Between Science and Politics: Friedrich Kratochwil’s Praxis of ‘Going On’

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Introduction

Friedrich Kratochwil’s first professional article – published in 1971, the year before I was born – was a conceptual exploration of the relationship between politics and political science. After canvassing a number of different attempts to define politics, he settles on an account that emphasizes the centrality of unsolvable problems to politics, and he relates that unsolvability to the ‘incompatibility of value-orientations’ between various parties (Kratochwil, 1971: 121). As a result, he suggests, the challenge of both politics and political science is to find a language in which ‘specific critical problems’, such as the nuclear arms race between the US and the USSR, can be defined and addressed (Kratochwil, 1971: 122). Assuming, or advocating, a complete homogenizing of values doesn’t get us as far as efforts to define a situation in ways that make possible at least minimal amounts of cooperation. Here the wissenschaftlich study of politics, particularly of international politics, can make a contribution to clarifying the areas of common concern even for otherwise diametrically opposed actors and communities.

In the conclusion of his latest and most synoptic work – the summa Kratochwilia, so to speak – we find much the same concern on display. We who are ‘not engaged in making practical politics, but who, as critical observers in the privileged position of academia, surely have something to say and to contribute to the understanding of praxis’, Kratochwil notes, but we won’t get far by imagining that we can exhaustively determine what political actors ought to be doing. Instead, we need a project of ‘seeking to
establish an order that allows us to “go on” in that mode of communication that is a “conversation”. This is

the precondition for common action … without reviving a genuine political language and caring again about what comes into existence by a communication that focuses on forming an inter-esse – rather than engaging in interminable arguments about ‘ultimate’ values or human rights – the chances for a politics of freedom seem dim indeed. (Kratochwil, 2018: 475–6)

There is a remarkable continuity here, over almost 50 years of scholarship. The role of systematic scholarship is not, and for Kratochwil never has been, to develop ideal theory from which supposedly necessary consequences for political action could be derived. Instead, he has long been concerned to clarify the conditions of praxis: how we creatively and collectively make and remake the world through our meaningful dealings with one another. This orientation has always placed him outside the neo-positivist project of explaining by testing hypothetical correlations that dominates so much of US-centred anglophone ‘International Relations’ (IR); it also places him outside those projects in political philosophy which seek to develop general standards for evaluating arrangements and courses of action, whether on the domestic or on the international level. In both of those projects, the goal of the exercise is for scholars to correct or improve political practice, bringing supposedly superior general knowledge to bear in dictating to actors of various types how they ought to act. Such a vision of scholarly activity has animated the American Political Science Association since its founding in 1903 (Ross, 1994: 181; Jackson, 2014: 274–6), and in this as in so many other areas, global anglophone ‘IR’ retains substantial traces of its historical organization as a subfield of the discipline of US Political Science.

That vision has never been Kratochwil’s, however, and that raises an intriguing question: if we take his alternative account of practical knowing – praxis – seriously, what is the role for academics and for the scholarship that they produce? How should we academics be engaging political issues, if we are not supposed to legislate solutions from our perch outside the

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1 In this way, the logical generality of ideal theory meets the empirical generality of neo-positivist covering laws, and it does so in such a way that both forms of generality serve as a basis upon which ‘experts’ can make policy pronouncements. What sets these two forms of reasoning together is nothing conceptual – they are very different ways of knowing, after all – but a practical habit of citing something general as a basis for a specific recommendation. More on this later.

2 Throughout this chapter I will assume that my audience is composed, for the most part, of academics. If I were writing for practitioners outside the academy, I would almost certainly formulate my claims somewhat differently.
rough and tumble of partisan political contests? I think the implications of Kratochwil’s position place him in the company of Max Weber and John Dewey when it comes to answering this question, although in a somewhat distinct or even deviant place from the usual and dominant understanding of both of these authors’ work. With Dewey, Kratochwil would celebrate the role of academics and academic scholarship in forming new publics united by a concern with some pressing practical problem, but that role has to be understood not as political organizing so much as what we might call the intellectual constitution of a public. With Weber, Kratochwil would highlight the distinctiveness of scholarly input into politics from a place provisionally isolated from politics – the academy – and highlight the ways that such input is able to serve as a parametric basis for subsequent contestation rather than collapsing into just another partisan political position.

But Weber’s identification of the contribution of Wissenschaft to the formation of a responsible politician was more or less exclusively confined to the scholarly identification of causal relationships from which likely consequences could be ascertained, and Kratochwil has been clear throughout his career that norms do not function as causes in the neo-positivist, efficient-causal sense (for example, and perhaps most famously, Kratochwil, 1984: 316–18; and Kratochwil and Ruggie, 1986: 767–8). It is therefore necessary to look to the other component of Weberian Verantwortungspolitik to see what academic scholarship in a broadly interpretive – that is to say, non-causal – mode could contribute to practical political life. After all, Weber’s responsible politician is suspended between two imperatives: the likely consequences of their actions, and the ethical imperatives from which they derive their ‘passion’. With Kratochwil, I want to suggest that there also is a distinctive scholarly role to be played in deriving and elaborating those ethical imperatives, not by miraculously finishing any of the inherently incomplete projects of ideal or nomothetic theorizing that continue to litter the academic landscape, but instead through a ‘Wittgensteinian redescription of practical action’ (Kratochwil, 2014: 266) that clarifies and sharpens our sense of the challenges involved in ‘going on’. This kind of broadly interpretive scholarship intellectually constitutes the public to which the politician is then responsible.

In order to read Kratochwil on these points and draw out the distinctive aspects of his position, I will place him in dialogue with three interlocutors – not necessarily as direct sources of influence on Kratochwil, but as thinkers wrestling with some of the same issues as he does. I begin with Weber, as there is a fundamental similarity between Weber’s diagnosis of the problem that arises when we look to contemplative, scholarly knowledge to resolve the problems of political contestation, and Kratochwil’s scepticism about political expertise. Their solutions diverge insofar as Kratochwil’s account of practical reason opens the possibility of something other than the ‘clash
of gods’ that Weber sees as the inevitable outcome of differences in value commitments. I then place Kratochwil in conversation with Dewey, as the publicity of practical reason plays a similar role in their accounts – although Kratochwil is less sanguine about the possibilities of rational planning than Dewey was. Kratochwil’s emphasis on ongoing dilemmas leads me finally to place him in dialogue with Andrew Abbott’s ‘fractal’ approach to conceptual dichotomies, which re-centres the always unfinished character of social and political projects in a way that lets us understand how academic scholars in particular should stop lamenting the loss of ideal circumstances which we never had access to in the first place and focus instead on how to ‘go on’ under our actual circumstances.3

**Responsible politicians**

Political actors, Weber argues in his famous essay on the vocation for politics, should have a sense of responsibility, a feeling of ‘being answerable to’, as a core component of their vocation. Without this sense of responsibility, a politician is ineffectual, because their passion for some cause doesn’t serve to animate and direct their actions, and their sense of measured proportion simply devolves into a calculating adaptation to and exploitation of existing realities. The cause that a politician serves gives political successes their meaning and purpose (Weber, 2004: 76) and connects the politician’s efforts to something broader than their own enrichment. At the same time, the politician’s sense of responsibility to their cause, whatever that cause is, allows them to endure the ‘strong slow boring of hard boards, with a mixture of passion and proportion at the same time’, which constitutes, for Weber, the truest vocation for politics (Weber, 2004: 88, translation modified).

Weber’s greatest fear is that a politician will succumb to either pure passion or pure calculation and thus forgo their actual vocation in favour of either an ‘ethics of conviction’ or a vainglorious pursuit of power for its own sake rather than for its utility in achieving an end. The latter outcome is produced by losing a sense of responsibility to a cause. Absent a morally compelling purpose that undergirds an ethically desirable end, nothing remains but more or less efficient means of employing the coercive techniques of state

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3 My reading of Kratochwil’s work is thus also in dialogue with Stefano Guzzini’s (2010) reconstruction of Kratochwil’s thought. Where Guzzini emphasizes Kratochwil’s quest for coherence across the parallel domains of theory and methodology and how that quest places him outside of the anglophone mainstream, I emphasize Kratochwil’s consistent exploration of a sense of the social world that differs from that on offer in most mainstream anglophone International Studies scholarship. This is ultimately a very subtle nuance, probably having more to do with the different perspectives of a European and an American reconstruction of a thinker who has spanned both worlds throughout his career.
rule for arbitrary and idiosyncratic goals. Perhaps chief among those goals is staying in office, so as to continue to benefit from whatever spoils one derives from occupying that position. The former outcome – the ‘ethics of conviction’ – is generated when a politician ignores the tragic necessity of using the immoral means of state coercion to achieve any end, even the most praiseworthy:

Can the ethical demands on politics really be indifferent to the fact that politics works with a specific means: power, behind which stands violence? Don’t we see that the Bolshevik and Spartacist ideologues are achieving the same results as any militaristic dictator precisely because they are using this tool of politics? … How are we to distinguish between the polemics of most of the representatives of the supposedly new ethics against their opponents, and those of any other demagogue? By their noble intentions! we are told. Good. But here we are talking about means, and the nobility of ultimate intentions is also claimed by their opponents with just as much sincerity. (Weber, 2004: 78)

Because of the necessity to use coercive force in political action, Weber argues, a responsible politician cannot follow an ethics of conviction in which the moral value of the ultimate end gives the politician licence to ignore the ‘(foreseeable) results’ of their actions (Weber, 2004: 79) – because that road leads either to abandoning political action altogether because of its immoral means, or to justifying any and every action in terms of the purpose pursued. Either way, the specific responsibility of the politician both to their cause and for the consequences of their actions – the unity of passion and a sense of proportion – is sacrificed. Even though Weber also notes that it is ‘authentically human and moving’ when a responsible politician reaches a point where they adopt an ethics of conviction to say, after Martin Luther, ‘here I stand, I can do no other’ (Weber, 2004: 86), it is clear that, for Weber, this is an extreme limit to political action rather than its core.

It would thus appear that a Weberian politician needs to know two things in order to properly exercise their vocation. On the one hand, they need to be able to foresee the consequences of their actions – not perfectly, but in a way that allows a deliberate consideration of what particular courses of action might lead to. On the other hand, they need a grounding in some vision of the goal to be achieved, a morally compelling cause that

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4 Any similarity between my characterization of the politician without a sense of responsibility and the theoretical assumptions of most rational choice accounts of political behaviour is entirely intentional.
can anchor their actions and give them meaning and purpose. Logically speaking, neither of those can be generated from within the sphere of politics, where the pursuit and exercise of coercive power is the continual means. Both consequential knowledge (that is, knowledge of cause and effect) and moral knowledge (that is, knowledge of right and wrong) have to serve as a check on the pursuit and exercise of coercive power, and as such they need to emanate from somewhere beyond politics. A politician who simply announced a moral purpose or produced their own forecast of outcomes would, and quite rightly, be quickly accused of inventing something that served their own interests rather than any ends towards which that purpose or forecast ostensibly pointed. The very grammar (in a Wittgensteinian sense) of such claims — claims about the ethical value of a course of action, and claims about the epistemic validity of a forecast — is that they are evaluable in terms of, or using standards other than, the question of whether they serve the political interests of one or another politician or political faction. This is how such claims can be compelling for ‘us’ rather than just for you or for me (Rescher, 1997: 14–16). To put this a little differently, they cannot be political claims, lest they lose any of their influence in politics.

In Weber’s account, politicians get their forecasts from academics with a vocation for science. Unlike people with a vocation for politics, people with a vocation for Wissenschaft abide not by the demands of acquiring and exercising power, but instead by a different set of commitments: ‘Presupposed in every piece of scientific work is the validity of the rules of logic and method: the general foundations of our orientation in the world’ (Weber, 1994: 13). This presupposition in turn gives rise to a distinct way of using words, with a quite different goal:

[T]he taking of practical-political positions and the scientific analysis of political forms and party positions are two very different things. If you speak about democracy at a public meeting, you do not make a secret of your personal position; on the contrary, you have to take one side or the other explicitly, that is your damned duty and responsibility. In that context the words you use are not tools of scientific analysis, but political advertisements against the positions of others … in short, weapons. (Weber, 2004: 14)

Note that the German word Wissenschaft is considerably broader than the English word ‘science’ and means something like systematic, scholarly inquiry. So ‘a scholar with a vocation for science’ would be somewhat redundant. I use the locution ‘an academic with the vocation for science’ because not everyone with an academic position displays the kind of vocation that Weber is talking about here; indeed, some are more political than others.
A scientific analysis does not yield a categorical pronouncement about what ought to be done in a given circumstance; that would be an instance of political speech. Instead, a scientific analysis yields a more modest elaboration of the consequences – both logical and causal – of the adoption of particular value commitments. This is both because scientific work cannot answer questions about ultimate value (the science of theology, Weber points out, is the rationalization of the feeling of being saved, and not a proof of salvation) and because the clarity that scientific analysis brings only demonstrates the necessity of choosing between irreconcilable values. In particular, instruction in scientific analysis can make one aware of the ‘unavoidable means’ that are required to bring about particular ends, even though those means may be morally questionable, thus posing the question: ‘does the end “sanctify” the means or not?’ (Weber, 2004: 19).

Weber’s analysis is therefore primarily an effort to limit the reach of scientific reason, upholding and foregrounding the tragic necessity of choice between irreconcilable values at the core of political and social action. Kratochwil certainly shares this scepticism about the capacity of scientific reason to put an end to difficult choices, and he operates in a decidedly Weberian manner when using his analyses of law and language to puncture the pretensions of putatively universal norms and foundational moral imperatives. He warns of the ‘open invitation for imperial projects’ that a universalist crusade for a notion such as ‘human rights’ appears to issue, including the dangers of ‘an “activist” judiciary – hardly rooted in a constitutional structure and a functioning political process – or by great powers, perhaps even by a coalition of the willing, who feel empowered by the universalist nature of their goals’ to engage in all manner of authoritarian abuses (Kratochwil, 2013: 18–19). And he is particularly sceptical of ‘the reformist bent animating much of legal scholarship’, which, under contemporary conditions, leads to a situation in which ‘anything deemed desirable becomes a “right,” without much concern for specifying the corresponding duty holders’ (Kratochwil, 2014: 115). A political project of limiting state authority thus arms itself with scholarly claims and portrays itself as a release from difficult choices in a way that Weber too would seek to analytically puncture.

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6 Several English translations of this sentence overlook Weber’s deliberate use of the word heiligt and the academic scare quotes with which he surrounds it and thus render this as a question about whether the ends justify the means. The religious resonance (even if it is a resonance that has been somewhat ‘de-sacralized’ in everyday German, as Stefano Guzzini pointed out to me) seems to me to be much more important than any connection to a superficial Machiavellianism.

7 I have discussed the very deliberately neo–Kantian aspects of this project in Jackson (2017b).
But Kratochwil’s strategy for such a critique of illusion differs from Weber’s. Weber focuses on the necessary use of the immoral means of state coercion in order to achieve even moral ends; Kratochwil instead focuses on the logical impossibility of foundational moral claims putting an end to difficult political decisions in the first place:

‘[H]umanity’ is an … ambiguous symbol as it usually does not stand for ‘all people’ existing, but for a specific way of life … It is through politics that we not only decide which goods are ‘public,’ that is, goods ‘for’ a public, but also determine who is entitled to enjoy them and who is left outside … Here questions of membership and of making binding and effective decisions arise. Law then becomes the sediment of such decisions and a powerful instrument of rule. (Kratochwil, 2014: 188)

For that reason, the invocation of putatively foundational moral principles (such as ‘human rights’) is never a universal imperative but always a particular usage that derives its operative meaning from the locally specific ‘sediment of [prior] decisions’. Difficult choices remain and leave their traces even in our efforts to resolve them by appealing to some ‘higher’ values.

Part of the difference between Weber and Kratochwil on this point is due to the fact that Weber doesn’t think that systematic, scientific scholarship does anything but work out the consequences of value commitments, and although those consequences can be both logical and causal, the consequences Weber thinks are most relevant to a responsible politician are the causal consequences. Jurisprudence, Weber suggests, can only tell us that ‘if one wants to achieve a certain result, then according to the norms of our legal thinking this legal rule is the appropriate means of achieving it’ (Weber, 1994: 14). But that, in turn, is only binding on someone for whom upholding the rule of law is a paramount value, especially when confronted with undesirable consequences of adhering to the law; the status of legality has no special value for the responsible politician but is one among many other considerations that have to be assessed in terms of their practical consequences. Knowing whether something is legal is far less important to the Weberian politician than knowing what effects might arise from pursuing a legal course of action — or, for that matter, knowing what effects might arise from pursuing an illegal course of action.

This is compounded by Weber’s strict insistence on locating ethical imperatives in religious systems of morality, and in particular in Christian admonitions about refraining from the use of violence. Weber’s key example of an ethical imperative in both of his vocation lectures is the Sermon on the Mount, a key piece of Christian ethical teaching which, among other

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8 Chapters 5–7 in the Gospel of Matthew, one of the four canonical Christian gospels.
things, specifically praises ‘peacemakers’ and admonishes listeners to love their enemies and pray for them, and to ‘turn the other cheek’ when struck rather than offering resistance. Weber declares that this is an ‘undignified’ ethic viewed from the worldly perspective, because not resisting evil may well make one complicit in its victory (Weber, 1994: 17). But even more strikingly, it runs directly against the organization of the contemporary sovereign territorial state, which rests on a claimed monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a particular territory, unlike other forms of rule. This last qualification is significant, because it localizes, so to speak, the tension between the Christian ethical imperative not to use force and the irreducible linkage between politics and coercive force. What makes Weber’s diagnosis so powerful is precisely that it is located, empirically and historically, within a particular tradition of political and ethical thought and practice, and Weber’s responsible politician is a particular solution to problems arising in that tradition. If the organization of politics were different, or if ethics were different – say, if politics didn’t involve coercive force, or if our moral cosmology didn’t praise peace and condemn violence – then the tension Weber argues is always at the heart of a responsible politics would simply evaporate.

Similarly, if there were sources of ethical imperatives that were not so closely linked to religious moral cosmologies, scholarship on values might not be so strictly limited to elaborating the logical consequences of commitments based in faith. This possibility is key to Kratochwil’s solution to the Weberian ‘clash of gods’, Weber’s evocative terminology for the conflict of irreconcilable value commitments. Kratochwil recognizes, in a way that Weber does not, that ‘after all, we do debate value questions and the reason is not accidental’ (Kratochwil, 1995: 34). Weber would regard such debates as unresolvable conflicts and highlight the limitations of reason when it comes to trying to resolve them; he is scornful of such efforts, comparing them to the exercise of trying to ‘scientifically’ demonstrate the superiority of German or French culture (Weber, 2004: 23). But while Kratochwil agrees that our debates about values don’t have any hidden telos that would deliver us from the realm of political contestation – we never arrive at a utopian kingdom of ends in which all speech situations are ideal and all rational beings join in consensus about the highest good – that does not make our debates nothing but a war of words. Instead, our debates are ways of figuring out how to live with one another, drawing on what we might call – borrowing terminology from John Shotter (1993: 170–2) – the rhetorical resources of the ‘living tradition’ in which we find ourselves. Scholarly reflection, far from providing universal moral solutions to political questions, elucidates the ambiguities and dilemmas characteristic of our tradition and can thus perform a role in politics that Weber doesn’t specifically envision: making plain to the politician the necessity of choosing not merely between ethical
imperatives and causal consequences, but between different moral accounts and their correspondingly diverse ethical framings.

In other words, Kratochwil understands the political situation as being even more complex than Weber argues that it is: not just a tension between one set of value commitments and the one unavoidable necessity of coercive force, but between many value commitments and courses of action. Here it matters a great deal, I think, that Kratochwil is interested first and foremost in international affairs, and in international law in particular. The challenge of the coexistence of diverse and distinct ways of morally ordering the world poses itself in such a context in ways that, perhaps, might be overlooked from an elite position within a single sovereign territorial state sitting near the top of a global hierarchy, which is the position from which Weber inevitably wrote and spoke. Indeed, the problem of the coexistence of different moral cosmologies, so to speak, is provisionally resolved by the principle of sovereignty, which displaces such differences to a place outside the state’s boundaries and makes possible the homogenization of the realm inside those boundaries (Walker, 1993; Inayatullah and Blaney, 2004). In practice, Weber can assume that the members of the domestic public to whom he is speaking share, more or less, a consistent set of (Christian) value commitments with respect to the use of force. There is no special challenge involved in their coexistence as a community because they are presumptively already coexisting. The plurality of value commitments poses a logical problem for Weber, making unavailable a purely rational solution to the tension between the values held by the political community and the necessary coercion utilized by efforts to rule that community.

But as Kratochwil points out, ‘the ambiguity of whether international law was to allow for the coexistence of vastly different systems with different political projects, or whether it represented a missionary endeavour for a specific way of life, has always been part of the tradition of international law’ (Kratochwil, 2014: 166), and as such this question of living with moral plurality has always been internal to the study of international affairs. Weber is concerned to prevent crusades, and to reign in naked ambition; his point about the plurality of the highest values is that reason alone cannot adjudicate between them. Kratochwil agrees that reason alone cannot provide the solution, but he is by contrast concerned with figuring out how we can ‘go on’ together, despite the lack of a value consensus based in pure reason. His position is therefore productive, or better, reconstructive (Dewey, 1978; Friedrichs and Kratochwil, 2009), where Weber’s stance is decidedly negative.

9 This is, of course, situated within the very intellectual tradition that gave birth to the realpolitik/realist tradition in anglophone International Studies (Shilliam, 2007; Jackson, 2014).
Constituting the public

In this way, Kratochwil’s position comes close to that of John Dewey. For Dewey, political activity is about coordinating and organizing rather than command and coercing. The challenges of politics are ‘a practical problem of human beings living in association with one another’ (Dewey, 1985b: 255), and Dewey’s emphasis is on the nature of those problems rather than on the character of the officials who play a role in solving those problems. The public, for Dewey, ‘consists of all those who are affected by the indirect consequences of transactions to such an extent that it is deemed necessary to have those consequences systematically cared for’ (Dewey, 1985b: 245). Those indirect consequences – where, for example, a commercial exchange between you and me, say when I hire you to build a fence to keep my cattle from wandering off, prevents other people from bringing their cattle to the water source now enclosed with a fence – are what call for regulation, by producing a public composed of people who are being affected by something they had no part in bringing about. Precisely how that problem is to be solved is less important to Dewey than recalling that the problem is what called for regulation and government in the first place:

Means of transit and communication affect not only those who utilize them but all who are dependent in any way upon what is transported, whether as producers or consumers. The increase of easy and rapid intercommunication means that production takes place more and more for distant markets and it puts a premium upon mass-production. Thus it becomes a disputed question whether railroads as well as highways should not be administered by public officials, and in any case some measure of official regulation is instituted, as they become settled bases of social life. (Dewey, 1985b: 273)

Indeed, Dewey suggests that solutions to problems like this – whether railroads and roads need public officials to administer them, given the indirect effects of actions such as building a road or laying railroad tracks – can only be ascertained in practice, experimentally, through ‘continuous inquiry, continuous in the sense of being connected as well as persistent’, which ‘can provide the material of enduring opinion about public matters’ (Dewey, 1985b: 346). There is no ex ante solution to an actual problem, and no way to decide in advance of practical engagement in the situation whether publicly administering roads is better than letting private owners do so.

There is, however, little or no coercion in Dewey’s account of political life. This is likely due to Dewey’s understanding of a public as something that comes into being more or less automatically because of indirect consequences: a public exists whenever such consequences exist. The
problem, though, which even Dewey recognizes, is that the factual \textit{existence} of a public – which, in virtue of the common problem faced by all its members, has an interest in solving that problem – isn’t always enough to actually activate that public in a politically relevant way.

Indirect, extensive, enduring and serious consequences of conjoint and interacting behavior call a public into existence having a common interest in controlling these consequences. But the machine age has so enormously expanded, multiplied, intensified and complicated the scope of the indirect consequences, has formed such immense and consolidated unions in action, on an impersonal rather than a community basis, that the resultant public cannot identify and distinguish itself. And this discovery is obviously an antecedent condition of any effective organization on its part. (Dewey, 1985b: 314)

It is therefore possible to \textit{know} that a public exists even if that public \textit{does not know itself to be a public}. This, in turn, sets up what Dewey calls the ‘prime difficulty … of discovering the means by which a scattered, mobile and manifold public may so recognize itself as to define and express its interests’ (Dewey, 1985b: 327). By Dewey’s own logic, this cannot be a means that comes into being by the same channels as a public does. A public, for Dewey, is a constellation of people united by the set of effects that they have in common, whether they realize it or not; the common interest that they have is in regulating those effects, not in constituting themselves as a public. Despite some trenchant observations about the role of communication in producing a community (Dewey, 1985b: 329–31), there is a gap between the existence of a public and the constitution of that public.

The bridging of that gap involves the active production of a public by demonstrating to the relevant people that they \textit{do in fact constitute a public}. Dewey has great confidence in the capacity of artists to do this – ‘[a]rtists have always been the real purveyors of news, for it is not the outward happening in itself which is new, but the kindling by it of emotion, perception and appreciation’ (Dewey, 1985b: 350). However, especially given the technical complexity of life in industrialized societies, there would seem to be a role for other kinds of detached observers too: observers who could trace out the complex consequences of various configurations and arrangements of action and thus generate awareness of a need to regulate and coordinate them. Clearly such observations would need a standard of validity that could not be reduced to solving a problem that the observers were facing and trying to solve; otherwise, publics would be produced as a by-product of other processes and as a solution to other problems, and not because the members of that public themselves were facing problems. Dewey’s answer to this conundrum presumes that people are engaged in ‘continuous
inquiry’ (Dewey, 1985b: 346) so that they will recognize valid arguments about indirect consequences when they hear them, but even he admits that ‘[i]nquiry, indeed, is a work which devolves upon experts’ (Dewey, 1985b: 365) and not on every person equally.

This opens a role for scholars that is quite distinct from Weber’s notion that the principal contribution of systematic scholarship is to force political actors to confront the consequences of their commitments and their actions. Instead, scholars and scholarship can articulate the basis on which a public – a number of affected people sharing an interest in governing the phenomenon affecting them – can coalesce and put pressure on the formally political actors (office holders and other public officials) to act. In this role, the scholar’s influence on the politician is indirect rather than direct; the point is not to urge the politician to see the gap between value commitments and coercive means, but rather to urge other people to recognize themselves as sharing an interest, so that they can urge the politician to enact appropriate policies. By virtue of their position outside the rough and tumble of practical politics, and because they are deeply immersed in research on their topic, scholars can diagnose complex problems and propose solutions which may elude the grasp of people going about their everyday lives, and they can do so on a non-partisan basis: from outside politics narrowly understood, just as in Weber.10 What changes here is mainly the audience, since Weber limits the scholar’s public role more or less to the university classroom, whereas Dewey envisions a more expansive engagement.

Dewey and Weber also remain close together on the question of the kind of knowledge that a scholar can and should impart: consequential knowledge of cause and effect. What the scholar brings to the public, in Dewey’s account, is an analysis of what is producing the difficulties and problems experienced by members of that public, and a recommendation for addressing those difficulties and resolving those problems. In accord with his broader pragmatist stance, Dewey doesn’t really maintain a separate moral or ethical register; ethical claims and moral values in his approach are candidates for experimental inquiry in the same way that other claims are and should be evaluated based on their widespread practical effects.11 The result is that Dewey’s politicians don’t have the same kind of tension-filled existence as Weber’s do, because there is no overarching challenge of standing between irreconcilable opposites. Instead, there is a lack of proper rational

10 Dewey would likely agree with Weber that the first duty of a scholar is to ‘serve only the thing’ and to be focused first and foremost on the topic of their research (Weber, 1994: 7).

11 Space does not permit a fuller exploration of the complexity of Dewey’s approach to ethics, which while taking consequences seriously, remains somewhat distinct from a narrow consequentialism. For a detailed examination of ethical issues in pragmatism generally, see Cochran (1999).
planning, which indicates, in Dewey’s dated but very revealing formulation, a certain lack of civilized progress: ‘A savage finds his way skillfully through a wilderness by reading certain obscure indications; civilized man builds a highway that shows the road to all’ (Dewey, 1985a: 126). The value of rational planning is never really questioned in Dewey’s work, and because Dewey’s notion of politics is less necessarily coercive than Weber’s is, the developmental telos here is towards an ever increasing control of causal forces, towards ever increasing ‘civilization’.

Perhaps with the benefit of hindsight, Kratochwil is more sceptical of rational progress than Dewey is, although he largely agrees with Dewey that politics can be something other than merely a set of tragic choices. Kratochwil points out that increasing regulation, especially regulation that does not come courtesy of a formal political process with oversight and accountability, can in fact disempower people, who then are increasingly ‘“subjected” to virtual laws made in virtual spaces’ and who have a tendency to retreat from ‘a serious engagement with public issues’ in favour of ‘spend[ing] their time with like-minded people’ and celebrating their shared private – but not public – interests (Kratochwil, 2014: 198). In that way, an overarching emphasis on the consequences of regulation, as is the case in the rapid promulgation of standards and conventions by firms and other private entities (someone has to decide this pressing issue, and we can move faster than the state authorities can!) might result in our losing sight of the value commitments that supposedly anchored the whole process. Kratochwil diagnoses the state of our present politics as resulting not from a lack of rationality but from a lack of authority, in the classic sense of a moral purpose in terms of which political activity might make sense and be legitimated: a common good, a res publica. If anything, we suffer from too much instrumental rationality, not too little.

Kratochwil’s account of law makes this point extremely clearly. Because we often labour under the spell of ideal theory, he points out, we presume that law is supposed to be a direct elaboration of some set of universal principles, for example ‘justice’ or ‘human rights’. This overlooks the actual, practical function of law, which is ‘to settle certain issues so that we can go on and not be constantly burdened with showing why the application of a certain rule … “truly” serve[s] the common good and [is] compatible with morality in general’ (Kratochwil, 2014: 259). At the same time, such provisional settling is, or should be, something other than an arbitrary imposition:

[T]he discussion of ‘rights’ is always only part of the story, as the complex interaction of facts and norms, and not only of the structure of norms (rules vs. principles, conflict among rules and so forth) is at issue. To that extent the decisions to bring different norms into play involve judgments and appraisals that remain contestable. But this does not
mean that such decisions are ‘arbitrary,’ that is unconstrained, although
the ‘right answer’ thesis cannot be maintained either. (Kratochwil,
2014: 236)

To determine the legality of some course of action is not a simple deduction
from either facts or principles but is instead a creative act in which
‘authoritative sources and materials’ are handed down ‘for the resolution
of the problems at hand’. As such, ‘traditions are not simply “there” as is
suggested by the large collection of “data” … They record actions rather than
mere events, and they are “made” in the sense that they are “recollected”
or remembered rather than just found’ (Kratochwil, 2014: 69). Working
within a tradition means bringing the historical inheritance of that tradition
to bear on contemporary challenges, a process which involves grasping
and reconstructing that inheritance in order to make it relevant – and, in
so doing, shaping that inheritance itself. The stability of meaning, even
legal meaning, ‘must be maintained from context to context and preserved
over time through the repetitive agency of speakers … through repeated
use’ (Medina, 2004: 355), making it something other than a more or less
automatic adjustment to the technical requirements of the problem to
be solved. Indeed, the problem situation itself is clarified and defined as
people work on it (Dewey, 1985a: 205–6), and that process of definition
and clarification always involves a subtle interplay of the stock of existing
conceptual material that people hand down to themselves in making sense
of the problem in the first place, and the consequences of doing so: a process
of situated creativity (Joas, 1997; Jackson, 2009).

As such, Kratochwil’s analysis of law highlights a second role for scholars,
beyond the provision of causal explanations which might give politicians
recipes for producing their preferred outcomes, and which might also make
those politicians confront what they have to do in order to achieve those
outcomes. Kratochwil’s reminder that ‘law is not only a coordination
device, regulating the interactions among “rational” self-interested actors,
but also a vehicle of sense-making whose constitutive function is deeply
embedded in our historical experiences and our political imagination’
(Kratochwil, 2013: 13) is an implicit critique of the Deweyian emphasis on
an ever increasing anticipatory control of consequences as the sole standard
of desirable political action. Instead, the work of law – and the work of
those engaging with making and interpreting the law, which is to say, all of
us in law-governed societies, albeit in different ways depending on our social
positions and roles – is an active process of discerning how we should ‘go
on’ appropriately. The community aspect is paramount here, because ‘the

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I elaborate the ‘recipe’ character of causal explanation in Jackson (2017a).
“view from nowhere” – God’s view, in modernity recast as an epistemological ideal – remains unavailable to us’, and always will be (Kratochwil, 2014: 204). The identification of value commitments cannot happen through the elaboration of universal standards, even if the language deployed is without reference to any particular community. Such putatively universal appeals always implicitly reference a community – a public, in the Deweyian sense – and its traditions of sense-making in practice, and derive their authority from that community’s tacitly shared moral principles and ethical values. Legal disputes are therefore a way that ‘we’, as a community, provisionally work out disagreements about values.

Scholars in this context can play one of two roles. They can wade into the fray, bringing their supposedly superior grasp of the moral issues involved to bear in defence of one or another side of a dispute. This kind of alliance between ‘experts’ in the law and ‘enthusiasts’ seeking to advance their cause produces, Kratochwil observes, the conditions for a ‘professionalized’ governance practice ‘focusing on “policy” rather than representation, applying efficiency and “best practices” criteria rather than focusing on issues of positioning’ in the name of ‘a less ideological approach to problem-solving’ (Kratochwil, 2014: 119). Alternatively, scholars can present themselves not as experts, but as contemplative thinkers, elaborating the issues involved and the values implicated in different possible solutions to a problem (and indeed, in different definitions of a problem). Explicating values also means shoring up a community, helping people realize that they should care about some issue and should work to address it, simply because ‘our’ values call for such a course of action. In so doing, scholars provide not a set of imperative instructions for action, but a voice in an ongoing dialogue – a dialogue that cannot be resolved in purely rational terms, but which will inevitably be resolved in practice, by the community.

The scholarly vocation

But it does not follow that scholars should abandon the academy and commit themselves to ‘actively organize the public through a shared method of critical inquiry’ (Abraham and Abramson, 2017: 40). As Kratochwil points out, the first duty of scholars is ‘to play devil’s advocate’ and stick to the ‘duties of an epistemic community’ (Kratochwil, 2018: 426). In practice,

13 There is a strong parallel here to Emanuel Adler’s (2019) most recent articulation of cognitive evolution as a process whereby a community of practice selectively retains distinct ways of doing things over time, including ways of valuing actions and outcomes, and thus (re)produces itself as a particular community. Even putatively universal values, Adler points out, have to be selectively retained by a particular community in order to be effective.
this means that the scholarly contribution to the constitution of a public is at best an *indirect* contribution, providing the intellectual resources on which proximate producers of an actually existing and actually aware public can draw in organizing people. In so doing, these organizers act not purely as politicians, but as *public intellectuals*, in a very specific sense of that term. What anchors their public intellectual role is the work of scholars proper, whose vocation is to think things through and to help others to do the same — especially in the rarefied, provisionally separated out atmosphere of the classroom. To be a scholar aware of their public role is a different thing from being a public intellectual.

I find it helpful to think these issues through with the help of a device that I borrow from Andrew Abbott (2001): the fractal diagram.\(^\text{14}\)

Abbott’s key insight is that, in practice, dichotomous distinctions display a tendency to ‘fractalize’ and replicate themselves at different levels of resolution, and the resulting positions are ‘indexical’ and related to a local context, rather than acting as timeless conceptual categories. The Weberian distinction between *Wissenschaft* and *Politik* is presented as, in essence, a binary distinction between the vocation to contemplate politics to try to understand it, and the vocation to enact programmes through political action. But if we look more closely, we see that the same distinction then fractally recurs within each camp, producing the four ideal-typical positions pictured in Figure 14.1. At the far left we find the pure(st) contemplators, concerned almost exclusively with scientific validity; at the far right, we find the pure(st) enactors, the politicians that Weber worried would succumb to an ‘ethics of conviction’ or a naked grab for power for its own sake. *Between* these two poles we find the scientist who is concerned to deliver instructional messages to the wider world (the expert) and the

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14 This specific diagram is not one that Abbott himself offers, but one that I have produced through an application of his insights about dichotomous distinctions in practice.
politician who seeks to theorize their experience ‘from within’ and urge action on that basis (the public intellectual). While the expert seeks to simply demonstrate an optimal solution, the public intellectual calls a public into being by practically articulating the common threads that tie its prospective members together. The content of specific claims varies depending on the relative positions of the speaker and the audience; words spoken by a scholar and an expert might carry different weight, and a politician’s use of the same words might not come with the same commitment to epistemic validity. The diagram gives us an ideal–typical instrument for making sense of concrete speech acts, a kind of provisional classification that elucidates the intention (in the sense of Anscombe, 1963) of acting from different positions.

These fractal distinctions shed some additional light on the question of how scholars ought to relate to practitioners. If we follow Kratochwil in abandoning the project of ideal theory, it follows that the ‘expert’ position is not one that we can occupy when it comes to issues involving moral values. We can occupy that position as long as we confine ourselves to advancing causal arguments about the likely consequences of different courses of action, because then we are resting on the epistemic authority of our specialized research to compel practical politicians to acknowledge necessary tensions between their means and their ends—precisely the role that Weber envisioned for scientists with respect to politics. In fact, because the ‘experts’ and the ‘practical politicians’ are, so to speak, the ‘local enactors’ of their respective branches of the fractal tree, they share a positional similarity that we can see on display in the calls from practitioners to scholars for relevant solutions to their immediate problems, and in the persistent efforts to ‘bridge the gap’ (George, 1993) between scholarly experts and practitioners by working on issues of vocabulary and communication. Here the presumption is that the experts and the politicians are working with a fundamental similarity of aims. As we have seen, neither Weber nor Kratochwil considers the matter to be so simple.

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15 Note that the distinctions here are distinctions between positions, and not between actually existing concrete persons. A single person might, at different times in their career, occupy different positions on the fractal tree. Not all experts have to start off as scientists, nor do all public intellectuals have to come biographically from the political arena. My point here is to elucidate the consequences of occupying a particular position; my analysis is ideal–typical, and not empirical–historical.

16 In this way, the fractal diagram itself is the kind of thing that would almost certainly only be produced by a scholar. It is a provisional freezing of a set of ongoing relations of location and distinction so as to produce an ideal–typical mapping of different ways that one might comport oneself towards politics. Concretely, actually, these categories are never as fixed and stable as the diagram might make them appear.
But the more important thrust of Kratochwil’s thinking, as I have argued throughout this chapter, is the identification of an alternate, interpretive – and thus non-causal – pathway for scholars and scholarship. Just because ethical imperatives emanating from a moral cosmology present themselves as universal or categorical instructions does not mean that we scholars can have nothing rationally to say about them, although we should never delude ourselves into thinking that we can produce purely rational solutions to conflicts of value. Instead, there is an important role for scholars to play in creatively deploying the inherited cultural materials of a community in such a way that they become and remain relevant for present predicaments. In that way, scholars can help a community think through what it ought to do and thus produce an authoritative baseline for subsequent action. A Deweyian public is then produced not merely by the identification of a shared interest in addressing some common effect, but by the development and circulation of an ethically compelling account of a problem and thereby an active constitution of the public that should work to address and solve it.

But we scholars cannot occupy the public intellectual position outright without, to some extent, abandoning our base in the academy. Indeed, the public intellectual needs the scholar, precisely because the relative detachment of the academic form of life underpins the possibility of abstracting from particular experiences in order to create knowledge claims that can travel beyond their original contexts: ‘abstraction is liberation’, as Dewey (1978: 166) once pointed out. This goes equally for causal and interpretive claims. The expert, armed with abstract causal claims worked into concrete causal explanations, can speak more or less directly to the practical politician; abstraction provides them with the basis on which to make specific recommendations. By contrast, the scholar provides the conceptual material which the public intellectual uses to enframe and understand their practical situation, and the situation of the community of which they are a part. Solving the problem is not the point of such scholarship; defining the problem and envisioning the relevant community while refreshing or updating its values is the point. And reminding us of that possibility is, I think, Kratochwil’s most important contribution to the study of praxis.

Acknowledgements
Thanks to Gunther Hellmann and Jens Steffek for helpful feedback on an earlier, much draftier, draft. Thanks to Ian Reynolds, Stefano Guzzini and Eva Johais for comments and feedback on a much more complete draft.

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