In these situations he will counsel adaptation in order to forestall more radical, upsetting change. Consider, for instance, Hans Morgenthau's advocacy of a world state in reaction to the nuclear revolution.[81] Or consider the shrewd defense of status privilege in reaction to processes of societal democratisation.[82] The latter example flags the elitist bias inherent in the concept of practical knowledge. Agents imbued with practical knowledge

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[78] Pierre Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 141-142.
[79] Cf. Alexander, *Fin-de-Siècle Social Theory*, 128-217.
[80] Cf. Theodore Schatzki, *Social Practices: A Wittgensteinian Approach to Human Activity and the Social* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), chapter 5.
[81] James Speer, 'Hans Morgenthau and the World State', *World Politics* 20, no. 2 (1968): 207-227.
[82] John Pocock, *The Macchiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 145-146. Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2000).

can foster change, but they are few and will only foster change that coincides with their (conception of the general) interest. *Practical knowledge emerges as a direct answer to practice: it pits agency against chance and the phronemoi against the mob.*

Practical knowledge and peace

Laura Ring's account of 'everyday peace in a Karachi apartment building,'[83] describes how women congregate in the women's quarters – the *zenana* – of their apartments and explains how their interaction there helps mediate the ethnic tensions that mark the city. Ring situates 'peace' in an uninviting environment. 'The dangerous, slippery, disordered circumstance of proximate living must be transformed, through practice, into *ham sayagi* [i.e., sharing the shade, neighborhood].'[84] Ring identifies 'practice' with practical action and explains how it builds on practical knowledge, not in the least of how to 'handle' – not suppress – emotions. Ring (2006: 111) stresses that women are the agents of that knowledge; that 'peace' is the 'product of relentless labor […] carried out by women.'

> […] while men's anger is dangerous and uncontrollable, something to be avoided and feared, women's anger is necessary and tactical. Women's anger and its expression through violence, are represented as intelligent, reasoning, directed, controllable and restrained. Women's anger is moral and productive; it is in fact a tactic of containment.[85]

Two features characterise practical knowledge's theory of peace. First, it is agentic. Peace does not emerge from an impersonal process, but is tied to real, individual people, acting self-consciously and more or less competently. There is a certain knack to veer into a type of heroism. Because it is individual people that hold practical knowledge, an explanation of peace that centers on practical knowledge will often end up celebrating particular people, in group or individually. With Ring it is Karachi women. With Kissinger it is the likes of Metternich and Richelieu.[86] In both instances, their students value *their* practical knowledge and write about them with a hagiographic streak. Second, the concept of practical knowledge affords an *impure conception of peace*. Ring, for instance, accepts spitting and beating as falling within the remit of peace, and, like classical realists (who observe the unresolvable dilemma of reconciling order and justice), identifies peace as 'an unstable state between festival and war.'[87] Both the agent-centered explanation and the impure conception of

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[83] Laura Ring, *Zenana: Everyday Peace in a Karachi Apartment Building* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006).
[84] Ibid., 22.
[85] Ibid., 111.
[86] Henry Kissinger, *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh and the Problems of Peace, 1812-22* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1957).
[87] Ring, *Zenana*, 65.

peace result intrinsically from the concept of *practical knowledge*; the first because practical knowledge accrues to individual people and to some more than others, the second because practical knowledge entails an appreciation of the non-universality of situations.

Practices

Let us once more return to ordinary language, which includes a meaning of practice that identifies it with custom. 'Pope Urban II,' an historian mentions, defined 'torture as a practice of barbarians.'[88] We encounter strange practices – *things that people(s) do* – when we travel. Ethnography finds its colonial origin in recording these practices. 'As European powers expanded and colonised large areas of Africa and Asia, they encountered new cultural practices and beliefs,' which (proto-)ethnographers would describe and categorise as 'primitive practices.'[89] Our own practices we find modern. We name them institutions instead of customs, but they are no less the *things that we do*.

Practice appears here as a countable noun. We observe *a* practice, *this* practice or *that* practice. Our first concept – *practice*, or *all of us doing all of our doings* (uncountable) – represented a metaphysical intuition with sociological implications. Our second concept – *practical knowledge*, or *my and your, and his and her skill at doing what we do* – represented an ethical wager which had morphed into an action-theoretical argument. Our third concept, for its part – *practices*, or *the things that we do* – takes up a more modest position. The concept operates at the ontic level of reality. To observe practices is to carve up social reality into more-or-less coherent slices of activity. 'Related rules, skills and goods,' that is, 'constitute a field of objects, which an agent-observer *could describe as a practice.*'[90] (Onuf 2010: 120; emphasis added). Praying and pilgrimage are practices in this sense, and so are tax-collection and warfare. Practices assume a degree of coherency or organisation. They admit of a form and converge on an end. Practices matter, not in the least because they mediate our experience for us.

A sociology centered on practices is, firstly, a descriptive endeavor. One describes a set of doings and sayings, but also the ends, the rules, the affective stances, the concepts, the practical and general understandings that link that group of doings and sayings together into an arrangement,[91] that define the set, that constitute the doings and sayings *as a practice*.

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[88] Larissa Tracy, *Torture and Brutality in Medieval Literature* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2011), 15.
[89] Julie Scott Jones, 'Origins and ancestors: a brief history of ethnography', in *Ethnography in social science practice*, eds. Julie Scott Jones and Sal Watt (London: Routledge, 2010), 15.
[90] Onuf, 'Rules in Practice', 120 (emphasis added).
[91] Theodore Schatzki, *The Site of the Social: A Philosophical Account of the Constitution of Social Life and Change* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), 87.

In a second moment, a sociology centered on practices will want to account for said practice by interpreting its content, its attributes, its characteristics. It recognises that practices have origins, typically hybridise, and bring about (redistributive) effects, but will insist that 'cultural things' have 'properties' too,[92] and that these properties matter to people, that these properties we should account for. Marshall Sahlins recognised the historicity of cultural practices, but wished to emphasise their thing-like quality. He recognised that practices helped people meet their individual needs, but stressed their social form. 'Historical customs' were not to be confused with 'dispositions;' neither 'forms with desires, structures with subjectivities, *in the vain hope of reducing on to the other*.'[93]

Sahlins saw ethnography – understood here as the non-diachronic description of a society's practices – as a necessary complement to geneaological reconstructions of these same practices, because he understood that customs are 'a-temporal, being for the people conditions of their form of life as constituted, considered coeval with it.'[94] Practices are, at least from the agents' point of view, *the things that they do*, relative certainties in a world which we fear to be in constant flux.

Practices are *things*, or thing-like, in three analytically meaningful senses. First, like objects they are situated in space. They are tangible or can be rendered tangible through our descriptions of them. They are 'moderate-sized specimen of dry goods.'[95] Second, like tools they have a form and a function. Practices are practical. People make use of them, or, put less subjectively, participate in their use. Third, like *arte-facts*, practices are animated. People experience them as living things; they endow them with (a) spirit – *hau* or *mana*,[96] one could also call it *authority*[97] – when making or repairing them (and might abandon them when they come to be experienced as soulless). Practices, like artefacts, have an aesthetic aspect to them. They are experienced as meaningful (or meaningless) *because of their properties*.

Practices abound in world politics. Interpretations of practices – interpretations of the *thingness* of practices[98] – are much scarcer in International Relations scholarship. Practices are studied, certainly,

[92] Sahlins, 'Two or Three Things', 407.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Ibid., 409.
[95] J.L. Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 8. Nicholas Onuf, Guest Lecture: Constructivism at the Crossroads – or the problem of moderate-sized dry goods. *Lecture at the University of Erfurt*, 19 November 2012. Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, *The Conduct of Inquiry in International Relations: Philosophy of Science and its Implications for the Study of World Politics* (London: Routledge, 2010), 84.
[96] Marcel Mauss, *Sociologie et Anthropologie: Introduction par Claude Lévi-Strauss* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2013).
[97] Ian Hurd, 'Legitimacy and Authority in International Politics', *International Organization* 53, no. 2 (1999): 379-408.
[98] Compare Wendy Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* (New York: Zone Books, 2010). James Hevia, *Cherishing Men From Afar: Qing Guest Ritual and the Macartney Embassy of 1793* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 118-133.

and are seen to shape the international order.[99] But the practice turn's primary interest is typically with what this or that international practice brings about, what outcome it effects, what windows of opportunities it creates, less so with interpreting its meaning. The approach is typically explanatory and political, not hermeneutic and cultural. Concluding his practices-centered ethnography of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a study that hovers between political science and anthropology, which begins with noting the cross-cultural importance of familial metaphors in diplomacy but ends with an explanation of how sub-state diplomacy developed in the Norwegian High North, Iver Neumann (2012: 182) reflects on this difference. 'It must be possible,' he writes, 'to speak about political processes and negotiations of identities more anthropologically, without worrying about what is actually being decided. But I have to face up to it: I cannot let go of my infatuation with outcome.'[100] Neumann's self-diagnosis has wider validity.

To the extent that practices exist in the world – as moderate-sized specimens of dry goods, at the ontic level of reality, where the common sense realist dwells – and happen in that world, they *must* have some causal efficacy. In combination a bundle of practices *might* even have decisive causal efficacy in bringing about large-scale historical developments.[101] But to reduce practices to their effects, to primarily treat them as causal factors, is to deny their particularity *as practices*. It is to deny the *thingness* that defines them.

Practices and change

Practices change. Take embassies, which evolved from ambulant to resident institutions[102] Or take humanitarianism which from its earlier, more inspired, days transformed into a thoroughly professionalised endeavor.[103]

Sometimes we judge practices' change to be non-trivial. The concept of practices entails a criterion to judge the quality of change. Because practices matter by mediating people's experience of their

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[99] For an overview of recent empirical studies of international practices, cf. Pouliot and Cornut, 'Diplomacy in Theory and in Practice', 9.

[100] Iver Neumann, *At Home with the Diplomats: Inside a European Foreign Ministry* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012), 182.

[101] Ringmar, 'Search for Dialogue', 18.

[102] Garrett Mattingly, 'The First Resident Embassies: Mediaeval Italian Origins of Modern Diplomacy', *Speculum: A Journal of Mediaeval Studies* 12, no. 4 (1937): 423-439.

[103] Michael Barnett, 'Evolution Without Progress: Humanitarianism in a World of Hurt', *International Organization* 63, no. 4 (2009): 621-633. Mark Duffield, 'Risk-Management and the Fortified Aid Compound: Everyday Life in Post-Inventionary Society', *Journal of Intervention and State-Building* 4, no. 4 (2010): 453-474. Lisa Smirl, *Spaces of Aid: How Cars, Compounds and Hotels Shape Humanitarianism* (London: Zed Books, 2015).

action and environment, a purported shift in experience indicates a meaningful change in practice. Drone warfare, for instance, can be said to differ *substantially* from trench warfare because soldiers in the trenches experienced war so differently from soldiers in drone control facilities do today.

There is a methodological complication to this argument. The complication springs from the fact that practices – *the things that we do* – while in an important sense material, ever only exist, *as practices*, in our reconstructions and reckoning of them. 'Related rules, skills and goods constitute a field of *objects*,' I have already quoted Nicholas Onuf as saying, 'which an agent-observer *could describe* as a practice.'[104] Practices are directly observable in their behaviorist dimension, but never directly observable *as practices*, as meaningful *sets* of doings and sayings.

'Change' fares even worse. It is possible to experience change but experience is forever contestable. Meaningful change, moreover, ever only exists in the stories that we tell about change. Change can be (thought of or talked about as) progressive, regressive, cyclical, revolutionary, or haphazard. Consider Rogers Brubaker review of Marcel Mauss' 'objectivist' analysis of the nation (which treats the nation as 'a thing being done'[105]), wherein Mauss compared the nation as a way of organising polities to earlier, tribal ways of political organisation.[106] Brubaker emphasises that in spite of a knack for evolutionism in early French sociology, Mauss insisted on the similarities between (primitive) tribal and (modern) national ways of doing politics. Brubaker finds Mauss' observations to be 'sardonic' and detects 'irony' in the comparison. Even if ontologically Mauss understood change to be ceaseless,[107] he likewise understood that the observation of change in practices always happens as a plotted narrative of their historical development.

Practices change but our observation of their change is never direct. It is always mediated by a particular narrative structure or philosophy of history. *How practices change*, the direction or meaning of their change and *the impulses driving their change*, remains a matter of appreciation, of irreducible theorisation.

The question nevertheless arises if the very *concept of practices* implies a particular bias in favor of this or that view of historical development, of its likelihood, motor or direction. Practices being

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[104] Onuf, 'Rules in Practice', 120 (emphasis added).

[105] Marcel Mauss, 'La Nation' (1920). Available at http://classiques.uqac.ca/classiques/mauss_marcel/oeuvres_3/oeuvres_3_14/Mauss_la_nation.pdf. Last accessed 02 August 2015.

[106] Rogers Brubaker, 'Marcel Mauss on Nationhood: Objectivism and its Limits', in *Studies on Nationalism*, eds. Maria Kovacs and Petr Lom (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2004), 107, 109.

[107] Marcel Mauss and Paul Fauconnet, 'La Sociologie: Objet et Méthode', in *Œuvres 3: Cohésion sociale et divisions de la sociologie*, Marcel Mauss (Paris: Les éditions minuit, 1969), 151. Compare Sahlins, 'Two or Three Things', 405: 'The old-timers virtually made a Heraclitean mantra of the incantation that […] cultures are constantly changing […].'

things, there is at least a metaphorical suggestion that practices will change with difficulty. *Things* (as objects) have solidified. *Things* (as artefacts), moreover, are infused with *meaning* and *authority*. Theorists of social practices point up that practices will often be lodged in traditions[108] and that practices come with their own 'practice memory'[109] which informs people's experience and performance of practices, facilitates a sense of attachment, and constrains the future development of the practices in question. If practices do change, on this view, it will be because of broader cultural, societal or technological developments which exert their influence on them.[110] These developments we observe, and we equally take note of their influence on this or that social practice. Developments are often bemoaned. We are taught to cherish memories. We at least used to be told to respect traditions. The concept of practices betrays a conservative bias. It finds that 'human activity is laden with the past.'[111] It betrays a romantic streak when, as happens regularly, it finds value in this.[112]

A sociology of social practices does not have to succumb to a conservative politics. It is easy enough to imagine an evolutionist sociology of social practices, as exemplified by some of Emile Durkheim's work. The cultural politics of a sociology of social practices are ultimately underdetermined by its central concept. At the same time, though, there would appear to be political significance to the concept's incapacity to theorise the causes of change. Within a sociology of social practices, change befalls us. We can do little more than observe and interpret it (and attribute it to broader changes in the environment).[113]

Practices and peace

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[108] Alasdair Macintyre, *After Virtue: Third Edition* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 2007), 194.

[109] Theodore Schatzki, *The Timespace of Human Activity: On Performance, Society, and History as Indeterminate Teleological Events* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010), 215-221.

[110] Sometimes large-scale physiological changes are included among the factors influencing the development of social practices as well. Cf. Robert Bellah's monumental interpretation of the evolution of religion in human history, which relates the direction of the evolution of religion to the evolution of the human brain and the changes in human consciousness that this entailed. Robert Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, 2011). Also Nicholas Onuf, *World of Our Making: Rules and Rule in Social Theory and International Relations* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), 292. Here Onuf wagers that senso-motoric faculties, shared by all human beings, give rise to a set of universal practices.

[111] Schatzki, *Timespace of Human Activity*, 214.

[112] E.g., Macintyre, *After Virtue*. Michael Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

[113] E.g., Barnett, 'Evolution without Progress.'

What kind of account of peace does our third concept, *practices*, afford? One option would be to explain peace – the (durable) absence of war – as a by-product of an interrelated set of practices. Dieter Senghaas explains peace as the outcome of a 'civilisatory hexagon,' including such social practices like power monopoly, political participation and the rule of law.[114] Truer to the concept of *practices* would be an account of peace, not as an outcome of this or that practice, but as a practice, a thing being done, in its own right.

The Greek comedian Aristophanes developed such an account in *The Acharnians*. Dicaeopolis, a farmer and citizen of Acharnia strikes an *individual* peace agreement with the Spartans, in spite of his city being allied with Athens. Having reached the agreement, he orders his wife and children to prepare a rite. Baskets of fruit are offered to the Gods and an erect phallus is carried around. Throughout the rite, the family sings songs that are shot through with obscenities. The rite – the practice – prefigures the coming condition of peace. When a woman from a nearby town comes to offer her two daughters so that they can share in Dicaeopolis' peace, Aristophanes sets up a scene where the daughters get dressed up as sows. The word the poet uses for "sows" equally meant reproductive organs. Aristophanes' peace-as-practice was a decidedly carnal activity.

Aristophanes *theorises* peace to the extent that he offers 'a view of,' or 'a looking at' the phenomenon. This is what a sociology of social practices does too, although it would have to theorise peace on the basis of a more systematic, comparative observation of the phenomenon. It would have to account for differences – e.g., the shift from carnal to pious and ultimately to business-like conceptions of peace – as well as for similarities – e.g., peace often being situated in bounded 'islets of peace,'[115] where punitive violence can figure prominently. Some have concluded, on the basis of this kind of research, that peace is a kind of 'sublimation: violent impulses and anxieties are cathartically released through ritual inversions and anti-structural ceremonies.'[116] Whether modern ways of doing peace have escaped this incantatory aspect must be the subject of study and, ultimately, of emplotment.

Conclusion

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[114] Dieter Senghaas, *On Perpetual Peace: A Timely Assessment* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), 24.
[115] Ring, *Zenana*, 69.
[116] George Park in ibid., 63.

The main contention of this paper has been that the practice turn in International Relations works with three different conceptualisations of its central concept, 'practice' . The following synoptic table summarises the main differences.

	Practice	*Practical knowledge*	*Practices*
Definition	All of us doing all of our doings	My and your, and his and her skill doing what we do	The things that we do
Intellectual provenance	Metaphysics	Ethics	Ethnography, early French sociology
Theoretical mantra	Through practice	In practice	As a practice
Causation	Material cause; Chance, indeterminacy	Efficient cause; Agency	Formal and final cause; Structure; Environment
Change	Inevitable, continuous change; Change as process	Possibility of fostering change; Reluctance; To steer or channel change	The meaning of change; Change befalls us
Politics	Revolutionary; The mob	Realist, conservative; The elites	Institutions
Peace	Self-reinforcing peace	Heroic theory of peace; Impure peace	Islets of peace; Peace-as-incantation

Table 1: A synoptic overview

Definition. I have defined *practice* as 'all of us doing all of our doings' to signal the overwhelming nature of *practice*, which is everywhere and continuously ongoing. *Practical knowledge* I have defined as 'my and your, and his and her skill at doing what we do' to accentuate that *practical knowledge*, unlike background and common knowledge, accrues to individual people. *Practices* I have defined as 'the things that we do' to emphasise that, methodological complications notwithstanding, *practices* exist in the world for us and that we experience them to matter.

Intellectual provenance. *Practice* expresses the metaphysical intuition that all is process. *Practical knowledge* embodies the politico-ethical intuition a society will fare well when its citizens develop their (intellectual) virtues. The sociological use of these two concepts is derivative. *Practices*, for its part, was always a means to organise proto-sociological reflection.

Theoretical mantra. Social life allegedly unfolds 'in and through practice.'[117] It has thus far been left unclear what the precise meaning of that mantra is. My argument suggests that we need to disaggregate the motto. The concept of *practice* entails that social life unfolds 'through practice,' through a myriad of everyday doings. The concept of *practical knowledge* points up the chasm between theoretical fancies and how (and why) things pan out 'in practice.' The concept of *practices* invites us to consider a range of social phenomena 'as practices,'[118] as though they were *things* that people do.

Causation. *Practice*, being the 'stuff' of social life, is the material cause of any event or outcome that we observe, but always fails to explain particular outcomes. *Practical knowledge*, being constitutive of agents' skill, can be thought of as the efficient cause of social change, but its contribution to an outcome must in many ways remain an assertion. *Practices*, because they constitute an arrangement and embody a function, offer the formal and final causes of what people do. What *practices* themselves are being caused by is less clear. Typically, the 'environment' is taken recourse to.

Change. If *practice* celebrates the ubiquity and ongoing-ness of change, or at least of 'process,' *practical knowledge* and *practice* are less appreciative. The first of these concepts introduces the possibility of fostering change but remains reluctant about it. The second insists that meaningful change ever only emerges in stories about said change. As to the driving forces behind change, the concept remains silent. It would seem that change simply befalls us.

Politics. *Practice*, because it connotes movement, resonates with a revolutionary conception of politics, which puts its faith in the power of the mob. *Practical knowledge*, because it accrues to

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[117] Adler and Pouliot, 'International practices', 16. Schindler and Wille, 'Change in and through practice.'
[118] Cf. Andersen andNeumann, 'Practices as Models', 468.

individual people, and to some more than to others, often leads to a preference for elite rule – as a direct answer to the whimsies of the mob. *Practices*, being vested – as customs and institutions – with intersubjective authority, promise to contain both mob and elites.

Peace. *Practice* explains peace – the durable absence of war – with reference to a process of cognitive evolution that happens and 'potentially' self-perpetuates 'through practice.' *Practical knowledge* explains peace as the work and merit of a limited number of flesh-and-blood people. It recognises that peace will often be compromised. *Practices* presents peace as a bounded practice, where violence happens as an intrinsic aspect of peacemaking.

Where does this leave the practice turn? I do not think that there is one coherent practice turn, and given the argument in the paper, I do not think that there can ever be one. The common denominator that remains – an appreciation of the importance of deeds or 'doings,' of the fact that the social world is populated by tangible people who are busy doing stuff – is too thin (and theoretically underdetermined) to sustain a turn of any kind. We should generally become more cautious in our use of the notion of a turn. Theoretical turns are proliferating, but they are no longer the names bestowed on historical intellectual developments, like the linguistic turn was. A turn is mostly a rallying cry now. With so many turns being declared, it is all getting a bit silly: one more reason to have parsed – pulled apart – the practice turn. Its parts turned out to be more meaningful than the whole.[119]

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[119] It does not really help to argue that the practice turn groups together a set of theories that share a family resemblance [*pace* Davide Nicolini, *Practice Theory, Work, & Organization: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), ch. 1, & Bueger and Gadinger, *International Practice Theory*, ch. 1.]. In my opinion, the differences among those theories are often starker than their similarities. Also, following my argument here, they often are not theories of the same referent object.