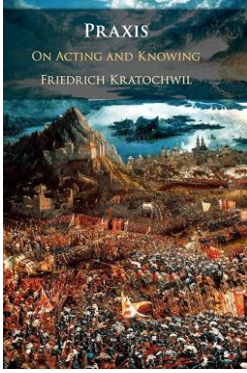


BOOK REVIEW – 1

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WHAT is CONSTRUCTIVISM ACCORDING to FREDERICH KRATOCHWIL?

Author: Friedrich KRATOCHWIL

Praxis:

On Acting and Knowing

Cambridge University Press, 2018, 552 p.

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Abstract

As a scholarly book, *Praxis* has an extensively long narrative. Yet, this lengthy narrative has a strong gravitational pull. It does not leave the reader with centuries old abstract jargons and ideas but takes the time to elaborate what the author means by these concepts. Kratochwil is one of the first well-known constructivists who linked International Relations to the concept of Constructivism. If there was a central question in the book, the intention must be to work out an answer to the question "what is Constructivism?" To achieve this Kratochwil time and again displays the habit to descend from a highly abstract narrative to an intellectual frame that is extensive yet eloquently put. He does not mind to compare his work to a composer who is about to compose his masterpiece, or a painter who paints his masterpiece. He does this in an allegoric fashion and enjoys to let the reader know that this book should be read from top to bottom if one wishes to make sense out of it. *PRAXIS* is a scholarly book that addresses theoretical as well as practical questions using rather impenetrable philosophical texts such as Kant, Bentham, Foucault, Hume and Aristotle. Kratochwil does indeed write masterfully with a witty undertone that time and again sneers realists and caters the reader some entertainment (Reus-Smit, 2019, p. 178).

Keywords: Constructivism, Friedrich Kratochwil, Norms, Meaning, Reasoning

As with other constructivists *Praxis* too is about social life. For the scholars amongst us, the word *Praxis* is obviously borrowed from Aristotle with reason as the word means "action". For most of the initial chapters Kratochwil is occupied with the setting up of his workbench. He introduces and rearranges all of the conceptual tools,

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ideas that he is going to use in the later chapters. Almost in every chapter Kratochwil suddenly comes to a halt and starts to carve out the indispensable pieces of his constructivist puzzle, which he then puts aside and continues to evaluate and criticize ideas and arguments from texts of authors as mentioned above. One of these concepts is "action", which is the use of "norms" and "values" that are shared and common in a social world. Attention must be paid to the word "use" in this sentence. As with Onuf, Kratochwil puts much emphasis on deeds. For Onuf there was an order and the social life could only be constructed first and foremost by deeds and then words. Kratochwil seems to favor action as well, but meanings are equally important to Kratochwil as these meanings are detrimental to how individuals behave in a social world. Kratochwil establishes a direct link between norms and historical understanding. Historical facts and events for Kratochwil form the utmost basis for individuals to embrace norms much easier. Historical memories can serve as the storage room for norms that individuals are familiar with. Even though, historical accounts and events are selectively stored in the memory bank, they are crucial in the construction of collective identities and behaviors. Norms let individuals make choices, yet the social climate individuals live in today are confusing. The confusion partly come from the usage of meanings of words in language by the media. Narrating from Kant and Hume, individuals ought to be critical as their political interests and their wellbeing depend on this. Yet, the social world today is filled with egotistic individuals who are busy with selfies and self-promotion.

Constructivism for Kratochwil is not a grand theory but simply put it is an instrument that lets one look at a social situation and scrutinize what exactly is happening. Constructivism aims to understand the social world. Constructivism is therefore merely a meta-theoretical stance or a methodological orientation (Reus-Smit, 2019, p. 18). For Kratochwil there is variation in beliefs across all individuals in every possible social world, there are differences in knowledge, skills, wishes, identities that no two individuals would be identical. There may be similarities but identical situations or individuals do not exist. It is for this reason that every situation must be unique and requires its own sequence of events. Who were at the scene, who started first and what was said and who responded in what way etc. Therefore, the order of events and the sequence of these events do matter to understand and construct a storyline. p.62 Collective meanings and individual motivations (no matter how diverse a society may be can converge and possess features of collective action. Can find common space and common language and meanings. Theory of Action.

This storyline is an objective narrative that focuses on the choices of individuals and collectivities. The reason is that it is impossible to gain access in social life by making fixed assumptions as is the case with realists and their emphasis of "fear". However, a situation or the sequence of steps taken can be reconstructed with proper analytical reasoning. This brings Kratochwil to the concept of context! Kratochwil acknowledges that realist assumptions in the order of "fear" do exist. However, there are also other emotions such as "assurances" and the possibility to communicate and sit around a table. Therefore, it is easier to analyze choices and to do this Kratochwil prefers to look at law. From this perspective, rules are based on norms and norms coming from historical traditions have built-in morals that guide and let individuals make free choices. Laws are featured to be constraining in what choices are possible. This means that there are also choices that are not welcome. Those individuals who break the law are excluded. This means that laws can be inclusive but also exclusive. This brings about the point that there are also individuals who can pose a threat and cause harm to others for obvious reasons. Individuals who participate in politics may manipulate the social world and serve personal interests. In case of corrupted individuals there must be social situations set in place. Such an example for an institution is punishment and sanctions. Yet, Kratochwil

also points out that sanctioning does not work. Examples are the sanctions against Iraq, Yugoslavia, Liberia, Haiti, Somalia, and Cambodia (Reus-Smit, 2019, p. 232). For sanctions to work it is obvious that norms must be embraced by all parties and the imposition of sanctions can be disregarded as relative gains. Therefore, constructing a new future should capacitate social units to see the potential of building new alternative futures. Kratochwil borrows the idea of why some are war-like individuals from Aristotle. According to Aristotle there are always those who do not have any reason to cooperate. Such people may not have families, morals, or homes to go back to and all that is left could be non-cooperation (Reus-Smit, 2019, p. 23). Yet, enlightened self-interest could be learned in a social world where common norms support recognition, support and cooperation. Kratochwil prefers universal norms to analyze why humans cooperate.

Learning is a process of change and Kratochwil presents some real-world illustrations of for example the Russian invasion of Crimea in 2008 and efforts of the United Nations that have backfired in Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Libya etc. Such changes in the world make it harder for individuals as well as scientists to read and understand social life. Change for Kratochwil means crisis and people have difficulty in adapting to a new situation that is born out of crisis. When changes in the social world are rapid and the crises are bigger, making choices become more stringent. Constructed identities after the crisis must again be redefined. Such a process is long and slow. Another example that Kratochwil demonstrates are the changes in international politics. Until the sixteenth century feudal relations were central which after the sixteenth century changed into contract thinking between rulers and ruled ones. Until recently European concert was about power balancing and today liberal ideas such as the Washington diet and regionalism as in EU, UN and NATO have gained prominence.

Other recent examples are that even the EU was too late in registering the change. Until it was too late as with Georgia. For Kratochwil the global order has shrunk and the East has found out about nation-building. The Western conceptual baggage now is inadequate to get a reading of what is happening right now. Constructivism requires first and foremost to acknowledge the existing diversity of social worlds that have their own logic. It may be possible that not every single social world is ready and equipped to participate as a conversation partner but it must be central to put the effort to understand.

Men are different than animals as men have power of reasoned speech. Language has a constitutive function that can create an artificial social life where people learn from conceptual thinking, reasoning and even from others' experiences. People use language and shared meanings that creates social order. Yet, the clouded judgement of the individual can be attributed to the duality of cognition and feelings. Cognition is rational and rational can predict human behavior that aspires utility. Yet, there are also language dependent feelings such as fear, remorse, shame, admiration and guilt that make human behavior irrational and the human behavior unpredictable. In other words, to reduce human behaviour to only pain and pleasure or utilitarian mode of maximizing one's benefits and reducing risks is a shortcoming of the classic liberal action theory. Anarchy does not pay attention to norms and values or their meanings or their usage.

Order is important as order is primarily a point when it comes to learned ones with whom conversation and hermeneutics is possible. Not even those who are intelligent can be expected to have common sense or judgement ability, but the usage of rule-based norms and institutions in a constant change only matters if society can "go on". The choice of people today as uncritical apathic, escapist individuals is result of the dominant norms and common understanding today. It comes down to the ability of a social world and individual that is able to socially reproduce and commit to a whole range of cognitive emotional parameters to ascertain social continuation.

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