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Critical Theory, Habermas, and International Relations

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter we outline elements of critical theory and its contribution to the study of international relations theory in the belief that a critical theoretical stance offers an appropriate framework for examining the emergence of international institutions as new forms of legitimate political community. Our emphasis in the first section is on three constituent elements of critical theory: theoretical reflexivity, human consciousness, and normative purpose. In the second section, we examine the contributions of Jürgen Habermas to a critical international theory. Indeed, his ideas about communicative rationality, deliberation, and the public sphere have gone far to reinvigorate the Enlightenment project of emancipation, and the implications for international relations theory and global institutions are substantial. As we shall examine later, these institutions, particularly the international regime, commonly incorporate procedural norms of participation (or inclusion) and transparency (or openness). The consequence is that certain international regimes, by building democratic procedural norms into their design and evolution, acquire the character of incipient transnational political communities. These regimes effectively serve as public spheres whose scope for dialogic interaction amongst a wide array of state and nonstate actors reflect emerging global democratic practices on an unprecedented scale.

CRITICAL THEORY AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The turn to a critical theoretical interpretation of international relations and, specifically, international institutions, is not an argument about the failure of neoutilitarian accounts. To the contrary, neorealism and neoliberal institutionalism provide important insights regarding the relationship of power to international institutions and the role institutions, particularly regimes, have in overcoming "political market failures." Both theoretical perspectives offer insightful and helpful accounts of regime construction, maintenance and decay. Rather, we argue that a critical theoretical account is useful at this point in time for two reasons. First, the contemporary global condition is such that accounts of international politics anchored in statist forms do not accurately capture the diverse social forces and political challenges confronting the human polity. As the extensive and growing literature on the "new transnationalism" illustrates, a plethora of nongovernmental actors are excluded by state-centric formulations.[1] Moreover, we embrace Andrew Linklater's argument that the contemporary international political order has a "tenuous existence and precarious legitimacy," because decisions "are taken without considering their likely effects on systematically excluded groups."[2] Global institutions that deny the importance of nonstate actors potentially lack staying power. Second, a critical theoretical approach provides a foundation for defining alternative emancipatory purposes for international theory. We are interested in identifying the changes immanent in the global order, especially the democratic ideals promoted by the diverse array of nonstate actors contesting its current design. The status quo version of globalization often simply replicates long-standing power relations and the "discontents" associated with that material reality.[3] Thus, in the words of one scholar, globalization has too often "perpetuated poverty, widened material inequalities, increased ecological degradation, sustained militarism, fragmented communities, marginalized subordinated groups, fed intolerance and deepened crises of democracy."[4]

Taking into account the role of nongovernmental organizations and applying Habermasian discourse ethics to the study of international regimes illuminates their potential as the foundation for a new global order characterized by nonterritorial forms of political community. By dramatically expanding the boundaries of participation and open discussion in the context of universally agreed normative procedures, these regimes reflect the emancipatory aims of critical theory, approximating modes of democracy essential to constructing new identities, loyalties, and obligations inherent in a global political community. Burgeoning international norms promoting greater inclusion and openness in various international regimes greatly diminish the likelihood that the coercive strength of materially powerful actors will

carry any given point, and substantially increase the prospects for compelling arguments to find consensual agreement.

The opportunity for building community is found in the immanent contradictions of the current political order. The contemporary human condition is characterized by rapidity, intensity, and extensity on an historic scale. Technological transformations are revolutionizing means of communication and production, resulting in flows of money, knowledge, and information around the globe at unprecedented rates of speed. The carrying capacity of communication networks is increasing such that the volume of flows is unique in historical time while the extensiveness of networks has left no part of the globe untouched.[5] The consequence for advocates of a "hyperglobalist" view of globalization is profound political, social, and economic change.[6] Patterns of international economic exchange are undermining the authority of states overwhelmed by the quantum leap in transnational interactions that, by virtue of their scale, demonstrate the decline of unilateral and absolute territorial governance. By contrast, for "transformationalists," it is not the decline of the state per se, but a fundamental reconfiguration of sovereignty and authority that is of interest.[7] More than simply integration and interdependence proceeding apace, the structures and centers of authority are shifting even as identities become redefined. This long-term secular trend is accelerated with networks of communication and advances in technology that, in effect, empower emerging societal actors, whether they be transnational corporations, NGOs, social movements, or other elements of a global civil society.

In either case, these profound changes are taking place within a transformed geopolitical context that heightens the salience of new issues on the one hand, and the consciousness of social actors on the other, signaling a unique era in global politics.[8] In the first instance, the end of the Cold War has increased the visibility of numerous issues on the global political agenda that were historically characterized as "low politics." Economics, certainly, but also human rights, the environment, development, and the growing gap between rich and poor are central themes of contemporary world politics. These are issues whose resolution challenges directly the politics of self-interest and particularism. The shared burdens of responsibility, the shared consequences of neglect, and the implied crisis of human experience, all suggest that the transformation brought about by globalization and the changed nature of world politics necessitates a new global agenda anchored in new conceptions of obligation, loyalty, and responsibility. To draw on Mark Neufeld's discussion, there is a recognition in popular and scholarly political discourse that the *polis*, a socially created political space intended to foster the "conditions necessary for the leading of a good and just life, a life encompassing the values of equality and freedom" requires redefining.[9] Whereas the territorial

state once represented the *polis* as "coterminous with the minimum self-sufficient human reality," the scale and pace of new challenges to humanity "call out for the reidentification of the idea of the *polis* with the planet as a whole: a truly *global polis*."[10]

Such a redefinition of a *polis* emerges only with a new mode of politics. Just as the changed geopolitical context gave way to alternative issue hierarchies, that context has also opened up political space for a greater number of actors. Nongovernmental organizations and intergovernmental agencies have become integral figures in world politics. Global social movements are taking advantage of unprecedented technological developments to strengthen their capacities for mobilization, organization, and articulation of principles.[11] One consequence is that the interconnectedness of issues is increasingly made apparent through the activities of transnational issue networks seeking to construct new international norms and other institutions of global governance.[12] Loosening the historic "social bond" between state and citizen challenges claims lodged by the sovereign state to the sole possession of political authority and loyalty.[13] In sum, new global social movements and transnational issue networks are reflections of the relative shift of capacities for political action and mobilization historically contained within the state. The rise of NGOs extends the boundaries of consciousness and obligation, hence politics, thereby serving as a crucial ingredient in the constitution of an historically unique *global polis*.

Under these transformed conditions, critical theory poses a real challenge to the orthodoxy of international theory—the neoutilitarian paradigms, as it were—in that it offers new foundations for conceptualizing the discipline, both theoretically and normatively. Of course, what constitutes a critical approach to international theory remains contested. Alexander Wendt, for instance, frames a definition around the importance of social, as opposed to material, structures and the importance of identity and interests, in contrast to the narrower rationalist concern with behavior.[14] While this serves as a workable explanation of constructivism, we find it too narrow. Chris Brown, by contrast, describes critical theory as a generic term for a set of approaches arguing that the dominant discourses of Western social and political thought emanating from the Enlightenment—the discourses of modernity—are in a state of crisis. The source of the crisis is found in attacks on positivism and the presumptions of universalism, foundationalism, and rationalism of modern natural and social scientific practice.[15] In the search for a response to this crisis, postmodernism, poststructuralism, critical theory, and deconstructionism represent varying epistemological strategies for decentering modernity's commitment to an instrumental rationality that is the essence of the Enlightenment conception of progress. Jürgen Habermas bluntly opines: "After a century that, more than any other, has taught us the horror of existing unreason, the last remains of an essentialist trust in reason have been destroyed."[16] This

collapse signals the emergence of a new field of action on which to construct alternative theoretical foundations. The "free play of non-foundationalist thought" offers both opportunities and dangers for the constitution of new moral and ethical premises in social life.[17]

The consequences for international relations theory are profound. The traditions of realism and neorealism, and liberalism and neoliberalism, are anchored firmly in modernity's grasp, a grasp that already spurred the field's "third debate."[18] Indeed, R.B.J. Walker notes that theories of international relations are "interesting less for the substantive explanations they offer about political conditions in the modern world than as expressions of the limits of the contemporary political imagination."[19] The constraints on this imagination are imposed by an implicit (and sometimes explicit) normative commitment to statist interpretations of the international political world, reinforced by principles of a rationalist liberal economy (and the materially self-interested being). The consequence is not innovation but repetition, progress defined not by the positing of alternative global orders, transformative possibilities, or the empowerment of new political actors and new modalities of action, but by the reinforcement of extant and unchallenged social and political forms and practices. Consider the duality of a neoliberal political economy and neorealist geopolitics, which together denote exceptionally limited bounds of imagination. In these neoutilitarian worlds, historical patterns of the moment are not taken as anything other than the reproductions of a timeless state-system. Thus, at the very point in time when the capacities, knowledge, and networks of alternative global actors are in a position to articulate concerns, assert agendas, forge new loyalties, and facilitate the generation of new norms and institutions, the theoretical apparatus of international relations is constrained from accommodating fundamental change.

To be sure, there is a danger of proceeding down a path wherein the absence of foundations finds the discipline enmeshed in a hyperpluralism of theory, method, and unresolved purpose. However, change need not involve the thoroughgoing deconstruction of existing social and territorial forms. States, in fact, are not likely to dissolve under the pressure of global civil society networks, nor is it likely that a shift in identities and loyalties will be of such a scale that territorial community and citizenship require a wholesale reevaluation.[20] To the contrary, the challenge of international theory—indeed, the thrust of a critical theory—is to pursue alternative modes of thinking that permit a reassessment of the field's assumptions about global order. Theory might then serve a higher purpose than the mere confirmation and replication of state behavior. Mark Hoffman notes that contrary to realism, critical theory

> seeks to understand society by taking a position outside of society while at the same time recognizing that it is itself a product of

society. Its central problematic is the development of reason and rationality that is directly concerned with the quality of human life and opposed to the elevation of scientific reasoning as a sole basis of knowledge. To this extent, it involves a change in the criteria of theory, the function of theory, and its relationship to society. It entails the view that humanity has potentialities other than those manifested in current society. Critical theory, therefore, seeks not simply to reproduce society via description, but to understand society and change it. It is both descriptive and constructive in its theoretical intent; it is both an intellectual and a social act. It is not merely an expression of the concrete realities of the historical situation, but also a force for change within those conditions.[21]

Several crucial themes of a critical theory are evident in this extended quotation. There is first the theoretical reflexivity of international relations. There is also the question of human consciousness as an agent for social change. And finally there is the question of purpose. These themes offer a direct confrontation with the neoutilitarian paradigms of contemporary international relations theory, their privileging of the state, and the consequent skewed practices of inclusion/exclusion.

Perhaps the most significant departure of a critical international theory is the explicit acknowledgement of a theoretically reflexive attitude towards the process of theorizing itself. While the underlying logic is now familiar thanks to the "constructivist turn" in international relations, an essential starting point for understanding the critical theoretical component is Robert Cox's contribution to the field's "third debate."[22] His description of problem-solving theory, which takes the world as given, and critical theory, which seeks to explain how that world came about, focuses attention on the fact-value distinction in, and the normative character of, social theorizing. Viewing theory as mere problem-solving preserves the fact-value distinction, emphasizing the objective circumstances and timeless quality of the world as we find it. The reflexive position, by contrast, recognizes the contingency of social life and of our place in it. Social orders and the knowledge that both produces and describes them are historically constituted and therefore subject to reflection and reconstitution. Our knowledge of material "facts," for example, cannot be disconnected from social understandings or interpretations of those facts, despite what rationalists might lead us to believe. Broadly accepted social or political theory about material facts are of necessity anchored to sets of preconceived beliefs and assumptions. In their totality, these preconceptions reflect understandings of the social or political world containing embedded normative judgments on the existing order and the relations of power contained therein.

Thus, the core elements of the neoutilitarian paradigms in international theory—states, rationalism, and anarchy—are universalized and divorced from their historical contexts, with consequences for our understanding of who acts, why they act, and how they act, in international politics. Those instigating the field's "third debate" sought to create a space for alternative theorizing that might account for the conditions and consequences of explanations of world politics. Indeed, the critical turn, as E. Fuat Keyman offers, allows one to regard theoretical activity as a

> [cultural] criticism, a 'lens' through which one, as an active subject, problematizes the world, rather than as a neutral instrument or abstraction, (thus) it becomes possible both to critically analyze interactions between the international, the state, and civil society, and to take seriously the need to create the possibility of emancipation, either (a) through the extension of human community, or (b) through the construction of counter hegemonic discourses that constitute an international civil society, or (c) through the radical democratization of human community based on the recognition of differences.[23]

The essence of a reflexive stance is therefore to deny the neutrality and objectivity of theory, the theorizer, and the world. Mark Neufeld concludes, for example, that "reflexivity directs us to a broader debate about which 'purposes,' which 'enquiries' and which 'ideologies' merit the support and energy of International Relations scholars."[24] It is only by reflecting on the ends and means of international theory that the potential to effect change is realized. Here, the constraints on global social transformation imposed by neorealist and neoliberal interpretations of world politics are well known—the critical and neo-Gramscian positions of John G. Ruggie, Stephen Gill, Robert Cox, and Andrew Linklater, or the postmodernism of Richard Ashley, James Der Derian, and R. B. J Walker. All engage in a demystification of the past and present.[25]

For Linklater, this reflexive position challenges the "immutability thesis" in international relations theory which, as "an exercise in the politically neutral observation of independent reality (lends) vital ideological support to the status quo by denying that alternative possibilities are latent within existing social structures or by obscuring their existence."[26] The crucial consequence of the immutability thesis is that theorizing for purposes other than description is an empty exercise, rendering what are "humanly-produced circumstances into a quasi-natural condition . . . contribut(ing) to the formation of subjects who succumb to the belief that the relations between independent political communities must remain as they are."[27] Critical theory's commitment, however, to exploring human consciousness and agency allows it to overcome the theoretical closure implied by the immutability thesis. A central tenet of

critical theory is that human subjects do indeed have the capacity to shape and reshape the social structures within which they exist. There is no necessary inevitability to this process, but the implications for redefining global politics are potentially profound.

The roots of this theme of human agency found in critical theory are located in the Enlightenment and the philosophical discourse of modernity.[28] Likewise, the element of critique and its consequence for a reformulation of the ends of political inquiry—emancipation—emanates from the Enlightenment movement towards autonomy in thought and action and finds expression in the Kantian philosophical tradition.[29] The Kantian position sought to assert the use of reason to throw off constraints imposed by tradition, thereby opening up unrealized possibilities for the future.[30] For Kant the Enlightenment was defined as "man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity," a reflection that "people can and must think for themselves." This was made possibly by virtue of Reason, which, for Kant, was "that tendency, in all human thought and conscious effort, towards, at one and the same time, ever greater unity, system and necessity, and *equally* towards ever sharper and more constant self-criticism and control."[31] Kant's notion of reason found expression in two spheres: Theoretical Reason "demanded and disclosed a world of natural determinism," whereas Practical Reason "demanded or presupposed the possibility of human freedom to choose what Duty or Justice commands."[32] The former offers a completed system, the latter an "ever-open, never completed task or calling."[33] For Kant, human progress and peace followed from the application of principles of Theoretical Reason to the search for moral law. In other words, Kant's "sovereignty of reason" suggests not only that we have the capacity to produce notions of causation in a world of natural determinism, but also that we have within us the capacity to realize the "moral law" or "categorical imperative." Hence, as W.B. Gallie describes the history of man's misfortunes and endeavors:

> Might not this be construed as a succession of naturally necessitated misadventures, spiced with episodes of ostensible good luck, through which men could nevertheless learn, by trial and error, to expand the area of their own rational freedom? More specifically, might it not be that the characteristic difficulties, failures, and tragedies disclosed in the history of mankind, constituted a necessary condition for the expansion of men's capacity to cope rationally with nature's challenges, and to begin to co-operate in the face of them?[34]

In the categorical imperative, so named because it imposes an absolute injunction to act in certain ways, there is thus implied in Kant's philosophy a moral requirement of universality, realized ultimately in the rule of law. In

this context, the state exists to allow people to find security for themselves, but the greatest realization of freedom can only occur with the abolition of war amongst states.[35] That is, "the same moral imperative that enjoins the creation of the lawful state" requires the formation of a world level system of laws that preserves the state within a cosmopolitan order.[36] These ends are expressed in Kant's vision of a federation of republican states arising out of a history of violence and reason, a process that reflects, as Richard Devetak describes, his "effort to break with the past . . . It constitutes a form of '*continuous renewal*' which involves the constant 'dissolution of the exemplary past' and an openness toward what Kant called 'the unbounded future.'"[37]

The willingness to break with the past and initiate a search for the "unbounded future" is, perhaps, the distinguishing element of a critical international theory. By posing a challenge to the status quo in social, economic and political life a critical theoretical stance couples political inquiry to normative purpose.[38] This normative purpose, a final theme, is found in critical theory's commitment to emancipatory ends. Such a commitment does not entail the deconstruction of foundations implied by postmodern responses to the crisis of modernity. To the contrary, the critical theory of Habermas and its application to international relations by, for example, Andrew Linklater, Marc Lynch, and Thomas Risse, has defined an agenda of political inquiry *and* action anchored in historically contextualized knowledge claims. These knowledge claims, in turn, reflect a certain type of rationality embedded in a particular social time and space.[39] As Richard Devetak notes, the project of emancipation central to critical theory's willingness to question and to reflect upon the presumed given order is a constitutive element of the Enlightenment project.[40] With this in mind, one can see that the project of critical international theory is one of reconstruction rather than deconstruction. For some, "emancipation" is, or must be, utopian for its realization entails transcending world order.[41] It is here, however, that a critical theory engages normative international theory's cosmopolitan-communitarian debate. Embedded within this debate is a contest over the ethics of place: where can the aspirations of the emancipatory project best be realized? Can an alternative world order reconcile territoriality with a universal ethics? And what forms of political community, institutions, and practices are implied by this reconciliation?

The search for a purposive politics is a response to the normative content of contemporary analyses of human practices and institutions. The crisis (and danger) of rationalist international theory is found in the refusal to acknowledge its own unspoken normative discourse, a natural refusal that follows from the absence of a reflexive stance. While ideological and value judgements constitute neorealist and neoliberal claims, this is obscured by the fact that these claims are cast in terms of objectivity and fact. Ultimately, the neoutilitarian paradigms serve to reinforce and reify prevailing global political

and economic structures of power. By contrast, the explicit normative com-
mitment of a critical theory and practice is oriented toward emancipation.
Critical theorists are interested in the realization of human security through
the actions of conscious subjects seeking the promotion of social justice,
peace, and the removal of unnecessary constraints on human freedom, goals
that are, in fact, consistent with the project of modernity.[42] As Linklater
contends, knowledge of society, its practices and institutions, is of necessity
"incomplete if it lacks the emancipatory purpose."[43]

The considerations of justice that inform this purpose are many—protec-
tions from inequalities of a neoliberal economy, from transnational violence,
the absence of democracy, or from ecological threats.[44] A global politics that
seeks both to critique the existing order and posit alternatives in the attempt
to redress human injustice must first "start from the assumption that the
moral relevance of the distinction between insiders and outsiders has to be
demonstrated rather than presupposed."[45] It is the presence of boundaries that
has generated the "Cartesian coordinates" of human existence, providing the
rationale for the totalizing project of the nineteenth century. The fusion of
state power, territory and identity reified principles of otherness that gener-
ated the inside/outside, society/anarchy problematic so essential to the foun-
dations of neoutilitarian international relations theory of the twentieth century.
Here, a reflective account of how we came to be, how boundaries and the
logics of inclusion and exclusion have segmented freedoms, rights, obliga-
tions, oppressions, inequalities and opportunities, represents a synthesis of
modernity's aspirations with a critical, post-enlightenment project. The object
of a critical theory is therefore to understand how communities are formed
and re-formed, how boundaries open and close, and how different concep-
tions of self and other evolve over time.[46]

Thus, a fundamental argument of this book is that political community
need not be defined by territorial borderlines. Rather, community in world
politics has assumed different forms, of which the territorial-state is only one
manifestation, albeit a manifestation whose normative and ideological com-
mitments are reproduced by the prevailing neoutilitarian paradigms. From a
critical theoretical stance, however, communities reflect more than territorial
borderlines; they are the consequence of shared identities, loyalties, and sym-
pathies born of commonly held principles. The structures that govern and
cement communities are human creations and therefore, given the fact of
human consciousness, have no necessary permanence beyond what humans
themselves define. This position is crucial for it enables a different kind of
politics both locally and globally, calling into question the exclusive role of
the state, its representatives, and its emphasis on narrowly defined notions of
security. By offering a mechanism to reconceptualize community, global in-
stitutions, specifically the international regime, can be regarded as novel forms

of political community. We address this particular institutional form in the next chapter. First, though, we introduce the work of Jürgen Habermas whose theories about communicative rationality, deliberation, and the public sphere provide the foundation for emergent procedural norms that democratize and thus legitimatize international institutions and regimes.

Habermas and International Relations

How can the concept of political community be extended well beyond the narrowly self-interested, strategic, and potentially violent domain of the nation-state? To answer this question, we briefly examine in this section the contributions of Frankfurt school philosopher Jürgen Habermas. We are primarily concerned with the way his "discourse ethics" might be employed to construct legitimate international order. His central ideas about communicative rationality, deliberation, and the public sphere will receive special attention, but given the author's prodigious output of scholarship, we cannot possibly examine in great detail Habermas's extensive moral, legal, social, and political theories. As shall be briefly discussed below, a number of international relations scholars are employing Habermasian insights to address important theoretical and empirical concerns.

Neoutilitarian accounts of international politics explain that the world of states and international institutions is shaped primarily by the strongest states employing their material power in the pursuit of relatively narrow self-interest. As we already noted, critical IR theorists examine and critique the global forms of dominance and injustice inherent in the structures and processes of contemporary world politics. Significant attention is given over to attacking the illegitimate actions of egoistic states, especially as they follow their traditional pursuits—power, security, and deterrence. One succinct statement of the analysis is offered by Neta Crawford, who asserts that "norms established through coercion, imposed by a hegemon, lack legitimacy."[47]

Of course, critical IR theorists are not merely interested in critique. They additionally explore the possibility of transforming world order, by emancipating it from current constraints. This would minimally involve, as is further explained in chapter 2, extending the concept of political community beyond its current territorial bounds. While environmentalists, human rights activists, development specialists, and others have already constructed all sorts of transnational connections, they continue to confront substantial and arbitrary barriers to action imposed by states and the state system. Critical theorists imagine a world in which the persuasive influence of a compelling argument determines outcomes, rather than the material strength or strategic action of a particular actor or set of actors. Truly remarkable change can occur, as

Linklater emphasizes, only when "dialogue and consent replace domination and force" as the central causal mechanisms in global politics.[48] This Habermasian emphasis on dialogue follows naturally from the ideas about normative agreement discussed in the Introduction. Legitimate order is "arrived at through communicative action in which participants seek consensus."[49] Dialogical processes also clearly serve the critical themes discussed in the first section of this chapter: reflexivity, agency, and purpose. People engaged in thoughtful discussions make conscious decisions about theoretical ideas. Their potential agreement, virtually by definition, reflects a shared purpose and can undergird the development of new norms.

Unfortunately, it is not at all certain that a world favoring dialogue and consent can ever exist outside the realm of the imagination. Critical theorists have infrequently offered concrete proposals and are often accused by neoutilitarian scholars of building "fantasy theory."[50] As John Dryzek has written, "It is perhaps at the juncture of model institutions that a critical theory program for political organization is currently weakest, to the point of petering out entirely."[51] This is not to imply, however, that critical IR theorists have altogether ignored questions of practice. Linklater, Crawford, Dryzek, and other critical theorists interested in global concerns have borrowed from Habermas when attempting to develop workable proposals about dialogical practice. To some extent, looking to Habermas is an odd choice since his ideas are often quite abstract and they tend to be buried in dense texts. Moreover, as we shall discuss, many critics view Habermasian ideas about practice as utopian and impractical.

In any case, Habermas has written frequently about a form of social and political decision-making based upon open discussion by the members of a community. Deliberation, or discursive democracy as it is sometimes called, is grounded in "discourse ethics," which are essentially procedural norms for dialogue that could purportedly assure genuine public accountability in modern sociopolitical settings. Deliberation features inclusive and public discussion of common concerns so that a relevant polity (or community) can work out its own consensual norms. The process is often viewed as a mechanism for collective truth seeking: inviting participants to advance claims and counterclaims so as to develop a common understanding of circumstances and solutions. Appropriately public and inclusive deliberative contexts provide advocates with a suitable forum not only for advancing their own arguments, but also for critically evaluating the points made by others. The veracity of self-interested claims can be challenged by any participant in a dialogue, which should encourage everyone to offer ideas and arguments geared toward achieving communicative consensus.

In a deliberative setting, all participants would equally find their assertions subject to scrutiny. Ultimately, if sufficiently interested in finding truth,

deliberators might agree to dismiss certain claims and to accept the validity and veracity of other points. Discursive processes should not only be unaffected by the external position or rank of advocates engaged in the discussion, but should also actually reveal and thereby minimize the effects of deception, secrecy, strategic action, and other potential distortions of the communicative process. Normative consensus is ideally achieved in a forum that is free of all distortions, including threats, secrets, and lies. Because deliberations are inclusive, public, and oriented toward consensus, at least some participants in a discussion should be able to provide good reasons to challenge and reject deceptive or self-serving arguments. By contrast, arguments supporting the community's "generalized interests" should be quite difficult for anyone to refute and relatively easy for everyone to embrace.

Put differently, deliberative participants engage in what Habermas calls "communicative action" that creates the possibility of "communicative," or "argumentative," rationality.[52] Habermas sees communicative rationality as an important critical alternative to the instrumental rationality he finds to be so destructive. Communicative rationality results when a community's members discover or develop intersubjective agreement after probing and challenging publicly presented arguments and evidence. Decisions would reflect generalizable, or collective, rather than particular, interests—and their authority would be based on the ideational force of a better argument rather than some other arbitrary and likely distorted cause. Indeed, sound ideas and arguments, advanced and refined in an appropriately open and inclusive discussion process, should lead participants to construct mutually agreed, and thereby authoritative, answers to fundamental questions about truth and justice.[53] Deliberation is a pathway, in other words, to the construction of legitimate normative understandings and order.

As should be evident, deliberative democracy is constituted by several basic procedural norms. While Habermas lists a number of specific requirements, we would argue that two are clearly the most important. First, the dialogue must be open to all interested parties—especially individuals and groups likely to be affected by any decision of the community. Linklater, for instance, calls for a wide-open "universal communication community."[54] In the literature on Habermas, this procedural norm requires that every community member enjoy "equal access to the discourse." Second, the discussion must be public so that everyone involved in the discussion has the opportunity to evaluate everyone else's arguments and evidence. This norm, which is in important ways intrinsically linked to the norm of access, is commonly known as "publicity."[55] When all the necessary conditions for deliberation are in place, Habermas would consider that context an "ideal speech situation."

Many critics consider deliberative democracy to be hopelessly utopian, and Habermas recognizes that the ideal speech situation generally cannot

occur in practice. Realistically, it would be impossible for all members of a community to engage in open debate about virtually every issue that affects their common lifeworld. Meaningful deliberation would seem to be especially problematic in international contexts, which are typically dominated by a very small number of powerful states and regularly feature coercive rather than communicative action.[56] Deliberative democracy is quite distant from the day-to-day reality of international affairs. Rather, global politics typically features secretive, exclusive and coercive state action that is fundamentally inconsistent with discursive democracy and communicative rationality. Even current international organizations, which might feature somewhat open forums for diplomatic discussion, such as the United Nations or European Union, would fall well short of Habermasian ideals. James Bohman observes that existing international institutional arrangements "do not have anything like the sort of accountability that public access to global processes requires."[57] Most students of international relations, in fact, would likely find the globalization of democratic discussion a virtually inconceivable prospect. Even among scholars attentive to communicative concerns, "operationalizing Habermasian notions" and applying them to "real world settings" are viewed as "difficult" or "daunting" tasks.[58]

Much of Habermas's writing thus focuses on the discursive potential of the public sphere, typically found in western democracies, but now also arguably developing in world politics.[59] The public sphere is simply the "shared space of common language, political argument and experience," which allows members of a polity to engage one another in a public debate.[60] In Western democracies, basic rights of free speech, association, assembly, and free press together help constitute a public sphere. Elected government likewise creates the conditions for some semblance of public accountability. While critical theorists can readily expose all sorts of arbitrary limits on freedom even in Western liberal democracy, Thomas Risse explains that political actors seeking normative consensus in a discursive setting behave counterfactually "as if" they are in an Habermasian ideal speech situation.[61] Advocates advance arguments and criticize opponents in the hope of providing a convincing rationale for political action, social action, or both. Relatively typical public discussion thus provides a potential—though flawed—means for endogenously discovering and creating norms even in nonideal settings, such as world politics.

Empirically, Marc Lynch directly employs Habermasian public sphere theory to explain how international normative understandings can be built through public discussion of actor interests and identities. Much of his work specifically examines the historic operation of public spheres in the nondemocratic Middle East, though he has also explored whether U.S.-Chinese relations might be transformed through "communicative engagement."[62] Risse's research employs a somewhat different approach, though he too finds Habermasian insights important for explaining some elements of interna-

tional relations. After reviewing evidence from numerous human rights cases, Risse finds that "argumentative rationality and persuasive processes constitute one of three causal mechanisms by which international norms become socialized into domestic practices."[63] These constructivist IR scholars sidestep the practical problems that might seem to preclude implementation of Habermasian ideas about discursive democracy in global politics by more narrowly employing his notions of the public sphere and communicative rationality in specific regions or issue areas. Lynch's work on global pursuit of a "dialogue of civilizations" rather than a "clash of civilizations" is something of an exception here.[64] Even without discursive democracy per se, the existence of an international public sphere has apparently allowed for the development of arguably legitimate norms. Indeed, constructivists define international norms as shared understandings about appropriate behavior and frequently assert that they reflect "legitimate social purpose."[65]

A truly deliberative world society, for many obvious reasons, seems impractical and utopian. Neither Risse nor Lynch view international relations as particularly inclusive or open to public deliberation. As Risse notes, for example, "the Habermasian condition of 'equal access' to the discourse . . . is simply not met in world politics."[66] Internationally, he argues that the sovereign equality of states might serve as a "functional equivalent" for the norm of equal access to a discourse. However, it is quite debatable whether constructivists should relax this Habermasian requirement, as Risse claims, since international politics quite often features hierarchical arrangements determined by differences in the material power of states.[67] Lynch, moreover, recognizes that "serious power inequalities are likely to stand in the way" of meaningful dialogue.[68] Relaxing the standard would mean, moreover, that nonstate actors would be excluded; thus, sovereign equality cannot assure anything like the kind of inclusion that critical theorists discuss. Risse also acknowledges that public spheres "vary dramatically in international relations" because secretive international negotiations may well limit access about many important decisions exclusively to nation-states.[69] This is a fundamental problem since secrecy has historically been a powerful norm in world politics, especially in security affairs, but it can also have a broad scope in financial matters.

Skimming Morgenthau's *Politics Among Nations*, for example, one quickly notices how important secrecy and disguised intentions are supposed to be for statesmen. Morgenthau specifically addresses the problem of distinguishing between policies that are status quo oriented versus those that are imperialistic, given that statesmen are naturally going to disguise their intentions and behavior behind political ideology and rationalizations. He also sharply criticizes the "vice of publicity," since he believes it inevitably causes diplomacy to degenerate "into a propaganda match."[70] Morgenthau's understandings of nation-state behavior, while perhaps momentarily out of favor in some academic

circles, almost certainly continue to resonate powerfully with policy actors. Indeed, since the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington on September 11, 2001, the U.S. government has quite obviously increased its efforts to control its secrets. Among other measures, various agencies and departments established more restrictive information policies and "sensitive" data on government internet websites was removed.[71]

What then can be made of the prospects for global transformation? Habermas and other critical theorists embrace open dialogue and consent, but those are qualities often missing in world politics. While constructivists find that some international norms are built legitimately, international relations is for the most part dominated by powerful states who use their strength to pursue their own interests, even as they limit the political participation of other actors. Secrecy, rather than publicity, seems to be a more commonly embraced norm of these states.

To return to the notion stated earlier, the opportunity for building a more democratic community, according to the critical argument, is actually found in the immanent contradictions of the current political order. Any normative structure not grounded in legitimate authority may well prove unsustainable, ultimately inviting disobedience and change. This book explores the immanent possibilities of discursive democracy in world politics.[72] Specifically, we discuss the construction of participation (or inclusion) and transparency (or publicity) norms in various international regimes and institutions. We argue that these norms can effectively function as discourse norms in world politics. A major reason they are burgeoning within numerous international regimes and institutions is that norms of exclusion and secrecy, which effectively preclude access to discourse and vitiate the possibility of publicity, are now typically viewed as illegitimate by a substantial set of global political and social actors. Thus, we find that all sorts of institutional foundations are being altered to allow for greater participation and transparency in world politics. Once in place, these norms provide opportunities for transformative deliberative practices—decisions based on dialogue and consent rather than force and coercion.

The evidence explored in this book differs rather dramatically from the empirical insights pursued by constructivist IR scholars. Fortuitously, our research dovetails nicely with the other research by filling an important gap in the literature. Risse and Müller, for instance, may well find that state representatives successfully employ arguments in certain international negotiation contexts, or Checkel may be able to isolate argument structures by studying the content of micro-debates within agencies of the European Union.[73] However, their findings will be inherently limited because the specific contexts under scrutiny are relatively exclusive and secretive. Individual agents may experience an epiphany thanks to a specific persuasive argument, but the

resulting norms would remain quite vulnerable to critical scrutiny. Some excluded non-state actors, for example, would almost surely find the results less than satisfactory, and their concerns could well be appropriate if agents were convinced in secret meetings by distorted arguments that would not withstand public scrutiny. By contrast, open public debate democratizes norm construction. Constructivists who claim that norms reflect "legitimate social purpose" should be keenly concerned about this point. As we wrote in the Introduction, our work attempts to build a bridge between relatively abstract critical theory and constructivism, in part by raising normative questions that should be central to any understanding of constructivist research.

In the end, our argument owes much to the critical theorist Dryzek, who searches for "incipient discursive designs" that might be taking hold in various institutional arenas—even in global politics.[74] Indeed, Dryzek argues that the international system provides a "golden opportunity for discursive designs" because there is no central world state to serve as a compelling authority.[75] Once a deliberative foothold is established, institutions are more readily viewed as legitimate, and they can act authoritatively on certain social and political issues. Logically, similar processes should begin to "invade" a variety of other institutional contexts since those would now be viewed as illegitimate. In this way, genuinely deliberative democracy might begin to permeate global politics.