

CHAPTER 4

EXPERTISE: THE MACHINERY OF GLOBAL REASON

Expertise is special knowledge made real as authority in struggle. My starting point for exploring expertise is the *work* experts do rather than the specialized knowledge they bring to bear. Expertise is less a form of knowledge deployed by specialized actors than a form of knowledge work undertaken by all kinds of people in their relationship with others. Expert work positions the people who do it between what is known and what must happen. The work is interpretive, translating the known into action and knitting the exercise of power back into the fabric of fact. One characteristic of this work is disagreement. Experts struggle with one another using tools of interpretation, articulation, and persuasion that are, when effective, at once words and authority.

The role of specialized knowledge *in government* has been explored for centuries in theology and political thought and has been a central preoccupation of sociology at least since Max Weber. Already in the sixteenth century, international lawyers were advising rulers to take advice to determine whether war was just.¹ Although Machiavelli had little advice for the prince on the role of advisors, his thoughts on the qualities to seek in a minister provide an early definition of expertise by role rather than knowledge. A prince must seek out men who place the interests of the prince above their own in all things, who must “never think of himself, but always of the prince, and he must never think of anything but what concerns the prince.”² At issue is less the knowledge or wisdom of those who serve the prince than their posture of alliance and loyalty. The rise of self-confident technocratic management in the past century generated both optimism and worry about the role of experts in government.³ Ever since, people have sought ways to harness their distinctive

knowledge for rulership while limiting their authority and humbling them before the popular will to ensure their accountability.⁴

One hears two different stories about global affairs: it is a place of unrestrained politics, a war of all against all, and it is a space of technocratic rule unrestrained by politics. Expertise either predominates or is invisible. I aim to bring these stories together. The diplomatic history and international politics story of leaders expressing national interests, paradigmatically through force of arms, captures the centrality of struggle and coercion in global life. Yet it underestimates the ways in which the choices and beliefs of statesmen are shaped by background players—other than the occasional Svengali—and the everyday vocabularies they use to articulate the national interest, even in war. This underscores the importance of interest in driving the projects people pursue, but underestimates the complex interpretive process through which national “interests” are formulated and brought to bear as things like geography and ideology are taken up as drivers of national interest. After all, diplomacy is as much the paradigm for war as the reverse and the use of force has also become a matter of communication and persuasion. The technocracy story identifies the significance of professionals and specialized modes of communication in global affairs, but underestimates the brutality of struggle within and through expert work while exaggerating the difference between technical and political modes of engagement.

The role of knowledge in global power is particularly easy to see because it so often arrives as an assertion, an argument, a program of action, or a call to resistance. Although authority always comes into being as an assertion, in other contexts that can be forgotten. Other than in moments of revolutionary turmoil, people forget that the sovereign is just a person whom everyone says is king. The institutionalization of public power makes authority seem “real” just as it makes the distinction between “public” and “private” or “legislature” and “executive” seem natural, however much institutional fine-tuning may be necessary to get the boundary right. At the global level, the saying and performing are often right on the surface. Global governance must be *claimed*, through an assertion that this or that military deployment or human rights denunciation is the act of the global public hand: the “international community” in action. The rhetorical dimension of global power is equally significant for those who would resist. Identifying the global hand in local unpleasantness is also an assertion and an allegation of responsibility. Whether one aspires to bring global governance into being or fears its power, one must name it, assert it, and identify it, propose it as something to build or destroy. In a sense, “global

governance" is simply the sum of what those who wish to manage and to resist globally have jointly drawn to our attention as governance.

This is on display in moments of crisis, when people who style themselves as participants in the "international community" discuss what to do about Muammar Gaddafi or Syrian chemical weapons or Burmese democracy. The situation needs to be framed—as a crisis, a conflict between the world and outlier rascals, a manageable problem, a precedent, a challenge to the credibility and ethics of the community. Military intervention, should it occur, is at once confirmation and consequence of the frame. Although we might come to see the situation as driven by power politics, geostrategic interests, regional rivalries, or historic grievance, these also need to be articulated. They are also made real—or not—through practices that confirm the analytics. Such modes of interpretation and methods of engagement are developed, deployed, and defended in specialized terms. Those terms are often rooted in law, but may as well be rooted in political theory, political science, history, religion, morality, national identity, and much more. In each case, they will have been honed by specialists before and as they are used.

Although less visible, expert practices of knowledge and power are more significant in routine situations. The structures of global political economy, the channels for diplomatic struggle, and the tools for the allocation, consolidation, and contestation of economic privilege require interpretation and framing as much as implementation or enforcement. Vernaculars developed by specialists—again often lawyers—are crucial here as well. We know, for example, that if everyone thinks the stability of the euro is at stake—well, the stability of the euro *is* at stake. But this is equally true of arrangements everyone thinks are stable: so it was, for example, with slavery or empire. And so it is for a territorial politics and a global economy in the form I explored in chapter 1. In this sense, the constitution of a world is ongoing: a technical and institutional practice as well as a communicative and performative work of the imagination.

EXPERT WORK: THE BACKGROUND BETWEEN FOREGROUND AND CONTEXT

I associate the term "expertise" with a type of intellectual and practical work that links analysis of the context for a decision with people and places marked out as the locus for decision. I call this activity and the style, posture, and role associated with it "background practice" or "background work." Specialized professionals do this when they explain to laypeople and leaders what is going on in a crisis, interpret public opinion, outline the options for action, and

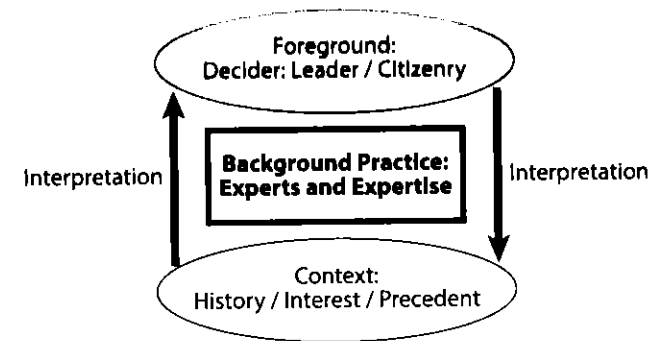


Figure 4.1 Expertise as Background Practice

explain what history and precedent require. After the people or the leaders have taken a decision, background work moves in the other direction, interpreting and implementing, giving effect to the general or sovereign will.

Background work linking context and decision is undertaken by all kinds of people, although people often draw upon more or less vulgate versions of ideas developed by specialists. The expertise and professional practices of specialists warrant attention not because they exercise disproportionate influence over princes and popular opinion as a kind of Rasputin/Riefenstahl monster, but because their interpretive background work is so characteristic of global struggles, whether undertaken by experts, princes, or populations. When people work in the "background," they situate themselves between two kinds of imaginary space that I term the "foreground" and the "context."

If foreground deciders seem empowered to decide in the context of forces and facts that have no agency, the experience of experts working in the background is different. They are people with projects, projects of affiliation and disaffiliation, commitment and aversion, and with wills to power and to submission, just like the foreground folks. Yet their practice is oriented to replace the experience of agency with something like the felt necessity of deference to contextual forces and facts and the experience that someone else will act. Background experts stand between the objective observation of facts and the subjective exercise of discretion. They advise and interpret by inhabiting modes of knowledge and communication through which they can pursue projects with some plausible deniability of agency.

Experts know in a general sense that they are not simply channeling the necessities of context. They approach one another's assessments and arguments with suspicion that interest or ideology might have gotten into the clean room.⁵

But they also know that they are adding something—professional judgment—where contextual forces may have supported a range of interpretations. Their agency in doing so is deniable so long as what they add is *plausible* given the conventions of their expertise and the practices of their profession. This is only possible, in turn, if there is a community and a discursive field that disciplines the plausibility of their interventions. The community and field need not be a recognized profession or academic discipline, but the work of specialized professionals like lawyers or economists provides examples of how this kind of plausibility is created, sustained, or undermined.

The *context* for decision consists in the facts and forces that are understood to impinge on a decision or that need to be taken into account. In chapter 1, I distinguished matters of technical or more general debate from the shared commonsense images and outcomes of earlier technical struggle that were taken as fact and not available for contestation. The first is background, the second context. But it is background work that draws the line between them. To raise issues up for debate is to bring them into the background. Context would include the “drivers” that decision makers are said to ignore at their peril: technological, historical, social, economic, or political “realities.” People speak about “national interest” this way: as a fact about the nation determined by its geographical position, history, economic structure, cultural identity, or objective place in the world. Trade economists often speak about a nation’s comparative advantage or factor endowment in these terms. People sometimes speak about the “productivity” of factors and the “competitiveness” of outputs as facts to be taken into account rather than reflections of decisions that could be reconsidered. Context provides the constraint within which allocations may be more or less efficient, business more or less profitable, nations more or less productive. This is what social scientists speak of as “structure”: the arrangements that shape and constrain the decisions of agents. Here we find the impersonal forces of the material world and the social system as well as the immutable beliefs of ideology or religion. The context is not a black box of subjective preference, nor the brute force of objective necessity. It is the settled outcome of background work. Interests and facts relevant for decision are socially constructed. The place where that happens—and could happen differently—is the “background.”

In the *foreground* are people identified as actors making decisions that affect the distribution of power, wealth, and status in the world. This is the space of world leaders, particularly at moments of crisis: perhaps Kennedy and Khrushchev in 1962 provide the model. This is how George Bush presented himself

when he claimed to be “the decider.” These, in social scientific terms, are the “agents.” Political leaders, statesmen, sovereigns, and the institutions of public law are all overrepresented here. This is how people sometimes view the commanding heights of finance and interpret what goes on at places like Davos. The defining characteristic of the foreground is the attribution of discretion and decision-making power: these people could take one road or another and decide which way to go on the basis of their interests, preferences, or political views.

Attributing this kind of power to decision makers misses the process by which constraints are made real to them and overestimates their own experience of discretion. Although government ministers and the heads of administrative agencies spend all day making decisions, briefed by staff, lobbied by constituents, urged on by allies, opposed by a wide variety of forces, such people are constrained and experience themselves as constrained by their institutions, their legal obligations, their political beliefs, their access to information, their assessment of colleagues, rivals, and opponents, and their own sense of role. To identify and understand those constraints, those drivers, and those interests, they must engage in background work.

Early in my career, I spent some time in the cabinet of a commissioner of the European Union, the rough equivalent of a national minister or, in the American system, a cabinet secretary. The one thing my commissioner rarely seemed to have was the feeling of “freedom to decide.” Or rather, he experienced this only fleetingly and often in moments of clarity about what his prior political commitments or the strategic situation *demand*ed that he decide. More often, the situation was muddy, decision a matter of small steps and trial balloons. The essence of political decision is confusion and constraint, even in the White House in October 1962.

Being “the decider” is not only an experience, if a rare one. More often it is an assertion or attribution made in a retrospective interpretation. The president claims to be the decider as an assertion of authority and responsibility, just as holding the president responsible begins with an allegation that he decided. To identify someone as responsible—like the identification of a force as contextual—is a claim. The claim comes to seem true when the background work of those who made it fades into the background. People speak about the “forces of globalization” or the “needs of the market” or “global warming” as if they were facts demanding responses rather than interpretations rooted in human decision. They speak about Davos or the CIA running the world as an accusation. If they come to be held accountable, the work of attribution will be completed and can disappear. A focus on decisions obscures the knowledge

work of those who attribute decision-making responsibility. Once taken, decisions are available for reinterpretation, review, reversal, or simple erosion as they are implemented and remembered, and the work of the background recommences.

The continuing presence of expert calculation, assessment, and interpretation in high politics is often overlooked because the vocabularies associated with high politics can seem markedly different from those more customarily associated with background advising. Leaders speak the language of politics, of with us and against us, of clashing civilizations, ideologies, and interests: the West versus the Rest, left-center-right, labor versus capital, South versus North, industry versus agriculture, the United States versus Europe, Sunni versus Shiite, secular versus religious, liberal versus conservative. We expect leaders to speak this way and routinely attribute agency and discretion to people who do. Experts who work in background spaces typically refrain from the language of interests or ideologies. They speak professional vernaculars of best practice, analytic rigor, empirical necessity, good sense, and consensus values. They may speak about the national interest and what it requires, but to decide on the national interest or to act in its name is above their pay grade.

The distinction, however, is rarely sharp. Whether making war or pursuing economic development, politicians also speak in languages of technical expertise. The media have become adept at educating their audience about the nuances of what had been technical disputes. Perhaps the most significant example was the strategic studies profession's work transforming their computer models of prisoners in reiterated dilemmas into massive defense funding—in Moscow no less than Washington. Experts are also required to develop and apply the language of politics and ideology. This is where spin doctors and media consultants and all the intellectuals who write op-eds come in: working out what it means to be “liberal” or “Islamic” or “European.”

The difference between foreground and background is itself a product of fluid expert analysis. One way to think about it would be to say that the *background* is the space where people argue about and make real the claim that something or someone is foreground or context. Foreground political decision can often be reframed as a question of technical management, a mopping-up operation for a decision taken elsewhere, just as the technical debates of experts can often readily be assimilated to the left-center-right structures of public political discussion. People in the governing professions deploy the distinction strategically as they locate responsibility for decisions with which they agree or disagree. It is striking how often people in government locate the moment of

political decision elsewhere—yesterday, in the Council, in the Oval Office, in Congress, in precedent, by the member states, at our last meeting—or deny the possibility of decision: the context determined the outcome, the bean counters just wouldn't go for it.

In national systems, this potential is dampened by the convention to treat particular institutions or role occupants as avatars of the political—the president, the king, parliament—and others as the space of expertise—administration, adjudication, the academy. At the global level, rulership is far less the monopoly of identifiable institutions. The colonization of foreground institutions by background vernaculars and the strategy of attributing responsibility elsewhere are far more pronounced. State power is everywhere spoken and exercised in the vocabulary of international relations, political science, international law, military science. Wars and the machinery of war are ordered, purchased, launched, and pursued in professional vocabularies, whether the computer-modeled rationality of nuclear deterrence, the justificatory language of humanitarian intervention, self-defense, and rights enforcement, or the gaming vernacular of dispute resolution and grand strategy. International economic life is organized in the vocabulary of professions committed to growth and development. Markets are structured to reflect professional notions of “best practice,” and defended in the professional language of efficiency. Likewise, when state power takes the form of public or private law, it is conceived and exercised in the vocabulary of law and lawyers.

The background work linking context to decision is a commonplace way to imagine deciding what to do. I have needs and desires I would like to realize. There are limits, pressures, and constituencies I must heed. As I contemplate what to do, argue with myself about the direction to take, I consult my desires, assess my needs, and evaluate the forces arrayed around me before advising myself on a course of action. I also want to look ahead to evaluate the likely impact my decision will have and how it will be interpreted. People have something like this in mind when they say they want to “think it through.” Interpreting this from the outside, it is easy to focus on the needs, desires, and impinging forces—and on the decision. By attending to the “background practices,” my intention is to focus rather on the ways people individually and collectively “think things through.” Background work lies behind the large-scale decisions of businesspeople and investors allocating and conditioning the use of vast resources, made in the vocabularies of economists, accountants, and policy analysts seeking to maximize return or corner markets as well as the decisions within families distributing resources among members in terms

developed by priests, therapists, the advice givers of the media or the sages within each family network. People doing background work in all these sites routinely imagine that, in their own special way, they are figuring things out and thinking things through.

MAKING THE BACKGROUND VISIBLE

When background work has been most successful, it is very difficult to see. It just seems obvious: he's the president, that's the situation. Or, as in chapter 3, this is the world and these are its problems. It takes effort to reverse engineer the expert work embedded in this kind of common sense and open it to contestation. To say that wages reflect the "productivity of labor" is to condense the background distributive work described in chapter 1 into the context. This harsh contextual necessity brands the outcomes of the struggles that shape relative labor productivity or competitiveness as "facts," although wage rates in a given factory may be affected by the background work of public and private administrative or regulatory players across the globe who struggle over what to interpret as a fact of economic life and to whom to attribute regulatory capacity.

For years, people wishing to influence global labor conditions focused attention on the World Trade Organization and the International Labor Organization. The ILO for its obvious subject matter competence, the WTO because it seemed more capable of compelling compliance with whatever labor standards might be adopted. The weaknesses of global legislation by either institution were well known: national actors have not been willing to adopt rules that would threaten their national economic strategies. The result has been vague compromise standards, unenforced agreements, standards that legitimate more than they restrain. But where else can one turn but to the available foreground institutions? In this situation, the possibility for background struggle disappears. Everything that is not within the decision space of the WTO is context. As a result, it is easy to overlook the impact of decisions by entrepreneurs, workers, consumers, and investors made in the shadow of background rules and expectations about the uses of property, the conditions for labor organization, the transport and trade of industrial inputs and outputs, patterns of credit and payment, immigration. The world of background norms—private law, corporate standards, transnational administrative arrangements, rules of corporate governance and liability—seems less open to struggle. They are either aligned with "best practice" or shaped by the inexorable forces of competition across open markets.

The WTO might play a larger role in global wage regulation were the background work it undertakes as an interface between diverging national background regulations reinterpreted as a foreground decision affecting global wages. We have long known that in some sense, as the saying goes, "fair trade is free trade's destiny." As tariffs came down, industrial nations began to challenge all sorts of diverse pieces of one another's regulatory environment as "non-tariff barriers to trade." In doing so, they were identifying something that had been seen as the context for national market activity and opening it to technical reassessment and political struggle. The "non-tariff barrier" is context made background through expert identification and naming. Once begun, there seems no natural limit to this practice—as the European Union's legal order has amply demonstrated. The WTO provides a context for struggle over these rule systems, including, potentially, those that affect wages. In principle, for example, the United States could challenge Mexico's or China's low effective minimum wage as an unfair subsidy of their exports and impose a tariff at the border to compensate. Or perhaps the lax enforcement of local law might be seen as "dumping" and warrant a response. On the other side, Mexico or China could find a US demand for higher labor standards to be an unfair or unreasonable extraterritorial reach of American law and a barrier to trade.

The result would be a dispute undertaken in the language of trade law. It would have highly technical components: the legal definition of "non-tariff barrier," "dumping," and "injury," the calculation of gains and losses, the rules for accessing the WTO or other decision-making processes. It would also have elements that may have been given professional meaning, but shade off into popular discussion: ideas like "unfair trade" or "level playing field." It is common to assume that such disputes will be either settled by political decision or resolved by technical expertise. The resolution may be either a foreground decision to end the "trade war" or a technical resolution by trade lawyers determining what is and what is not a "subsidy."

Resolution by the political leadership will be shaped by the technical vernacular through which the dispute arose and may be more constrained than one might expect. The technical resolution will be pursued in the shadow of the political stakes and typically has more room for discretion than might initially be visible. In this situation, for example, it turns out there is no objective intellectual instrument to determine whether the Mexican wage law is a subsidy or the American wage requirement is a non-tariff barrier. Each rule, if permitted, could have an extraterritorial impact on the economy of the other nation. Nor does international law have an objective professional method for determining

which extraterritorial impact is the exercise of a legitimate sovereign privilege. Ultimately, it seems to depend on an assumption about which legal scheme is “normal” and which is not. If the difference between American and Mexican wages is “normal,” American efforts to raise Mexican standards will seem an abnormal non-tariff barrier. As it processes routine trade disputes, the WTO system generates a string of decisions about globally tolerated levels of differentiation among labor and other regulatory standards—about the range of “normal” background regulation.

Deciding what is “normal” and what is not is rulership: a decision about the allocation of costs. Although the WTO provides a mechanism for settling disputes between nations asserting that *their* rule is normal, the WTO’s work is not generally understood in this way. People seeking to alter wages and working conditions focus on national legislatures: that is the foreground where labor policy is made. International institutions like the WTO are significant if they can encourage changes in national labor policy—by studies promoting labor flexibility or by adoption of a “social charter” advocating stronger worker protections. Progressive interests bemoan the fact that the international legal order is not powerful enough to do much about the conditions of work, yet the WTO is deciding what is and is not a “normal” background legal regime on a routine basis. The difficulty is finding opportunities to contest the wide range of low-wage industrial strategies that result. They seem the inexorable result of economic forces that cannot be challenged in the foreground of political life.

Something similar goes on in thinking about war and peace. When people focus on summit meetings and late-night telephone calls between heads of state—or speeches in the Security Council—they underestimate the discretion and the significance of people in the background of these public deliberations. The power of *expert consensus* is real: consensus that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, that American credibility is on the line, that something must be done, that dominos would surely fall. We now know that although 9/11 opened a window of plausibility for the invasion of Iraq, the campaign had already long been under way—and not simply because the leadership, the Bush family, say, was “obsessed” with Iraq, but also, and more importantly, because an entire administrative machine had been set in motion, with its own timetables and credibility requirements. The invasion incubated there, in the background, built momentum through hundreds of small decisions, budgetary, administrative, political, rhetorical, public and private. In some sense, of course, Bush could have called the whole thing off, and without his enthusiasm all that

momentum may never have built. The interesting point, however, is that by the time people focused on “the president deciding,” it was not at all clear how much room to maneuver he still had. “The United States” had made a commitment to overthrow Saddam Hussein—a commitment whose political and bureaucratic momentum could not easily have been stopped without incurring all manner of further costs—long before the decision came to the president, let alone the Security Council, for explicit decision.

A decade later, the question of what, if anything, to do about the conflict in Syria seemed to be a classic foreground issue of high politics. People debated how to understand the conflict: was this a struggle between the “international community” and an outlaw regime, or was it a more horizontal struggle between Russia and the West, among regional powers and religious/ethnic traditions? In the summer of 2013, President Obama set out to “decide” whether the United States should respond with a military strike to the use of chemical weapons in the conflict. At stake was the credibility of the international legal regime, the determination of the United States to enforce the line against use of “weapons of mass destruction” in the Middle East, the American commitment to Israel vis-à-vis Iran, the personal credibility and power of the president, at home and abroad. All these were claims made by experts in strategic thinking and political calculation who battled for attention with experts in public opinion on war weariness, experts in military tactics on likely effects and consequences, experts on political strategy on relations with Congress and electoral impact, and so on. The impact of a set of explosions in Syria—or the absence of explosions—was also a matter for interpretation, to be undertaken by laypeople and politicians, media experts and military planners, in the same vernaculars. Claims were being made on numerous boards simultaneously: about the president’s war powers, the legal/political/strategic reasons for engaging Congress or pursuing diplomacy, and more. The summer passed into fall and the US did not strike. That became another fact to interpret, for diplomats and politicians, soldiers and insurgents, in Syria and beyond.

In short, the work of the background has colonized the foreground and the context. Whenever something is labeled “the decision” or taken as a force or fact of context, somewhere there is the person who argued persuasively that this was so. Argued within the constraints of plausibility recognized by his or her discipline, field, and professional community. We should understand the foreground and context to which people attribute facticity and necessity, agency and political significance, as the spectacle-like effects of background performances.

MAPPING THE KNOWLEDGE PRACTICES OF BACKGROUND PROFESSIONALS

Background work is a plural and contested activity. To map the background work of expertise in global economic and political life requires attention to the professional communities where expertise arises, the roles people in those communities imagine for themselves, the boundary work they do to maintain those roles, and the more and less conscious knowledge they draw upon. Background work is a plural and contested activity. There is no master vocabulary, whether from law, economics, or political science, for understanding global affairs, and no discipline is first among equals in the management of the world. Different modes of expertise jostle with one another to define and manage aspects of global life: the public analytics of government and the private logics of commercial activity; the political vernacular of international relations and the economic models of global markets and finance. The ubiquity of law as a medium of struggle across many domains makes it a good place to begin, but the same could be said for economics or science and technology and many other domains of expert work. To understand *how* experts govern—how they develop and deploy their expertise, how they struggle and reason with one another, and how their knowledge comes to be taken up by others—we need field- and site-specific studies alongside work on patterns of struggle among experts and expert communities.

GETTING STARTED: IDENTIFYING AN EXPERT COMMUNITY

A first step is to identify a group of people in a particular time and place whose projects generate materials one can study. I have begun with specific professional disciplines: public international lawyers in the United States after the Second World War, human rights advocates in the West after 1980, specialists in “development policy” who draw on legal and economic materials. The fields I have studied are self-consciously oriented to interpreting and advising foreground actors, at least in fantasy. People working within them weigh in on issues of the day in terms that may be practical or polemical. They also write texts we might call “academic” or “theoretical” about how the world works and the (appropriate) role or significance of their field. One can identify thought leaders who would be recognized as such by people in the field and outside and whose arguments are taken up, transformed, and distorted by people pursuing projects. People in these fields manage the boundaries of their discipline to maintain the field’s autonomy and integrity while borrowing avidly from

neighboring disciplines. In each field, there is a self-conscious feedback loop through which perceptions of the field’s uptake among policy makers, commercial or public actors, and citizens influence ongoing work.

Having identified a field, it takes some interpretive work to understand the role and significance of their expertise and professional work. What is their context? What forces and facts do they interpret and for whom? Whom do they credit with foreground agency? As they work between contextual forces and foreground deciders, with whom are they in conversation, at what institutional sites? Experts speak and write about these things all the time. What they say is an important clue to the workings of their expertise, but one cannot take their word for it. Much of their shared knowledge lies beneath the surface of their performances in training and acquired common sense. Experts—and their lay audiences—often underestimate the blind spots and biases common in expert communities and overestimate expert capacity: imagining that development economists *know* how to bring about development or lawyers *know* how to build an institution or draft a statute to bring about a desired result. And much of what experts say about their role is argument. Professionals routinely disagree about things like the status and significance of law, the priority of economic analysis in policy, or the importance of cultural knowledge. This makes sense: if they agreed there would be no need for articulation. Things they all take as facts slip into common sense and settled field boundaries need not be defended. If law always already binds, there is no reason to assert law’s binding force: people will have complied.

Experts make arguments about such things for a reason: their assertions are motivated. Often, the motivation is their role in a distributive struggle. Someone wants to do one thing, someone else another, and the expert makes assertions about what law or economics requires, what the facts are, who the decider is, to tip the balance one way or the other. If law is this or law binds this way, then this assertion of power is legitimate and that one is not. As a result, it is difficult to grasp what expert work is about without identifying its oppositional animus. Against whom have they bestirred themselves to argument or action? What is their strategy? How do they imagine their work will affect the status of forces? People deploy expertise in struggle to influence outcomes, whether by enlisting someone’s discretion or persuading him or her that they have no discretion.

In assessing the significance of expert work for governance, there is an enormous temptation to resolve expert disputes about their respective significance. It is difficult, for example, to write about the US Supreme Court without opining

on whether and when the justices overstepped their proper role or strayed beyond the text of the Constitution. These, of course, are likely to be questions disputed by the justices themselves. The scholar need not adjudicate that dispute, although much legal scholarship tries. Scholars often nominate themselves a kind of tenth justice, more well informed by history or theory or ethics than those on the bench, restrained by a scholarly rather than a judicial role. Their scholarship continues the ongoing background work of judicial expertise. Focusing here, however, much can be overlooked: knowledge and role constraints for both judges and scholars that are outside explicit dispute, shared biases and blind spots of the legal community, and the larger sociopolitical function of an endless debate about judicial function that remains unresolved.

At the global level, international lawyers make many disputed assertions about the importance of international law, about who breaks and who complies with law and how law does or ought to shape political or economic activity. To understand the significance of international legal expertise, it is tempting to try to adjudicate these claims. Was Germany or England the more law-abiding nation in World War I? Which nation had the correct theory about what "law" is all about? Do states comply with treaties because they are legally binding or for other reasons? Historical and empirical studies have been undertaken to resolve such questions, continuing the background work of international legal expertise. When published, they may—or may not—effectively end debate on one or another such point. But the significance of international legal expertise in global life is not exhausted by resolving these salient queries. International legal expertise is also important—may be more important—when such questions are unresolved or when their resolution rests dormant awaiting its re-emergence as something to be debated.

As a result, in studying the background work of experts, it is important not to take their own assertions about the boundaries and content of their field too seriously. Arguments about who is and is not within the discipline, whose arguments are and are not plausible, or what expert work has what consequences in the world are all part of expert practice. To understand how struggle over such things is undertaken—or avoided—and what its consequences might be, it is important not to prejudge the outcome and to understand the oppositional posture that animates these articulations.

At the same time, it is not possible to escape the tendentious nature of inquiry into the significance of expert performance in global political and economic affairs. You are also exploring their activities for a reason. You have an intuition about the significance of their activity; a hypothesis about how their

role has been over- or underestimated and why we should be concerned. Presumably, your intuition differs from the field's direct engagements with their own power. To say that framing an issue in legal rather than religious terms may affect the outcome of distributional struggle, for example, is different from identifying and interpreting the legal norm that controls. Nor does the routine boundary work undertaken by legal experts managing relations between "legal" and "political" questions exhaust inquiry into the political significance of legal ideas, practices, and institutional arrangements that frame political strategies or objectives. To keep this distinction between routine expert work and your own investigation in view, it is helpful to begin with some working hypotheses about how you imagine expert work in a field to be significant. Who gets persuaded, what do they do differently, what might have happened had these experts not been involved in this way? Developing a sense for the possible social pathways through which one expert performance or idea or activity rather than another might matter is helpful in avoiding the temptation to imagine that once an expert community's unfortunate ideas are exposed it will be clear to all why they matter. Working hypotheses about the impact of expert work need not be unduly specific: they speak to the avenues by which the ideas of an expert community, conscious and unconscious, the victories won and lost in expert struggle, and the terrain defined by expert work may affect the distribution of power and resources in society. For example:

- Although development specialists have oscillated wildly in their ideas about what the state should do to promote "development," their advice, when taken, has shaped government policy. Their vocabulary has been used to defend and attack policies and has become a mark of legitimacy, even where the analytic link to specialized knowledge is weak. Their shared ideas about what an economy is and what development could be have constrained political choices as people in public life, whether politicians or citizens, interpret their world in terms they have absorbed from these professional communities.
- International lawyers are sometimes able to assert the authority to say what is and is not "legal." Where their assertions are effective, they may affect the outcome of struggles, limiting or enabling action by different public or private actors. Their doctrinal tools have constructed and empowered actors in global economic and political life—states, citizens, international institutions, corporations. Their vocabulary has been used to legitimate and delegitimize military campaigns, state policies, and the

governments of particular states. And they have contributed to the common sense of the global policy class about what governance is and what “sovereignty” does.

- Human rights professionals and many others have used their vocabulary to denounce and defend government practices. Their work has shaped government and corporate policy, altering the practices that seem normal and abnormal, defining what it means to be a “legitimate” government or a “socially responsible” corporate citizen. Their commonsense ideas about what justice requires, what it means to be a citizen or a state, and what should and should not be evaluated in cost-benefit terms have affected the balance of power among interests by affecting the perceptions of people taking action and evaluating the actions of others.

The purpose of such hypotheses is to understand and distinguish one’s own animus—why do I care about these people?—from the desires and projects of the experts one studies. My belief in the significance of international law as an expert framing device and tool of battle may animate my study, but to say so is not to carry a brief for the binding force or meaning of international law whenever it is asserted by international lawyers. International law may be meaningful, for example, precisely because it *cannot* cleanly resolve disputes about what is and is not legal. As I imagine these possible effects of expert work, they do not depend on the analytic rigor or clarity of the expert vocabularies involved. Sloppy reasoning and contradictory materials may be important. Unresolved arguments can shape outcomes. So can unspoken or unconscious commitments.

Nor is my objective to formulate hypotheses that could be proven in the social scientific sense of demonstrating cause and effect. It is very unlikely that one could prove the impact of professional ideas in this sense. Efforts to do so risk narrowing the inquiry too sharply to be of much explanatory power. Moreover, arguing about effect is one of the most prevalent activities through which experts pursue their projects. The objective is to evoke the world as they see and create it and articulate pathways through which this work could be impactful without adjudicating their own claims to influence in one or another situation.

BOUNDARIES: PROFESSIONAL ROLE AND POSITION

My own next step has usually been to spend time with these people, observing their modes of work, listening to their styles of argument, and reading the materials they produce. There are some practical things to understand: How

were they trained, what did they learn and what did they not learn, what jobs do they have and what institutional opportunities to use their expertise? How do they imagine themselves in the world, and how do they differentiate their expertise and professional practice from others? With which other expertise do they compete, what adjacent fields make them feel insecure or self-confident?

International lawyers, for example, will typically tell young students seeking to join the profession that it is crucial to “become a good lawyer first.” This is partly about training—the first years of law school are largely devoted to national law—and partly a shared sensibility about what “being a lawyer” means: an attitude toward legal materials and legal reasoning, pride in technical competence and in professional alternatives and opportunities available alongside whatever “international” work comes along, and a sense for the leverage and authority that comes from being a lawyer in the locations where professional projects are undertaken. It also says something about not being a political scientist or specialist in international relations and foreign policy: having something more rigorous, technical, and professional to offer. The professional focus on the legality of international law speaks also to the international lawyer’s confidence and ambivalence about her role.

Expertise about economic development policy, by contrast, self-consciously lies at the intersection of at least three different realms of knowledge. The professional role of “development policy” expert is linked not to a particular academic field, but to a posture toward several fields of knowledge and to the work of politics. Although economics has often been treated as the “queen of the sciences” by development policy experts, the discipline also draws upon ideas about society from the fields of history, sociology, anthropology, or philosophy and ideas about institutions, governance, and law, often from political or legal science. Ideas from these fields filter into the expertise of the development professional in ways that blend highly technical knowledge, both empirical and analytical, with lay versions of ideas about the economy, the society, and the legal tools of governance.

- *Economics*: Are there many national economies, or one global economy? If we might choose, which is better for development? Should we think of an economy as something to manage, or as something best left to its own devices? Should we imagine the economy as an input-output cycle responsive to government stimulation, or as a market of private actors responsive to price signals? Should we aim to “get distribution right” or to “get prices right”? How different are the economies of developed and underdeveloped societies? What does it mean, economically speaking, for

a nation to be a "latecomer" to development? Might there be more than one equally stable or efficient economic modes of development in a given society? How important are institutions, path dependence, or local culture in economic life?

- *Law, governance, and institutions:* Is law an instrument for the development state or a limit on the economic powers of the state? Should the state be large or small? Which legal institutions are most important for economic development? Should we strengthen public law and administration? Private law and courts? Is it better to rely on formal rules or discretionary standards? Should we seek to legalize the informal sector—and what would that mean? How appropriate is it for legal professionals to engage in policy analysis? How effective an instrument of policy is law? How autonomous are legal doctrines and institutions from a nation's economic and political life? How significant are "rights" in a legal order? What is the relationship between "rights" and law's role as an instrument of public power or a strategy for development? What legal rules are necessary to establish a market? To regulate one? To ensure that a nation's economic market contributes to national development? Is there one "rule of law" or many?
- *Sociology, anthropology, and history:* Are all societies functionally rather similar, or do they differ? Are the important differences matters of culture, or stages of economic life? How do "modern" and "traditional" societies differ? Are they linked by natural stages of progress? Is development something that happens once in the life of a nation? Is the industrial revolution in the North Atlantic nations the model? How large, how decentralized, how democratic, how active should a state be for development? What social bonds and divisions accompany, facilitate, or impede a market? How was development linked to the Enlightenment, the Protestant Reformation, to pragmatism or "entrepreneurialism"? What was colonialism, and how is it relevant to cultural and economic progress today? What is "capitalism," and what might it become? What drives "globalization"? How is inequality between rural and urban, male and female, or rich and poor reproduced? Is there a "world system"? Are the interests of the "center" and the "periphery" complementary or antagonistic? Are families the building blocks for development or obstacles to modernization? What about ethnic groups, cities, or nations?

Development professionals debate one another both by pitting economics against sociology or law against political science, and by drawing on professional

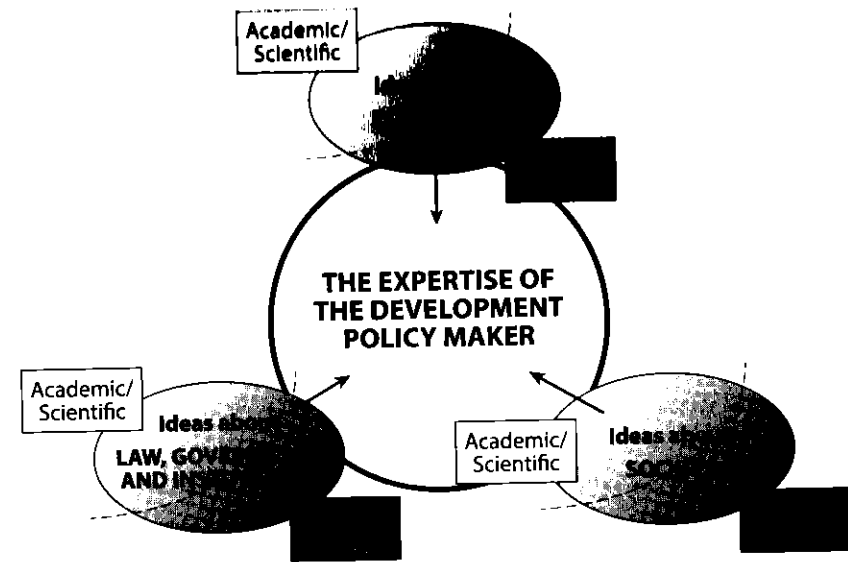


Figure 4.2 The Economic Development Policy Maker: Intellectual Influences

debates already swirling within each of these fields. As they do, they ride the waves of fashion that move all academic disciplines. Economics may seem prestigious for a period, and then fall out of fashion, to be replaced by law or sociology. Macroeconomics was dominant for a generation, only to be displaced by microeconomics within a few short years. Institutional economics rises and falls. It would be tempting to picture the development professional as a consumer, picking and choosing from the ideas of various disciplines as they suited his purposes. That is surely part of it. But the tail of disciplinary knowledge also wags the dog of professional work.

Professionals in different fields approach the boundaries of their special knowledge in different ways. An international lawyer's sense for the distinctly "legal" nature of his field contrasts with the development policy professional's openly parasitic relationship to the knowledge of these adjacent fields. Their attitudes toward amateurism and laicism are also different. International lawyers may be pleased when others pick up their arguments and use their institutions, but they imagine themselves having professional custody of the tools of validation, persuasion, and legitimacy. They are "legal practitioners" whose work is "lawyering." The development policy professional, by contrast, is an amateur economist, lawyer, and sociologist all rolled into one. Their work is "policy making." Policy is defined more readily by what it is not than what it

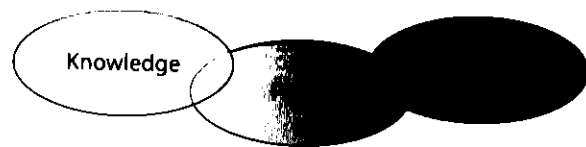


Figure 4.3 The Policy Maker: Suspended between Science and Politics

is. Policy professionals position themselves in their own minds between two ideal-typical alternatives: the national leaders whom they advise about how best to achieve their development goals and the Nobel Prize-winning economists whose ideas they find most influential or helpful. They are neither scientists nor politicians. Policy is an applied amalgam of both, more practical than science, more knowledgeable and reasoned than politics.

Unlike academics or scientists, policy makers are not looking for interesting counterintuitive experiments to try or seeking to perfect a predictive model. They are not experimenting on their society—they are doing their best to do what makes the most sense. Their authority is rooted not in a school of thought—or in a political constituency—but in the consensus wisdom, the apparent “reasonableness,” and even necessity of what they propose. Against scientists, their most potent argument is that this will simply not fly politically—against politicians, that it contravenes the clear consensus of the scientific community. In the world of policy, a consensus scientific view, like the safe political center, will have a strong appeal. The work of policy proceeds most smoothly in moments of relative consensus within both scientific and political communities, and policy work can adjust scientific and political consensus to one another. This is a work of translation as political and scientific differences fade into policy. But sharp differences in either community can also be heightened as they are harnessed to disputes about policy differences. Policy work then becomes a mode of battle that threatens the carefully neither-nor posture of the policy maker with collapse into either scientific truth or public preference.

Politicians thinking about development are also straddling two stools. On the one hand, politicians are also trying to get something to happen rather than figure out what is true. But politicians come to debate about what “makes the most sense” from a position, with allies and enemies, with a constituency, with particular interests to protect and further. The political world, like the scientific community, is split into factions. Political work may be the smooth translation of factional preference into scientific truth and political fact, or it

may be a battle in which politicians find it advantageous to exaggerate the degree of consensus in the policy or scientific community to buttress their preferences or to overstate the professional disagreement to garner a free hand. There are analogs in scientific communities that are also home to factions with interests that may be served by their affiliation with politics or policy. The relative hegemony of various methods within economics owes a great deal to the prestige and funding that accompany positions for thought leaders in governance.

The differences within these various professional communities do not arise independently of the differences between them. Politicians interested in development frame their policy differences in the shadow of differences in the scientific and policy community. Not because they are “followers” of different economic schools of thought or believers in one or another economic theory, although they may be. Differences within these communities come into alignment as positions in one are associated with positions in another in struggle.

A great deal will depend upon how the expert languages of science and policy have already been assimilated by the political class. Differences between scientific theories or policy alternatives may have come to define the nation’s political vernacular. Where the political elite share in an expert consensus about the range of alternatives, things that seem either obvious or inconceivable to the experts may disappear from the politically contestable, whether politicians are motivated to exaggerate or understate differences. On the other hand, a politician may fasten on a difference that is relatively insignificant in the scientific or policy world to differentiate his or her own political position.

As a result, the “degree of difference” or the felt passion of quite similar debates may differ wildly between the worlds of science and policy or politics. The hot passions of normal science are often reserved for quite narrow differences within a well-accepted general approach. These may, in the end, make little difference for policy and may be glossed over by policy makers or ignored by politicians. On the other hand, politicians may transform small scientific or policy differences into sharp tests of political affinity, just as they may blur ideas that are considered incompatible by the scientific world. It is common, of course, for politicians to associate their opponent’s position with what seems “extreme” and their own with what seems “appropriate” or “reasonable.” As political debate goes forward, narrow scientific differences can become exaggerated, even in periods of great scientific consensus. For the policy maker, the tendency of both the scientific and the political communities to exaggerate their differences poses a real challenge. Efforts to design politically acceptable proposals that seem to reflect a scientific consensus will need to be redoubled,

driving policy analysis to an ever narrower range of alternatives or to mixing and matching bits from various scientific and political programs.

The same idea may well sound quite different depending upon who articulates it, and it is often helpful to think of the scientist, the policy maker, and the politician as speaking dialects of the same language. They may value nuance, for example, quite differently. It is often the very work of policy to simplify, and it is common to find ideas expressed more crudely in politics than in science. For the scientific expert, assumptions stay assumptions, qualifications stay qualifications—no one is trying to *do anything* with the results other than refine them, improve them, reproduce them. An argument may be a sensation within a scientific paradigm, regardless of whether the paradigm corresponds particularly well to any particular society. That is in the nature of basic research, in economics no less than biology or math or physics. The world—or the “market”—to which the scientist refers could well be a fully imaginary one, sketched in a few crucial assumptions. The real world to which a policy maker refers may be that imagined by scientists or politicians, or that pressed upon the policy process by the short-term administrative requirements of implementation. For the politician, the real world may be an ideological construct, or a place peopled only by constituents and their enemies.

EXPERTISE: MAPPING PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE

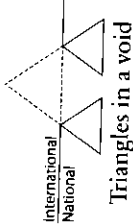
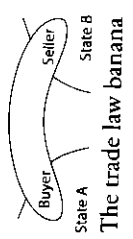

After identifying the field of expertise, developing some hypotheses about how background work by these experts might matter, and understanding their sense of role and field boundaries, one can turn to the *knowledge* an expert community brings to their work. In chapter 1, I proposed that the intellectual content drawn upon in expert practice consisted of disputed material, either technical questions or broader thematic disagreements that had not been resolved in earlier disputes to the point that they had sunken back into commonsense matters of fact. In the next chapter, I focus on the structure of expert dispute: how knowledge is mobilized by opposing experts in struggle. A preliminary map of expert knowledge in a field aims to identify the knowledge that will affect the attitudes, ambitions, and strategies of these experts in their background struggles. Although some elements of a discipline's expertise will be visible on the surface of expert work, many will lie forgotten in common sense and in the semiconscious space of shared disciplinary consciousness or sensibility about how things are and will need to be reconstructed by empathetic interpretation.

What do you need to know to be a competent international lawyer, development professional, or human rights activist? The degree of complexity will differ: the human rights movement has defined their basic materials with a view to ease of entry. One does not need much detailed knowledge to begin naming and shaming: there is a catalog of rights, a rather basic historical narrative about their history and a simple model of their applicability. Amnesty International set the frame: individual citizens could write letters to statesmen as human rights experts after reading a simple set of materials. Development policy expertise is at the opposite pole—even a moderately competent player needs a fair amount of economics and sociohistorical knowledge. Different expert communities will value analytic and empirical, counterintuitive and commonsensical, historical and contemporary knowledge in different ways.

It is useful to distinguish knowledge that is widely shared or taken for granted from points about which people in the field disagree when they argue about what is legal, what policy to adopt, or who should do what. The line between them is not firm. Commonsense matters can be brought into more conscious focus by dispute. As disputes are resolved, an outcome may, after a time, begin to disappear from a field's consciously shared knowledge into common sense. The as-yet undisputed material is important for understanding the biases and blind spots experts bring to their background work and can usually be seen only in moments of transition or by empathetic reconstruction. Experts may share many things not immediately relevant to their supposed substantive expertise. International lawyers share desires, fears, and hopes for the world community that are only loosely linked to international law. They have ideas about what progress means, how it occurs, what problem-solving requires, the horizon of possibility for their profession, perhaps also for mankind. They share a sense for the limits of things: of theory, of politics, perhaps even of human achievement.

Even within the legal field, neighboring subspecialties see the world differently. Public international lawyers share a picture of the history of their field and of the interstate system, which they see developing in parallel. There are crucial dates associated with postwar settlements: 1648, 1918, 1945. Other dates are less relevant: 1789 or 1815 or 1929. They see a world of nation-states and worry about war. They remember the trauma of the Holocaust, fear totalitarianism, and are averse to ideology. They understand legal arrangements as fragile human constructions seeking to tame a sea of political conflict. International economic lawyers remember different events: more the Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act than Verdun, more Bretton Woods than the United Nations. Trade lawyers

Table 4.1. Mapping Expertise: Disciplinary Sensibilities

	Public international law	International economic law	Comparative law
			
What they see:	States	Buyers and sellers	Cultures and economic systems or technical levels of development
Desire:	Governance	Trade	Understanding
Worry:	Is law possible?	Is trade free?	Is understanding possible?
Traumatic memory:	War and holocaust	Depression and collectivism	Parochialism, imperialism, and national extremism
Program:	Progress from autonomy to community through progress from formal to antiformal law	Reduce tariffs and nontariff barriers through multilateralization of bilateral commitments	Improve knowledge of each other
Allied discipline:	Political science	Economics	Anthropology and sociology

see a world of commerce and remember the trauma of the Depression. Their attitude toward legal arrangements is more straightforward, rarely pausing to doubt the “binding” or legal nature of the private law, public regulations, treaties, and global institutional arrangements affecting trade. Comparative law experts, in turn, have a different project and worry about different things. The world they seek to understand is one of diverse cultures crisscrossed by varying stages of economic and social development. All these ideas affect what each profession feels able—or willing—to do.⁷

The central preoccupations and worldview of a discipline change over time. Ideas come in and out of fashion in each discipline on different schedules. Economics can seem more important than political science for a time, and then the reverse. Some economic ideas can seem more significant than others. When international lawyers think of “the economy,” for example, they no longer imagine a national input-output cycle responsive to government stimulation, but a global market of private actors responsive to price signals. In different periods, the tools they find most attractive, the modes of argument they find most compelling, the disciplines they find most useful and most threatening all differ in ways that affect their interpretation of the world and the governance strategies they adopt. One way to map changes in the sensibility of public international lawyers over the twentieth century would be as depicted in table 4.2.

This mapping exercise could be continued in a variety of ways. The goal for this kind of preliminary map is to catalog elements in the shared vision of experts that may affect their governance work, either by sinking into common sense in ways that make some problems easy to address and others to ignore, or by becoming overtly thematized in the arguments experts make with one another: this is the way the world is and we should therefore do this. The next step, to which I turn in the next chapter, is to understand the ways in which points of difference that arise within the field become grist for the mill of struggle over what the context requires and what deciders should decide. These points of potential contestation are often marked by divisions among schools of thought, national traditions, or methodological preferences.

Table 4.2. Mapping Expertise: Public International Law

	An intellectual history of public international law								
	Trauma	Doctrinal focus	Preoccupation	Mode of action	Mode of organization	Heroic figure	World map	Mode of thought	Inter-disciplinary resource
1900–1950	War Hague League failure	Sources: Treaties Customs	Minority rights Colonial management Collective security Nationalism Self-determination	Codification	International organization	Jurist and international judge	Civilization and mandatories Progress Paternalism	Antiformal Social reform Positivism	Politics
1950–1989	War Cold War Totalitarianism Depression	Process: Jurisdiction State responsibility Claims	Decolonization Development Disarmament/ security Social welfare Expropriation NIEO Human rights	Administration Policy management	International institutions	Managers/ statesmen	East/West and third world Coexistence and cooperation	Functional problem solving World order building	Economics and social science
1990–2000	Thatcher/ Reagan/Bush Neoliberalism Vietnam American empire	Substance: Environment Human rights Terrorism International crimes	Trade and economic management “Globalization” Humanitarianism Intervention Environment	Debate and adjudication Principles and standards	National and international NGOs National and international courts Networks	Citizen/NGO advocate National judge	Democratic liberalism and the nondemocratic world Globalization	Pragmatism Legitimacy Humanism Ethics	International relations Cultural and human sciences