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Tales of Function and Form: The Discursive Legitimation of International Technocracy

by Jens Steffek

Abstract

It has become commonplace to say that, in the past, international governance has been legitimated mainly, if not exclusively, by its welfare-enhancing 'output'. There has been very little research, however, on the history of legitimating international governance by its output to validate this point. In this essay I begin to address this gap by inquiring into the origins of output-oriented strategies for legitimating international organizations. Scrutinizing the programmatic literature on international organizations from the early 20th century, I illustrate how a new and distinctive account of technocratic legitimation emerged and in the 1920s separated from other types of liberal internationalism. My inquiry, centring on the works of James Arthur Salter, David Mitrany, Paul S. Reinsch and Pitman B. Potter, explores their respective conceptions of 'good functional governance', executed by a non-political international technocracy. Their account is explicitly pitched against a notion of 'international politics', perceived as violent, polarizing, and irrational. The emergence of such a technocratic legitimation of international governance, I submit, needs to be seen in the context of societal modernization and bureaucratization that unfolded in the first half of the 20th century. I also highlight how in this account the material output of governance is intimately linked to the virtues of the organizational form that brings it about.

Introduction¹

For almost two decades, there has been a lively debate in the discipline of International Relations over the legitimacy of international governance. Most contributions to that debate focus on the much-lamented 'democratic deficit' of governance beyond the state, and the corresponding notion of an 'input legitimacy' that is obtained through procedures of political representation and consultation. Considerably less attention is paid to the output side of governance. Output-oriented strategies of political legitimation stress the potential of systems of governance to produce decisions that enhance the welfare of the entire constituency in question (Scharpf 1970: 21-24). Reference to the output dimension is supposed to be a complement, and even an alternative, to input-oriented forms of legitimation of governance beyond the state (Scharpf 1999: 11). And it is often argued that, before the 'democratic deficit' was diagnosed in the 1990s, international governance (or international organization/cooperation/integration) was legitimated mainly, if not exclusively, by reference to its output (e.g. Zürn 2004).

That output-oriented modes of legitimation have always been extremely important in the international domain is a plausible conjecture. However, we know very little about the form and content of such legitimation discourses in the past. This is unfortunate because we do have a rich body of published material at hand that in the first half of the 20th century made the case for a type of international cooperation that one would call 'output-oriented', even if that term was not in use at the time. In this essay I therefore endeavour to trace the emergence and transformation of this type of

¹ Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the Gemeinsame Sektionstagung Politische Theorie und Internationale Beziehungen der DVPW, Goethe-Universität Frankfurt/Main, 10-12 June 2010; at the workshop „The Politics of Talk in International Relations“ at the University of Bremen, 27/28 July 2010; at the 7th Pan-European International Relations Conference, Stockholm, 9-11 September 2010; and at the Department of History and Area Studies of Aarhus University, 12 November 2010. I wish to thank participants for their helpful comments, in particular Andreas Føllesdal, Daniel Gaus and Maja Zehfuss who acted as discussants.

justificatory discourse. This is a relevant topic for scientific research in IR because, first of all, the output of international governance is not something to be found simply 'out there', striking our senses. Rather, the output of governance is always constructed discursively and embedded in wider structures of meaning and interpretation that establish a link between the activities of a largely invisible international organization based in Brussels, Geneva, or Washington D.C. and perceivable change in the material world. As a consequence, the output of international organizations can become a social mechanism of legitimation only through processes of discursive representation. To function as legitimating devices, references to organizational output need to be presented as convincing lines of argument, or even as a form of narrative, woven into a story.

It is plausible to assume that narratives containing output-oriented arguments justifying international governance may have been changing over time. During the 1940s and 1950s, the most often cited rationale for international governance, or rather 'international organization', was that international cooperation and regional integration would lead to peace (Mitrany 1943). In today's global governance discourse, by contrast, the peace-as-output argument has receded to the background, and a notion of effective problem-solving-as-output seems to have taken its place. On the other hand, some features do not seem to have changed much over time, in particular the recurring reference to an objective need for international cooperation that arises from increasing international interdependence (compare Reinsch 1911 to Keohane 1984).

Even if much of today's evaluative discourse on global and European governance is focussing on the input dimension of legitimacy, output-oriented lines of argument can

still be found. Influential commentators, such as Giandomenico Majone (1998) and Andrew Moravcsik (2002), defend functional governance by international administrative agencies with limited scope of competences. Legal scholars have developed the notion of a good inter- or supranational administration (Esty 2006), and the concomitant conception of global administrative law (Kingsbury et al. 2005). Authors who stress the output legitimacy of international governance also seem to be sympathetic to a specific vision of international governance that one would best characterize as a form of expert administration working on functionally limited technical tasks in independent organizations that are removed from the dynamics of party politics. This is a first indication that two major themes, the welfare-enhancing output of governance and the organizational form that brings it about, may be intimately linked.

My task in this essay is to explore the very origins of this vision. I focus on a body of programmatic thought that is often referred to in IR as 'functionalism' and that justified international organization by pointing out its welfare-enhancing output. Despite the occasional reference to David Mitrany's seminal work, and despite the efforts by a number of dedicated scholars to highlight its continuing relevance (Ashworth and Long, 1999), functionalism is a largely forgotten approach to international relations. This is unfortunate, because functionalism was not merely, and maybe not even in the first place, an academic theory of international relations but an empirically influential way of legitimating the power of technical international organizations (Sewell 1966: 47). Functionalism, as Inis Claude had it, was 'not merely a recipe to be studied, but also a pudding to be tasted' (Claude 1964: 365). Some have called functionalism an 'ideology' (Tooze 1977: 211), and I take it to be a strategy of legitimating existing or planned international institutions. Consequently, I

will analyze it here as a legitimating account of international organization, not as an academic theory of international relations (which has been done extensively, see Engle 1957, Haas 2008[1964], Sewell 1966).

The text is structured as follows: In the next section I lay some theoretical foundations for the analysis that follows. I briefly explain my conception of legitimacy discourse and discursive legitimation, underlining the important role of elite communication in the development of new legitimating accounts. In the third section I take issue with the origins of the line of argument for international technocracy that has become widely known as 'functionalist'. I argue that Mitrany was certainly a highly original thinker but neither the first nor the only one to call for international organization(s) along functional lines. In the fourth section I turn to the writings of four authors who can be regarded as early advocates of international technocracy: James Arthur Salter, David Mitrany, Paul S. Reinsch and Pitman B. Potter. The fifth section is devoted to the similarities and differences of their respective accounts, and section 6 briefly concludes.

The upshot of the discussion is that there is sizeable overlap among the programmatic visions of transnational technocracy as developed by Salter, Mitrany, Reinsch and Potter. I submit that the emergence of a 'functional' legitimation of international organizations cannot be understood without reference to the context of societal modernization and faith in rational political planning in which it was developed. References to welfare gains as 'output' of governance were always present but they represented just one aspect of a more complex legitimating account that focuses on the virtues of non-political, functional governance by international technocracy. The form of governance matters as much as its output. Interestingly,

early accounts of 'good functional governance' on a global scale resound with themes from Max Weber's theory of societal modernization through bureaucratization and the rule of law, which was developed during the same period of time.

2) Discursive legitimation and legitimating accounts

Legitimacy has become a buzzword in the recent literature on international governance, but it is not always clear whether the term is used in the normative or in the empirical-analytical sense. What I am proposing here is an empirically oriented approach to the study of legitimacy and legitimation. Legitimacy in the empirical sense is the phenomenon that specific institutions in power, or even an entire social order, enjoy 'the prestige of being considered binding' (Weber 1978: 31). A discourse approach to the study of legitimacy refers to the key social mechanism by which legitimation functions, which is public justification and challenge (Steffek 2003). I am studying the use of arguments, factual and normative ones, which are brought forward in support of certain governance arrangements. Legitimacy 'is built over time by the discursive, critical examination of institutions and their actions' (Parkinson 2003: 184). This is not to suggest that all challenges to, and affirmations of, legitimacy are discursive in nature. Persons and institutions in power may also use symbolic techniques to legitimate their roles (Barker 2001), and challengers of the status quo have repertoires of contention that contain also non-discursive, symbolic acts of protest (Haunss 2007). Symbolic acts, however, in the modern age seem to be rather subsidiary to the discursive type of legitimation. Protesters normally employ symbolic techniques in order to draw attention to an explicit and verbalized political message.

The ensemble of connected speech acts that are used to legitimate or (de-)legitimate societal and political institutions may be called an 'account'. The concept of an 'account' was developed in sociology and originally referred to the explanation and justification of deviant or unexpected behaviour by individuals. Citing Scott and Lyman one may define an account as 'a linguistic device employed whenever an action is subjected to valuative inquiry' (Scott and Lyman 1968: 46). The concept may be also used, and without stretching it too far, to denote the practice of explaining and justifying novel, and in that sense 'deviant', proposals for political institutions. In legitimating accounts we find what Mills called 'vocabularies of motives', that is, 'accepted justifications for present, future, or past programs or acts' (Mills 1940: 907). Motives, in Mill's sense, are not simply individual reasons for action. Rather, motives are widely shared justifications for action that individuals cite routinely and that are routinely accepted by their peers. Deviations from established ways of justifying actions are in need of explanation and give rise to what Mills called 'motive talk', the discursive screening of the validity of motives.

Why do we need the term 'legitimating account' here? Why not just talk in a more conventional fashion about theories of institutional legitimacy? The reason is, first of all, that it would be overbearing to suggest that normative 'political theories' in the academic sense have ever legitimated a system of government. Rather, elements of those theories, such as axioms and principles, have become incorporated into the accounts that political actors give to sustain or challenge political legitimacy. What also distinguishes account-giving from theorizing is that on closer inspection most historically existing accounts of political legitimacy are not limited to logical inference from a general premise or principle but also contain descriptive and narrative elements. These elements may be references to an imagined common origin or

certain historical events that can function as founding myths of societies and states (Anderson 1983, Cederman 2001, Obradovic 1996). I suppose that also the legitimating accounts of international organizations are likely to rest on such amalgams of relatively heterogeneous elements.

Legitimizing accounts are produced, propagated and transformed by elites, consisting of politicians, journalists, intellectuals etc. They become fully effective only when they successfully spread through the public sphere, gaining access to a wider audience. Studying elite discourse on the merits and faults of governance arrangements is a way of observing the production of legitimating accounts. Studying mediated public discourse, by contrast, would be a way of observing the spread of these legitimating accounts to a wider audience (Schneider et al. 2010). The analysis of elite discourse hence is a necessary element of studying political legitimation at work but certainly only one strategy, next to studying media discourse, opinion polls, or individual belief systems through extensive interviewing or focus groups. The problem with studying legitimation at the citizen end is, however, that we do not have appropriate survey data to explore popular perceptions of international governance of the distant past. The question if, or to what extent, citizens were ever convinced of the beneficial output of international governance is extremely hard to answer in retrospect. I am conscious that this study, based on written sources of elite communication is only concerned with parts of a much larger puzzle. However, it covers new ground by analyzing the emergence of legitimating account(s) of 'functional governance' in the first decades of the 20th century.

3) The historical context: programmatic internationalism in the early 20th century

Historically, programmatic proposals for functional governance by a transnational technocracy became prominent during the Interwar years. The very idea of international cooperation in technical and scientific matters is older, and a Frenchman writing under the pseudonym of Edgar Saveney seems to have been the first one to call for European integration along these lines in 1870 (quoted in Engle 1957: 8). And also empirical instances of what later came to be called functional governance existed on a transnational scale well before (Murphy 1994). The 'public international unions' of the 19th century may count as the first instances of functional cooperation among states in a multilateral and technocratic fashion (Reinsch 1911; Sayre 1919). However, truly programmatic proposals for international technocracy can be found in what is commonly referred to as the 'idealist' writings of the early 20th century.

The term 'idealism' in this context denotes a strand of thinking about eliminating war through international cooperation, the rule of law, economic interdependence, education, the promotion of democracy etc. (Wilson 1995a). 'Idealism' is a problematic label, however, because it was a charge made by political opponents rather than a neutral description by disinterested observers. Some great post-war 'realists' in international relations thinking, such as E.H. Carr, Hedley Bull, John Herz and Hans Morgenthau, were influential in portraying the 'idealism' of the early 20th century as some sort of temporary folly that does not warrant much scholarly attention any more. Idealism's main influence, or so the story goes, was in setting proper realist thinking and systematic IR-theorizing on track when its utopias foundered in the apocalypse of World War II. This essay is not the place to set the record straight and discuss the importance of 'idealism' in the evolution of IR theory,

and others have done so ably (Osiander 1998, Wilson 1998). My interest here is in the discursive legitimation of international governance, and in that respect there are very good reasons for studying idealist writings.

Idealist authors in their time not just made original proposals but had public influence in a way that contemporary IR scholars do not. They directly delivered argumentative raw material for academics and politicians alike, and they sought public impact and political influence. They actively tried to establish a discursive legitimation for their new visions of international governance. Most of the idealists were not academics in today's sense, even if many held academic positions, but they were public intellectuals. The arguably most popular work of the idealist kind, Norman Angell's "Great Illusion" (Angell, 1910), sold over two million copies between 1910 and 1913, and was translated into 25 languages (Weinroth, 1974: 551). One measure that most idealists agreed upon was the need for international organization in the singular, and of international organizations in the plural, on the road to world peace. International organization in the singular would include aspects such as the international rule of law and the peaceful settlement of disputes. International organizations in the plural included forums of global cooperation and diplomacy such as the League of Nations, and functional organizations (the 'public unions') with rather narrow, technical mandates, such as the Universal Postal Union (UPU) or the International Telecommunications Union (ITU). It is the latter type of proposal that is of particular interest in this paper.

The programmatic proposal of setting up an international technocracy divided into functional agencies is most commonly attributed to David Mitrany. There is a good deal of truth in this, as Mitrany was the first one to publish a book-length treatise on

the subject (Mitrany 1933), and he continued working and publishing on functional integration of Europe and the world until his death in 1975. Consequently, Mitrany's seminal work will occupy a prominent place in this analysis of the emergence of the functionalist legitimation of international technocracy. But, as I will discuss below, many of his ideas were shared and propagated by some of his contemporaries as well (Dubin 1983). In this essay I will therefore broaden the range of my inquiry and take into account the writings of three other key authors. First of all, I will scrutinize the work of James Arthur Salter, a British diplomat, high official of the League of Nations, and Oxford professor. In his book 'Allied Shipping Control', published in 1921, Salter delivered an important blueprint of a functional international administration, based on his wartime experience. Second, I will turn to the writings of Paul S. Reinsch and Pitman B. Potter, the only Americans among the ranks of classic IR functionalists.² Reinsch was a political scientist and diplomat who delivered the first systematic study on the functioning of international functional organizations. Pitman B. Potter was a political scientist who in 1932 moved from the University of Wisconsin, where also Reinsch had been teaching, to the newly founded Graduate Institute of International Studies in Geneva, the gathering ground of progressive students of international organization. Reinsch's and Potter's work is instructive for comparative purposes because they developed their ideas outside the specific intellectual milieu from which most of the British idealists emerged.

The central questions to be addressed in comparing the legitimating accounts presented by these four authors are as follows: Is it possible to identify a common

² The authors usually regarded as classical functionalists are presented in Haas 2008[1964], 29. The most obvious candidate not considered in this essay is Leonard Woolf whose wartime book 'International Government' (Woolf 1916) delivered what Peter Wilson called the 'skeleton of a functional theory' (Wilson 1995b: 140), but was rather unspecific on precisely those institutional and organizational questions that are in the focus of this contribution.

legitimizing account for international governance of the functional kind in Britain and America? If so, what are its central characteristics? What role does the material output of governance play in these legitimating accounts, and what role the specific style of governance?

4) From wartime cooperation to a “working peace system”

a) British functionalism

The end of the First World War gave a boost to world order proposals and to the foundation of international organizations (Kennedy 1987). The war was evidence that the enormous technological advances of the time were not used for the progress of mankind but rather for mindless destruction. Traumatic experiences on the battlefield made prominent idealists, such as the Welsh industrialist and benefactor David Davies, dedicate their energy and fortune to the quest for world peace. Personal trauma is certainly an extremely important connection between the Great War and the rise of idealism in the international relations thinking of the 1920s. Yet, with regard to the construction of the functional legitimation of international governance the wartime experience proved important in two additional ways.

The first link is in the boost to modernization that World War I had brought about. The enormous effort of the war required from participant states the mobilization of resources and coordination of economic activity on an unprecedented scale. Mitrany in a study on the Balkans in fact identified the war as a great modernizer and centralizer of economic governance (Mitrany 1936). Public planning became indispensable in this situation. Second, the war also prompted cooperation among the Western allies, which proved to be a laboratory of international functional cooperation. The *Allied Maritime Transport Council* (AMTC), albeit a short-lived

experiment, seems to have provided a crucial experience of international administration in practice. The task of this wartime organization was to coordinate shipping activities among the Western allies. A number of prominent figures served on it, such as Jean Monnet for France and James Arthur Salter for the United Kingdom. For Monnet it was an important experience of international integration (Monnet 1976: 71-95) and a personal friendship with Salter developed (Salter 1961: 176-7).

It is in the last section of Salter's book on the AMTC, published in 1921, that we find a first programmatic sketch of functional international organization, and a characteristic array of themes and arguments in favour of it. Unlike David Mitrany whose name still is somewhat prominent in IR theory books, James Arthur Salter needs some brief introduction. Salter (1881-1975) was a British diplomat, politician and academic. After graduating from Oxford University, Salter joined the British civil service in 1904. During the war he became a member of the Chartering Committee of the AMTC and in the 1920s worked as head of the economic and financial section of the League of Nations Secretariat in Geneva. In 1934 Salter was appointed Gladstone professor of political theory and institutions at Oxford University and between 1930 and 1953 was involved, in various functions, in British politics. He was a prolific writer on British and international affairs, and political economy.

In Part V of his seminal book on the AMTC, Salter analyzes the conditions under which functional cooperation among the Western allies came about. He finds that, first of all, the particular sense of urgent need for cooperation helped overcome the usually slow and cumbersome ways of international diplomacy. The German submarine war had made shipping capacities scarce and incentivized effective

transnational administration of these capacities. However, Salter also perceives some crucial differences between the military and the economic sphere (and shipping control was at the intersection of the two). The military sphere requires clear hierarchy and efficient command and control structures. In the economic sphere, he contends, there is neither a need nor a possibility for such hierarchy (Salter 1921: 248). As a consequence, the transnational machinery set in motion by the allies had the task of controlling and coordinating shipping capacities but without supreme control that would have replaced national government. 'Above all, the Allied organization solved the problem of controlling the action, without displacing the authority, of National governments' (Salter 1921: 246).

In structural and organizational terms, the AMTC was an interesting hybrid between an advisory and executive body. In the Council, member states were not represented by diplomats of their foreign service but by the national ministers and the lower level officials directly responsible for shipping matters. By this construction, the agreements from the Council were implemented directly through the national ministries, an arrangement that 'practically destroyed the distinction between the advisory and the executive' (Salter 1921: 249). The reason why this specific organizational form was chosen, Salter explains, was that career diplomats of the foreign service were ill-equipped to deal with the complexity of the tasks at hand. As generalists, diplomats did not have the specific expertise necessary for tackling highly technical problems. The same was true for ministers who attended international meetings for a day or two, and prepared for these intergovernmental meetings nationally, with their domestic experts and officials. The solution to this problem of territorial fragmentation, and for Salter the true innovation of the AMTC, was a transnational standing group of experts who would continually and jointly work

on the solution of the complex problem. Salter calls it the 'principle of direct contact between specialists' (Salter 1921: 253). In the AMTC, these specialists were organized in some twenty committees, each discussing one specific aspect related to allied shipping and supply.

Salter then extrapolated from this historical experience and argued that such a method of direct contact between specialists would be adaptable to a huge number of different functional needs of cooperation, within and beyond the state. Salter was convinced that the complexity of modern life made it necessary to strengthen the role of the executive and public administration, and especially of expert committees at work in the domestic and international sphere. These expert committees he finds necessary to deal with the increasing complexity of politics under conditions of modernity, and their existence shifted the balance between politicians and bureaucrats. 'In the growing complexity of modern life, administration steadily becomes more and more important in comparison with legislation in the government of a country' (Salter 1921: 260). The ideal of public administration present in Salter's work is that of 'an impersonal science based upon the conclusions of gathered and winnowed experience' (ibid.). Salter strongly believed in the virtues of public administration that are likely to materialize whenever civil servants were given constructive and 'obviously useful' tasks (Salter 1933: 214).

Salter does not envisage functional organizations with supranational powers that would gradually disempower their member states. Yet, we can find some scepticism towards the nation-state in his work. He found an unhealthy, exaggerated concentration of political power in national governments. This, he suggested, led to conflict because under the conditions of international interdependence there was a

great deal of minor, marginal conflict among states that endangered peace. He asserts that the League of Nations was able to mitigate this exaggerated concentration of power in a few national capitals. '[T]he institution of the League, with its principles of publicity and open diplomacy, is an attempt to take public policy away from the few overstrained centres of excessive power, and to base it boldly and broadly on the general wishes and will of the peoples of the world. (...) It replaces centralization by co-ordination' (Salter 1921: 255). The excessive power of the state, he argued, did not serve the needs of the people well.

Interestingly, Salter also contends that cooperation among specialists in particular policy fields would delegitimize the diplomatic practice of political horse-trading and shift the negotiation mode, as we would say today, from 'bargaining' to 'arguing' (Elster 1986, Risse 2000). Questions would become discussed 'on their merits' rather than in the framework of a *quid pro quo*. 'And behind this slowly and painfully new idea -which may ultimately prove the hope of the world- begins to form and find expression, the idea that even a particular negotiation should not be of the nature of a bargain; that there is for most questions somewhere a just solution independent of the relative strength of the contending parties, and that the question should be settled on these its intrinsic merits' (Salter 1921: 257). For Salter, experts are much better equipped than diplomats to decide questions on their merits. The networks of national specialists that Salter envisages should be in continuous contact so as to develop trust in each other. They should 'discuss policy frankly in its earlier stages and before it has been formed and formulated in their respective countries' (Salter 1921: 258). Thus specialists find a solution before national politicians are even able to define and pronounce a national interest on the matter.

In the discussion about the design of the League of Nations and its activities, Salter sees the proper role of the organization not in performing great power mediation but in the more humble tasks. The League, he argues, should not put its emphasis on the arbitration of interstate conflicts that have already arisen, but rather on tackling the root causes of international friction. To that end, the League should provide administrative machinery to promote progress. This machinery shall help governments not simply to adjust but to formulate their public policies. What Salter had in mind was not a supranational authority like the Commission of the European Union, but transgovernmental networks of specialists, of the kind that Slaughter describes in her “New World Order” (Slaughter 2004), and he proposed that the League of Nations Secretariat be organized accordingly (Dubin 1983: 473-75). In summary, we can identify some building blocks of what one may call a ‘functional legitimation’ in Salter’s account: a focus on problem-solving as task of international governance; the creation of functionally designed international organizations; the paramount role of administrators and experts; the possibility, and absolute necessity, of centralized planning.

As stated in the beginning, David Mitrany (1888-1975) certainly has been the most influential and systematic thinker on functional international organizations and transnational technocracy. He was influenced by a British intellectual environment which was as ‘liberal’ as it was ‘left-wing’, and that one may call most appropriately ‘Fabian’. In fact, in Mitrany’s case there is an intimate connection between the emergence of functionalist world order proposals and the social question, which requires a brief exposition and some biographical notes. Many scholars have been interested in the origins of Mitrany’s functionalist ideas that seem to have appeared so suddenly on the scene in the Interwar years. The author himself sustained that he

picked them up along the way, drawing lessons from experience (Mitrany 1975). It is documented, however, that Mitrany was heavily influenced by his teachers at the London School of Economics where he enrolled in 1912, L.T.Hobhouse and Graham Wallas (Ashworth 2005: 208). Hobhouse was politically liberal (as Mitrany himself) and Wallas a socialist, but both had a keen interest in the social question, even if they favoured different solutions. In addition, he was influenced by the thought of other theorists in the ambit of the British Labour Party and the Fabian Society, such as G.D.H. Cole, Harold Laski, and Leonard Woolf (Navari 1995).

Mitrany himself was concerned about the fate of the impoverished peasants of his native Romania and he continued working on the subject of rural poverty until the 1950s (Mitrany 1930, 1951). It is interesting to see that the same combination of a call for social reform at home and re-organization of politics abroad can be found in the work of his fellow British internationalists Norman Angell and Leonard Woolf. It is probably not an exaggeration to say that, in Britain, the 'idealist' concern with international political questions often resulted from, or at least stood in a synergetic relationship with, an interest in problems of social welfare and the modernization of societies. The British idealists, and prominently among them the functionalist authors, viewed issues of international politics from the perspective of the individual and its needs.

Unlike many other idealist writers of the Interwar years, Mitrany remained utterly sceptical of grand institutional schemes, such as global systems of collective security or international armed forces (Davies 1930). He was particularly troubled by the problem of sanctioning. He realized that sanctioning breaches of international law would place an enormous burden on countries, especially the smaller ones, or those

with long borders with a boycotted state (Mitrany 1925). As an alternative to collective security he envisaged schemes of functional cooperation at the administrative level. Mitrany was certainly familiar with Salter's book on the AMTC that he mentioned in his memoir (1975: 17). In 1922 he had taken up a job in London as assistant European editor of the Carnegie Endowment's book series on 'Economic and Social History of the First World War' in which Salter's study had appeared. That series was important for the formation of his thought: 'As I worked through the various manuscripts one particular background picture began to assert itself: it showed how under the impact of the new kind of warfare, which had made economic resources and industrial potential a decisive factor, the belligerents had all adopted much the same ways and means for dealing with problems of supply and production and distribution under conditions of war' (ibid.). The form of governance followed from its specific function and manifested itself cross-nationally.

Mitrany's 1933 book on international government is the first book-length treatise on what came to be called later 'IR functionalism'. It originated from a series of lectures delivered at Yale University. In the first lecture Mitrany attacks the categorical distinction between the domestic and the international that had become so fashionable in international affairs. 'It is my general thesis, which I shall endeavour to expound in a pragmatic manner, that the crisis through which our institutions of government are passing springs precisely from that divorce between the two fields of municipal and international political theory and practice' (Mitrany 1933: 20). Mitrany develops here a most important theme of his work: that modernization required overcoming the territorial fragmentation of the political world. He does not, however, start immediately with practical considerations but seeks to ground his approach historically and philosophically. His starting point is the idea of equality that was

applied since the Enlightenment to both individuals and states. Historically, he claims, the equality of states that emerged under the Westphalian order had come to stand in the way of progress and modernization (Mitrany 1933: 33).

While economic and social progress unfolded domestically, politics in the international realm was devoted to the avoidance of armed conflict through balance of power politics and an orientation towards the *status quo*. This is why the opportunities for transnational modernization through cooperative efforts have been missed at the international scale. The doctrine of sovereignty stood in the way of setting up institutions that really served the international common good as it legitimated politics of national grandeur and mundane rent-seeking. What put pressure on this traditional system of international politics was the increasing level of transnational societal interaction – what today we might call a wave of globalization. During the 19th century, Mitrany explains, states were forced to conclude international treaties and conventions to deal with problems arising from interdependence. But they did so only in those fields where these tasks were of technical rather than political character. ‘In such timid and groping manner, more forced than willing, the nineteenth century acquired a sense of the unity of international interests. That psychological advance was perhaps the most important discovery of the last hundred years’ (Mitrany 1933: 44/45). Mitrany places much emphasis on this changing perception that for him is the foundation for the belated modernization of international life and a setting-up of appropriate ‘machinery’. He displays a good deal of optimism and of faith in the prospect of international cooperation.

The new and better system of ‘international government’ that Mitrany seeks to propose is built upon the notion of equality, but without the excesses of

unaccountable power that the anarchical international system based on sovereignty has given rise to. That system in the end came to violate equality by privileging great powers and excluding minor powers from decision-making. Real equality, he contends by citing his teacher Hobhouse, requires the rule of law, and Mitrany asserts that this is true domestically and internationally (1933: 65). International law must be developed and its implementation overseen by international executive bodies and courts in order to end the arbitrariness of great power conduct. In this respect, he finds encouragement in the contemporary developments in the discipline of law where ideas of a universal legal order assailed the doctrine of national sovereignty. He also felt encouraged by the working of the mandates system and protection of national minorities by the League that are 'eating into the fabric of the national sovereign State' (1933: 79).

Not surprisingly, given his interest in the social question, Mitrany also discusses social inequality among nations as an aspect of international concern. Social equality shall be created by international cooperation in the field of economic development, health, education etc. Mitrany finds these functions still in an embryonic state but flags them as promising tasks for future international cooperation. Compared to other IR theorists, Mitrany had a rather unusual conception of equality, encompassing social aspects. State equality for him does not have any value in and of itself but only with a view to the individuals living within the respective territories. Mitrany's theoretical approach is radically different from realist views on world politics in that he starts theorizing international relations from the individual. '[T]he State is for the people and not the people for the State' (1933: 99). The basis of his theorizing are the needs of human beings that are fulfilled through the functions of societal institutions. Meeting the needs was not tied to any particular state nor was it tied to

any specific cultural group or nation. 'Need, to Mitrany as to all liberal internationalists, was something that cut across cultural barriers' (Ashworth 1999: 95).

For Mitrany, there is no good reason to assume that the state should be privileged in performing these functions. Unlike contemporary IR-liberals, such as Keohane and Moravcsik, who accept the existence and predict the persistence of the nation-state, Mitrany's functionalism is definitely anti-statist in character (Hammarlund 2005). Mitrany wanted to overcome the nation-state that he saw as a breeding ground of chauvinist sentiment, and irrationality. Nationalism was the ultimate cause of most political evil. 'A new philosophy for a world society must indeed begin by striking at the roots of this perverse creed. The first duty it must enjoin is that we should renounce the pagan worship of political frontiers as the source of our public law and morals' (Mitrany 1933: 118). There was, for Mitrany, no justification of the state beyond the functions that it served and at some point in history had come to monopolize and bundle. Meeting the needs of individuals was the basis for a genuinely de-nationalized type of governance.

It is here that we can discern the intimate connection between welfare and international affairs that seems to be characteristic of British idealism of the interwar years. Mitrany observed that the state was taking on more and more tasks in meeting the needs of its citizens, hence becoming a 'service State' (1933: 93). In Europe and North America, the state apparatus in fact expanded rapidly between the wars.³ The state in practice provided its services mainly through centralized planning and control, and bureaucratic organization. Yet national planning was bound to fail

³ There is a certain paradox in Mitrany's thought that Hammarlund (2005) has pointed out most clearly. Mitrany witnessed the expansion and strengthening of the state while predicting its decline.

without appropriate international coordination, especially when one tried to plan scientifically. Due to the manifold interdependencies, the national plans of states would interfere with and disturb each other. In planning in the domestic context 'it has been found fairly easy to separate the political from the technical aspect' (1933: 122), Mitrany claims, and he singled out this type of governance as the way forward.⁴

With respect to international organizations, their most fundamental functions are essentially two: creating equality before the law and creating 'fair material conditions' (1933: 103). Yet of course the problems they deal with in practice are more humble and specific. The nature of the task determines the type and geographical scope of the organization. Already in his "Progress of International Government" Mitrany argues against a reproduction of supranational state-like structures, shunning away from any type of territorially bounded re-organization of politics. He advocates instead a purely functional form of governance beyond the nation-state as a web of organizations of different membership and geographical reach.

In summary, there are some interesting parallels between Salter's and Mitrany's account. Mitrany's account certainly is more systematic and more comprehensive than Salter's statement. However, Salter's focus on problem-solving as task of international governance is equally prominent in Mitrany's early work. The creation of functionally defined spheres of international governance is a key point in Mitrany, as is the paramount role of experts and expertise. And his faith in the benefits of public planning is as unshakable as Salter's. However, there are elements in Mitrany's account of functional governance that cannot be found in 'Allied Shipping Control'.

⁴ Mitrany was confident that '(...) functional arrangements have the virtue of technical self-determination, one of the main reasons which makes them more readily acceptable. The nature of each function tells of itself the scope and powers needed for its effective performance' (Mitrany 1948: 358).

First is Mitrany's staunch anti-nationalism and his conviction that the state needed to be overcome as a form of social organisation at some point. This led him to part from Salter and to develop the proposal for more powerful supranational organizations, and not for the kind of intergovernmental cooperation that Salter favoured. In addition, there is the keen interest in the social question and a preoccupation with questions of equality that is prominent in Mitrany but absent from Salter, who was politically more conservative. Interestingly, the textbook wisdom that the overriding concern of IR functionalism was to overcome war through functional cooperation is not really confirmed by Mitrany's "System of International Government", where it is only a secondary theme. It was only in his "Working Peace System" (Mitrany 1943, 1966) that Mitrany put it centre stage.

b) American functionalism

Among the authors who are typically listed as classic IR functionalists (Haas 2008[1964]: 29), Paul S. Reinsch and Pitman B. Potter are the only Americans. This makes their work particularly interesting for this exploratory study. They developed their ideas far away from the circles of British internationalism. But to what extent is their resulting vision of international technocracy different from the ideas formulated by Salter and Mitrany? Paul S. Reinsch (1869-1923) was a political scientist at the University of Wisconsin and one of the first students of international organizations. He also served as US diplomat for many years, mainly in Asia, where he died on a mission in 1923. Reinsch is still cited in the legal literature as one of the founding fathers of the law of international organizations whose pioneering contribution is about to be re-discovered (Klabbers 2010). His major publications on international functional organizations are two substantial articles (Reinsch 1907, 1909) and a

rather slim monograph, in which much of the material from those articles is re-assembled (Reinsch 1911).

Reinsch in his works makes a very clear case for the international organization of an interdependent world (Reinsch 1911: 3). He adopts a theoretical point of view that he calls 'humanitarian' and allocates to a liberal tradition of thought that he traces back to Grotius, Locke and other 'believers in a rationalist policy' (Reinsch 1911: 8). His point of departure is quite similar to those of Salter and Mitrany in that he relates the welfare of citizens clearly to the need for international action. The main task of international cooperation, in his view, is to secure advantages for citizens through contact with other nations. 'Relying merely upon the capacities and resources contained within its national territory, it can not offer to those dependent upon it the protection and the advantages which as citizens of the modern world they have a right to demand' (Reinsch 1909: 12). The means for delivering such advantages is functional cooperation in the framework of the 'Public Unions', a name widely used for functional international organizations at his time. 'Civilized nations, being desirous to arrange their affairs in the most scientific and effective fashion, feel the need of making use of experience and knowledge wherever it may be found' (Reinsch 1907: 581).

Public unions with limited tasks, as Reinsch points out, had cropped up more or less spontaneously since the 19th century, without any global plan or orchestration. In his survey of more than thirty unions existing in his day he concludes that elements of all classic functions of government, the legislative, the executive, and the judicial, can be detected in these organizations, even if sometimes in an embryonic state (Reinsch 1909). His emphasis, however, is on the complexity of the technical tasks of

international governance that requires expert advisors and expert diplomats. These experts are often in conflict with more traditionally minded diplomats who treat questions according to the pursuit of national interest, prestige and considerations of power. Traditional diplomacy, in his view, was one of the retarding elements that inhibited the growth of international administration. This made him state that international functional organization was feasible only where nations perceived a harmony of interest.

In a truly modernist spirit, Reinsch underlines that international administration will lead to uniformity, less through imposing standards, but by mutual learning and spread of best practices. He displays a strong faith in the possibility of experts determining universally best solutions to technical questions. International organizations fulfilled a function as dispensers of factual information, but also of knowledge about administrative routines and practices, that national administration would otherwise not have access to. He suggested that international functional cooperation would lead to harmonization of public administration and to a 'uniformity of law' (Reinsch 1909: 44). The power resource of these international administrations he found to be in the 'reason and practicalness of the ideas suggested, which may ultimately bring about unanimity among all the nations concerned' (Reinsch 1909: 29).

Unlike Mitraný, Paul Reinsch did not expect the state to become redundant as a consequence of political and administrative internationalization, nor did he want it to disappear. For Reinsch, states were crucial in creating the much needed international administrative capacities (Reinsch 1909: 17). He rather imagined a sort of interplay between the international and national level of public administration. 'The effect

which international organization has exercised upon the methods and processes of national administration has been salutary. In the international conventions and congresses, methods are compared, criticisms and suggestions are made, and the best experience of the world is centralized; all of which may be turned to advantage by progressive national administrations' (Reinsch 1909: 16) However, the advantage of functional cooperation for Reinsch was not only in the welfare gains resulting from smooth administration and expert governance. In his work we also find the argument, often attributed to functionalism, that international interdependence and international cooperative endeavours will lead to international solidarity, and eventually peace. War between nations, he contended, would become less and less likely as the web of interdependence between nations grew thicker (Reinsch 1909: 18).

Like Paul S. Reinsch, Pitman B. Potter (1892-1981) served as professor at the University of Wisconsin before moving on to the newly established Graduate Institute for International Studies in Geneva, where he stayed from 1932 to 1941. In contrast to the other three early functionalists studied here he never worked outside academia. Potter was a prolific writer. His opus magnum is an 'Introduction to the Study of International Organization', first published in 1922 and repeatedly re-edited until the 1950s. In the US, Potter was one of the leading figures of the study of international organizations during that period. His writing style was much more scholarly than Salter's and Mitrany's, and he was somewhat more scrupulous and less programmatic in his proposals. Yet there are good reasons why Potter may be regarded as a programmatic IR functionalist.

He developed his account of international technocracy before the background of a deep-felt dissatisfaction with the achievements of traditional diplomacy. First of all, he

argued, diplomacy was deficient as it only dealt with issues of transnational importance only when disputes among states arose (Potter 1922: 269-70). In order to improve on this practice, international organizations with administrative functions, which he calls bureaus, should work on these issues continually. 'The bureaus have, in the past, been created to meet certain needs and have been given duties according to the need in each case, and a form calculated to support the functions assigned to these organizations' (Potter 1922: 275). For Potter, organizational form follows function. He also sustains a division between the political and the technical but argues that the difference between the two is not to be found in the subject matter that the organizations are concerned with. All political questions have technical aspects, and technical questions have political implications (Potter 1922: 283). It is not the subject matter that makes the difference but the method of tackling these subjects. 'It is the distinction between the volitional and the scientific attitude and action upon any given matter' (Potter 1935: 268).

Which subjects are being treated scientifically by international bureaus is in the end a question of political will, as states retain the prerogative of deciding this. The fact that mainly non-contentious, low politics issues are treated internationally is a consequence of the lack of political resolve to cede control over more contentious ones, not a direct consequence of issue characteristics. However, once a subject has been transferred to an international administration even a contentious question will be gradually removed from diplomatic strife and power politics. Potter quite openly prefers the scientific over the political, or 'volitional' method, and in this he seems to be in perfect agreement with Salter, Mitrany, and Reinsch. States are irrational in their reluctance to transfer issues to international organizations. In a rather short-sighted fashion they fear a loss of freedom to exploit opportunities of rent-seeking

that might arise in diplomatic negotiations. But this will prevent outcomes conducive to the common good, and to the welfare of all. 'If once a Convention can be concluded and a subject referred to a bureau and kept there, there is some prospect that it will be dealt with on its merits and not by reference to what are often fictitious and artificial 'national policies'' (Potter 1922: 283).

Like Reinsch, Potter does not see the state, or national government, on the retreat, or as being marginalized by international interdependence and functional necessities. Yet in his writings there is a discernable contempt of the 'volitional' method of dealing with problems that would be much better solved in a scientific fashion. The call for treating political issues 'on their merits' is a theme that runs through Potter's work and is even more prominent than in Salter and Mitrany. Potter shares their confidence in rationalization of international conduct and the welfare gains to be obtained from international organization. In a later edition of his "Introduction", Potter comes to draw a sharp dividing line between the realm of international politics, as traditionally conceived, and the new world of international organization that consists, essentially, of the combination of an international rule of law and international administration.

'More and more matters of international rivalry are being given treatment in some more mature and formal manner. Institutions and forms of procedure in international cooperation are engulfing one after another of the great topics of international politics and reducing the importance of one after another area of international conflict. One item after another in the foreign policy programs of various nations is being transferred to the agenda of an international conference or the list of functions of an international commission. International politics tend to become obsolete, as

international law and organized international cooperation become broader, deeper, and more effective' (Potter 1948: 55).

The 'peace through functional cooperation' theme is present in Potter's work, but it is not as central as one might expect when bearing in mind the standard textbook account of IR functionalism. For Potter, functional international organization contributes to international stability in an indirect way, by tackling the economic and social causes of international conflict (Potter and West 1927: 186). The direct road to peace, however, runs through conference diplomacy, international arbitration and fair peace treaties. Functional international organization, in contrast, is the road to global welfare.

5) Key themes and legacy

If we compare the legitimating motives proposed by the authors in their accounts of what one may call an international technocracy we see a lot of overlap, albeit they put their emphasis differently. Salter was most interested in the role of public administration, of expert committees and expert communication, and so was Reinsch. Mitrany was particularly concerned with planning, and tailoring institutional arrangements to functional needs and with the disempowerment of the nation state. Potter, by contrast, underlined the importance of the law as a civilizer of nations, and as institutional precondition for functional governance to be successful. It should also be highlighted that the starting points of their arguments are markedly different. Salter came to develop a vision of international technocracy from his personal experience as a participant in international cooperation. Mitrany's account has a more philosophical grounding in British left-wing liberalism that stands in the tradition of Hobhouse and, ultimately, T.H. Green. The two American writers, on the other hand,

start from a position that one may describe as a form of pragmatic, liberal, but essentially un-ideological cosmopolitanism.

What they all have in common, however, is a view on international politics from the perspective of the individual and its needs. The four authors discussed here were all convinced that international interdependence had created a pressing need for international political cooperation. The ultimate goal of functional cooperation is welfare, conceptualized from the perspective of the individual, and not from the perspective of a rent-seeking state. In that sense, functionalism clearly is a cosmopolitan theory. International governance should unfold in organizations with clearly and narrowly defined tasks. The quality of governance is secured by employing experts who are able to discuss problems 'on their merits'. This was clearly contrasted with a notion of international politics as irrational, driven by short-sighted calculations of power and national prestige. The legitimating narrative of international functional cooperation is about overcoming the traditional tragedies of international politics and diplomacy by shifting tasks to technical and legal experts. This is the road to progress and, not least, international peace. We can thus identify four central motives of an (early) legitimating account of international organizations that poses the emphasis clearly on the output of governance arrangements:

- 1) International organizations serve the common good of the world's citizens, not the particular interests of states.

- 2) International organizations can resolve transnational problems that affect the constituencies within their geographical reach.

3) International organizations secure the quality of their governance through the paramount role of experts and a mode of communication that enables them to find the best solutions to these problems.

4) In international organizations, the rule of law shields experts and administrators from the irrationalities of power politics and the ruthless pursuit of national interests.

The vision of governance proposed here draws on the legitimating virtues of science and law in mobilizing support for handing tasks over to an international bureaucracy. With its great faith in science, technology and planning it clearly is a modernist account that was equally popular in proposals for domestic reform during the same period (Murphy 1999, Pemberton 2001, Chapter 4). Although most popular after World War II, functionalism in IR clearly is a child of the 1920s. There are some striking parallels here with key themes from Max Weber's theory of modernization, centring on technological progress, the rule of law and the rise of expert bureaucracy. Although none of the authors discussed here draws heavily on Weber's writings the mode of legitimation proposed by them for international governance is 'rational-legal' in an almost ideal-typical form (Weber 1978: 217/8).

I have argued in the beginning that in this essay functionalism would not be discussed, or at least not primarily, as an academic theory of international relations (as has been the case in much of the extant literature on the subject) but as a legitimating account advanced to call for and justify a certain type of international cooperation. My view is not from inside the universe of IR theory but from the outside. I have also insinuated that this legitimating account was influential. Although I cannot draw on a rigorous study measuring the influence of that doctrine, scholars have

delivered evidence that it took deep roots in the minds of practitioners. Already in the League of Nations negotiations, proposals for a functional design of the organization were prominent, especially on the British side (Wilson 1995b: 138). In subsequent years, high-ranking League officials pushed functionalist ideas and policy proposals in Geneva, prominently among them Salter and Monnet (Ghébali 1975: 147). Also the first Secretary General of the League, Sir Eric Drummond, promoted functional forms of cooperation in the organization; and that Jean Monnet came to propose European integration along functional lines after World War II does not need further explanation.

As legitimation of international governance, functionalist theorizing to some degree seems to have created the conditions for its own reproduction in international institutions. As a legitimating strategy it became, in a way, taken for granted. Elements of functionalist theorizing were frequently reflected in the speeches and writings of international civil servants (Taylor and Groom 1975: 1); and academics doing their field work in international organizations found what they believed to be their own jargon tossed at them by the subjects of their study (Schmitter 1970: 838). And until the 1980s, at least, 'lawyers and others working in or with international organizations have all been speaking the language of functionalism without realizing it' (Klabbers 2010: 4). This taken for granted-ness of the functionalist account indicates that at least among elites, but plausibly also to many other people, the output-oriented legitimation of international governance was for a long time convincing and almost self-evident.

6) Conclusion

The purpose of this essay was to inquire into the history of output-oriented legitimization of international governance. The search for the origins of a legitimating account centring on the output of governance led us to an early body of thought that one would label, from today's perspective, a functionalist approach to international organization. In the IR-theory debate, this functionalism and the derivative 'neo-functionalism' received a fair share of beating for shortcomings in their ability to explain and predict the course of international politics and regional integration. Yet, for authors such as Salter, Mitrany, Reinsch and Potter, academic explanation or prediction was not the main point. They strove to deliver an appealing blueprint for politically promoting functional international cooperation, and hence a convincing legitimating account. Consequently, the key question asked in this essay was not if functionalist theories were correct in their predictions about international cooperation and regional integration. What was at the centre here was the emergence of a legitimating account that served to justify the transfer of competence and decision-making power to inter- or supranational technocracies. This is, I contend, the most important legacy of functionalism.

Comparing the works of Salter, Mitrany, Reinsch and Potter as eminent early functionalist writers I sketched the contours of this particular strand of internationalist thought that took up existing ideas of peace through interdependence and international cooperation and gave it a particular twist. Although the four authors under study here had quite different intellectual backgrounds that informed their functionalist theorizing, their accounts nevertheless converged on a remarkable number of key themes. For all of them, the promise of functional international cooperation was to rationalize political conduct in international relations and to treat

political questions 'on their merits'. Only this mode of operation can guarantee good, in the sense of welfare-enhancing, results that serve the public good. This is the essence of output legitimacy as originally defined by Scharpf.

In the functionalist account, global welfare is the goal, and international technocracy the way to reach it. For this to happen, international relations need to be depoliticized through the rule of law. Cooperation under the rule of law secures a fair treatment to every case and rolls back the effects of power asymmetries. The law thus provides an environment that makes sure that substantive considerations will prevail over the rent-seeking of states. The expertise of technocrats is conducive to the quality of political results as it guarantees that the persons in charge of choosing from different options have the necessary expertise to do so. The reign of expertise, shielded by the law against political interference, reassures us that the most appropriate option will be chosen in the end. Functional cooperation brings reason to bear in world politics, instead of power and short-sighted economic self-interest.

The particular promise of functionalism hence was to institutionalize a specific way of policy-making based on scientific evidence and expertise, purified of the pushing and shoving of everyday politics. In Weber's terminology, international governance of this kind would be based on purely rational-legal legitimacy. Of course, from today's perspective the enthusiasm of the early functionalists about science as political advisor and neutral arbiter seems excessive. Technocracy has come to be seen by many as a veritable threat to democracy, and a rather subtle and hidden way of exerting power and control over society. This essay is not the right place to discuss the faults and merits of technocracy. However, I contend that the timeless appeal of functionalist motives in a legitimating account of international cooperation is rooted

precisely in its modernist vision of governance, which was contrasted effectively with the frustrating irrationalities of international politics Westphalian style. Functionalists were able to present an attractive vision of international governance that found staunch supporters and with its rationalist, modernist overtones inspired generations of academic thinkers, civil servants and policy-makers.

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