PAUL KOWERT & JEFFREY LEGRO: "NORMS, IDENTITY, AND THEIR LIMITS: A THEORETICAL RESPONSE."

Norms are the "regulative cultural content of international policies," while identities are "regulative accounts of actors themselves." K & L address raise two central questions:

(i)   Is there a payoff in focusing on behavioral norms and identities, as opposed to individualism and materialism?

(ii)   If so, then where do norms come from?

HOW NORMS MATTER (454-468).

Rather than arguing that realism or liberalism are wrong, the authors suggest that their theoretical foundations are not equipped to take account of the impact of norms. Some bottom-up theories focusing on individual choice (eg. economic individualism) tend to face aggregation problems, to which institutional models can provide an effective response. Structural theories, on the other hand, adopt a top-down logic, and structure can be divided into material and social aspects, whereby "social structure refers to the cultural context of actor behavior" (459). While the realist structure is primarily uni-dimensional (power), neoliberal institutionalism allows for a potentially greater influence of norms, conventions and principles. However, it tends to focus more on formal institutions and treaties, rather than "less formal social expectations" (460).

According to K & L, a considerable variation in behavior remains unexplained. Enter social, normative structures, in three groups of arguments (ref. to entire Katzenstein volume):

(1) The effect of norms on interests:

International norms may shape the interests of leaders, which may explain action in the cases of Somalia or Cambodia, in which there were no (or few) material national interests. Norms associated with the spread of democracy may also have contributed to the promotion of NATO (462-63).

(2) The instrumental impact of norms:

Norms may shape the available or appropriate instruments or means that states will use. Unilateral action and certain types of weapons are seen as inappropriate. Realism has difficulty in explaining this fact. Moreover, internal cultural norms may dictate anti-militarist defense policies (Germany, Japan) (463-465).

(3) Normative Structure:

Behavioral norms may encourage the formation of national identities (eg. pan-Arabism), but may also have a profound impact on personal conceptions of identity (eg. Samurai, Eskimos). Interaction across levels of norms is thus possible, and "the interlocking web of norms, in turn, shapes the particular interests of political agents" (468).

THE SOURCES OF NORMS (469 - 483).

K & L challenge the authors of the Katzenstein volume to "take their own criticisms seriously and to develop more explicitly theoretical propositions about the construction of sociopolitical facts" (469). The propose three processes (other than "norms causing other norms") that lead to norm formation and change, which are (1) ecological; (2) social and (3) internal. (Ref. Fig. 12.2; note similarity to schema Prof. Moravcsik presented earlier in the course).

(1) Ecological Processes:

Norms, under this conception, are created and changed. through the "patterned interaction of actors and their environment."Actors may confront either a quickly changing, continuous, or 'murky' environment. Murkiness or ambiguity lies in the perception of actors (eg. Gorbachev's vision was sufficiently ambiguous to elicit allegiance among moderately competing political factions to pursue a common goal). The notion of ambiguity, however, must be developed further at the definitional level: Which types of ambiguity lead to norm and identity construction? Similarly, the notion of continuity can cut two ways: Stability or a "fade away" effect. K & L suggest further refinement of this hypothesis. Lastly, dramatic exogenous shocks can "loosen commitments to existing identities and behavioral norms" (eg. WWII), but can, at least initially, be identity-reinforcing (Pearl Harbor, Sept. 11) (474). Greater research is required to determine when shocks challenge vs. reinforce, and how shocks affect the relationship between different levels of norms.

(2) Social Processes:

Social processes can operate through simple "diffusion," whereby "new collective understandings" may "seep across 'transgovernmental networks' like ever-widening inkblots, or they may establish "in-group/out-group differentiation and social role definition" (474-475). In the latter case, continued social interaction would give rise to various "relational identities," which, in turn, have prompted extensive categorization (eg. "regional leader, independent, faithful ally, liberator, and defender of the faith"). K & L suggest that empirical inquiry focus on the linkages of various social roles and on the extent of their functionality.

(3) Internal Processes:

People crave identity in social relations. Thus, the first question we ask in determining group-belonging is not "Do I like these people," but "Who am I?". In other words, cognitive or motivational arguments lead to the same result; "stable in-group and out-group identities" (Citing Turner; 479). Linguistic theories go one step beyond cognitive theories, in that they not only emphasize that people need to make sense out of their world, but that they are compelled to communicate their representations, whereby "the process of communication *is* a process of making sense" (480). K & L argue that psycho-linguistic theories and rational choice should be seen as proximate, in that (eg.) the former can often be restated in rational choice terms. While the strength of internal process lies in the ability to better specify its "reductive arguments," its weakness is the difficulty in aggregating individual choice. (482)

CHALLENGES IN THE STUDY OF NORMS (483-END):

K & K identify five particular problems:

1. How do we know norms when we see them? By what criteria can we assess norm robustness? How do we distinguish deception and manipulation? There may be a bias toward the 'norm that worked,' and what about 'the norms that never made it?'

2. Norms are ever-present, so, whatever, the outcome, norms could easily have been the cause. A re-integration of norms may provide a solution (Realism: Norms must conform to certain structures).

3. Norms play roles in continuity *and* change, with confusing results. Here, also, a "greater appreciation for the hierarchical integration of cultural themes suggests at least a degree of cultural and normative stability" (489). Alternatively, structures and agents can be seen as mutually constitutive, constantly producing and reproducing each other. Exogenous historical conditions may help us to separate out what constitutes 'production' and what constitutes 'reproduction.' Or, levels of culture may be 'nested; within each other. The general consensus is that "norms and identity are constructed through regularized processes, often with relatively stable effects" (490).

4. It is difficult to specify the relationship between the normative and material worlds. Norms "do not float freely" (490). There must be a better, synthetic conceptualization of *how* the material and interpretive worlds interact.

5. The effect of agency on normative analysis is confounding. Is it useful to distinguish between *internal* and *external* norms? If norms are a collective phenomenon, don't they all have to be external? Yes, if the actor is an individual. Less clear if the actor is a collective. Moreover, the potential for the self-conscious manipulation of external norms presents a problem for scholarship: "Some variables (agents) are directly *aware* of other variables ... Since scholarly inquiry is itself interpretation (thus the product of agency), can it presume to investigate interpretive phenomena such as norms without, by the nature of the scientific enterprise, altering their meanings?" (494). K & L answer this concern by arguing that the quest should not be one of replacing interpretation with objectivity, but of providing better historical accounts and raising new questions."