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The eternal divide?: history and international relations

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The eternal divide?

Like most long-running interdisciplinary relationships, the liaison between International Relations (IR) and history has taken many turns. In some respects, history has always been a core feature of the international imagination. On both sides of the Atlantic, leading figures in the discipline such as E.H. Carr, Hans Morgenthau, Martin Wight and Stanley Hoffman employed history as a means of illuminating their research. Indeed, Wight (1966) made searching through international history the *sine qua non* of international theory, the best that could be hoped for in a discipline without a core problematique of its own. Although seemingly banished to the margins of the discipline by the emergence of behaviouralism and the association of 'real theory' with deductive, nomological methods, history never really went away as an important feature of IR's toolkit. Rather, history became part of a broader tug of war between 'classical' approaches which retained history as their central locomotive and IR's neo-positivist laboriticians, who saw history as providing the main ammunition for their experiments. As this essay shows, history has been employed, albeit unevenly, throughout the discipline. And given this, the rise – or reconvening – of historically-oriented research programmes such as constructivism, neo-classical realism and the English School should be seen less as a novel breakthrough than as a return to business as usual.

However, there is a tension which remains unresolved in the relationship between history and IR, one which is long-standing and which reappears with regularity, even in those texts which explicitly bestride the IR-history frontier. The issue is revealed in a passage from one of the best known of these texts (Elman and Elman, 2001: 7):

> Political scientists are more likely to look to the past as a way of supporting or discrediting theoretical hypothesis, while historians are more likely to be interested in past international events for their own sake. Although political scientists might turn to the distant past, the study of 'deep' history is relevant to their research objectives only insofar as it enables them to generate, test or refine theory. By contrast, for the historian, the goal of theory building and testing is secondary – the past interests for itself.

Later in the book, the authors make this distinction even more starkly (Elman and Elman, 2001: 35),

> Political scientists are not historians, nor should they be. There are real and enduring epistemological and methodological differences that divide the two groups, and there is great value in recognising, maintaining and honouring these distinctions.

These passages point the way towards a clear division of labour between theory-building political scientists and chronicling historians, a first-order demarcation on which other contributors to *Bridges and Boundaries* overlay a number of second-order distinctions: methods (a focus on secondary sources vs. primary sources); aims (identification of regularities, mechanisms and continuities vs. the highlighting of contingency, ambiguity and change); orientation (nomothetic vs. idiographic); sensibility (parsimony vs. complexity); scope conditions (analytic vs. temporal/spatial); notions of causation (transhistorical vs. context specific); levels of analysis (structure vs. agency) and so on. As a result, a list of essential differences are formed in which one discipline (IR/political science) acts as binary opposite for and, more often than not, coloniser of the other (history).

This essay questions the grounds for the construction of this 'eternal divide' between history and IR. The argument presented is straightforward: despite the surface-level closeness of the relationship between IR and history, much IR scholarship is predicated on a view of history caught between two equally unsatisfactory stools. On the one hand, history becomes a pre-determined site for the empirical verification of abstract claims. In this sense, history serves as 'scripture', as the application of timeless 'lessons' and inviolate rules removed from their context and applied to ill-fitting situations: the 'lessons of appeasement' become a shorthand for the necessity of confronting dictatorial regimes across time and place; the US retreat from Vietnam is invoked to halt talk of withdrawal in Iraq; the Reagan years are employed to support the idea that ultimate victory in the 'war on terror' rests on the deployment of overwhelming US military power married to the promotion – by force if necessary – of democratic ideals around the world. Such a move runs counter to the avowed aims of the historical (re)turn in IR: assuming due regard for particularity, context and complexity. In fact, it promotes a selection bias in case-studies in which history is reduced to a role, however well disguised, in which it is already filled-in as the fulfilment of IR's theoretical abstractions. In short, history becomes an uncontested background narrative to be coded

within pre-existing theoretical categories (Lustick, 1996). And as such, this approach is little more than the continuation of ahistoricism by other means.

A second, equally prominent, tendency in IR scholarship is to see history as the 'if only' realm of uncertainty (Versailles less punitive, Bin Laden assassinated before 9/11, Pearl Harbour never taken place) a 'butterfly' of contingent hiccups upon which IR theorists provide ill-fitting maps – maps which apparently reveal the distortions of their ideological prisms rather than the shape of history itself. Curiously, despite a sense in which this turn seeks to foster a kind of 'pure history', it is also ahistorical in that it fetishises the particular and the exceptional, failing to see how historical events are part of broader processes, sequences and plots which provide a shape – however difficult to discern – within historical development itself. The result of the 'if only' school of history is a reduction of the past to a 'pick and mix' sweet shop which is raided in order to satisfy the tastes and tropes of the researcher. Significantly, it is also a vision of history contrary to how the majority of historians themselves conduct their research and characterise their discipline.

The existence of these two forms of ahistoricism – history as scripture and as butterfly – are forged by the working practices of IR scholarship itself. Most mainstream approaches adopt a form of 'history as scripture', using history in order to code findings, mine data or as a source of *post factum* explanations (Smith, 1999; Isacoff, 2002). Most post-positivist approaches – particularly post-structuralism – assume a form of the latter, using history as a means of disrupting prevalent power-knowledge nexuses (e.g. Ashley, 1989; Walker, 1988; Vaughan-Williams, 2005). Few IR scholars spend sufficient time asking what it is we mean when we talk about history. Indeed, both (neo)positivists and post-positivists have generated an artificial divide in which second-order noise has substituted for first-order enquiry. The central aim of this essay is to delve beneath the surface of these debates in order to demonstrate how a historical mode of explanation based on context and narrative, allied to a social scientific mode of enquiry centred on eventfulness and ideal-typification, can reveal the necessary co-implication of each enterprise. This move, it is claimed, both fulfils the historical (re)turn in IR and adds theoretical value to it. The argument develops in three stages. First, the essay offers a brief overview of the relationship between history and IR, pulling out a number of tensions in the ways in which IR theorists approach historical research. The second section broadens this argument into a discussion of the relationship between social science and history more generally, arguing that, in parallel to IR, social

scientists and historians have exhibited a tendency to talk past each other, generating a number of powerful, if artificial, distinctions which have served to occlude the many overlaps between the two enterprises. The third part outlines the ways in which context, eventfulness, narrative and ideal-typification serve as tools for tacking more effectively between history and the social sciences, including IR.

Scripture and Butterfly: History and International Relations

Although there are – and have been – many encounters between historians and IR theorists, history has often served as a passive backdrop for theorist's experiments. Indeed, as one of IR's most celebrated quantifiers puts it (Bueno de Mesquita in Smith, 1999: 7), 'for the social scientist, history is primarily a laboratory by which to test both their claims about how variables are associated with each other and their propositions about causation'. In general, history is often assumed to be someway removed from the menu of mainstream IR, best captured by Waltzian neo-realism and Keohane-inspired neoliberal institutionalism. As is well known, both of these approaches work within an assumption of anarchy as containing a transhistorical logic. In this sense, the strength of third-image approaches, it is supposed, lies in the assumption of a continuous structural context to international relations (anarchy) which, in turn, generates a number of derivative logics – a self-help system, the need for states to prioritize survival, a recurring security dilemma and the mechanism of the balance of power. Because anarchy stands as a constant structural condition, so the international sphere appears as a continuous, almost static, holding pen for 'actually existing' international relations. In turn, this means that IR scholarship is – or should be – primarily concerned with mapping the ceaseless struggle for survival (as in neorealism) or the conditions for cooperation (as in neoliberalism) which take place within a timeless and spaceless anarchical system. And much of the criticism of neo-neo theories, particularly neorealism (e.g. Ruggie, 1986; Hall and Kratochwil, 1993; Schroeder, 1994), is made on the basis that it lacks a transformative logic and, as a consequence, is unable to explain processes of change – especially systems change – over time.

If the ahistoricism of neo-neo approaches is a commonly held assumption, equally widespread is the idea that historical sensitivity is something that has become a core feature of IR scholarship only relatively recently. In fact, a concern with temporality has long been a

feature of international studies. Indeed, it is possible to discern a classical tradition in IR theory, perhaps most obvious in figures such as Niebuhr, Carr and Morgenthau, which intimately associated the craft of international theory with deep immersion in history (professionally so in Carr's case). Of course, these scholars had quite different views of history. While Niebuhr saw history as contingent, diverse and, in his more Augustinian moments, sinful, Morgenthau (like George Kennan) argued that history was singular but repetitive, thereby delivering an 'ordered register' of practical knowledge for the prudential policy maker to learn from (Smith, 1999; ch. 4). Even within the classical tradition, therefore, can be found contrasting views of history: the tragic perennialism of Niebuhr alongside the contingent discontinuity of Morgenthau, Carr and Kennan. But despite their surface-level differences, these scholars shared a common interest in historical research, whether this was conducted in order to reveal the ceaseless precariousness of international politics, or as a means of generating practical advice for the prince.

In this sense, therefore, the neo-neo hold on IR in which 'proper theory' became entwined with deductive, nomological methods discrete from 'thick description' could be seen as an unwelcome interlude in a much longer, more fruitful, association between IR and history. However, there is a problem with this narrative. Even during the high-water mark of the neo-neo grip on IR theory, few advocates of either sensibility denied the importance of history as a means of testing their approach.[1] In this way, Colin and Miriam Elman (1995; 2008) found neo-realism to be perfectly compatible with historical research, while figures as varied as Robert Gilpin (1981), John Mearsheimer (2003) and Arthur Eckstein (2006) have carried out major pieces of historical research aiming to validate, fill-in or challenge the Waltzian frame. In a similar vein, Robert Keohane (1984), Lisa Martin (1992) and others have applied historical analysis to a neoliberal institutionalist research program in order to draw out its explanatory potential. In this way, the return of classical liberalism, the rise of neoclassical realism and constructivism, and the reconvening of the English School mark less the emergence of a historical turn in IR, but more an acceleration and deepening of trends already present in the discipline. History has always served as a tool for testing the validity of theoretical positions, and mainstream scholarship is perfectly content to use history as a barometer or litmus test for adjudicating between rival schemas.

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[1] The partial exception here is behaviouralism as exemplified, for example, by the Correlates of War Project, although even in this case the programme made extensive use of cliometric techniques which were themselves a means of coding historical 'data'.

However, although mainstream approaches – particularly neorealism and neoliberal institutionalism – *do* employ historical research, it is not clear that the latter serves much purpose in their accounts. Although 'history' as a point of data collection may be present, *historicism* – an understanding of the contingent, disruptive, constitutive impact of local events, particularities and discontinuities – is absent. As such, these approaches illustrate the ahistoricism of seeing 'history as scripture' – abstracting concepts such as 'anarchy', 'the balance of power' or 'self-help' out of their particular instantiations and reifying them as timeless analytical (and ultimately as ontological) entities. In this way, neo-neo approaches are home to what we might call a 'continuist mystique' in which history is not considered on its own terms but ransacked in order to explain the present. Thus, the contest between Athens and Sparta is transplanted to the Cold War in order to elucidate the stand-off between the United States and the Soviet Union; all wars, whether they be guerrilla insurgencies or total conflicts, are explained by international anarchy; and all political units – city-states, nomadic tribes, empires, nation-states and transnational alliances – are functionally undifferentiated. What John Hobson (2002) describes as a 'gigantic optical illusion' generates an isomorphic homology of social kinds. Neo-neo approaches, therefore, suffer problems associated with any theory which begins from a general abstraction (such as the timeless logic of anarchy). Such a view will *by necessity* take a view of the detail, the mess, the contingencies and excesses of history which condemns it to the status of under-labourer. If the researcher starts with a picture of the whole which is already filled-in, they will see conforming details rather than possible alternatives. To all intents and purposes, this form of research is a type of motivated bias, a cognitive disability to recognise historical anomalies and discrepancies which, in turn, generates an apparently unbridgeable gap between theoretical assertions and historical analysis (Lebow, 2010).

There is an alternative, of course, to such approaches – to revel in the contingency, accident and indeterminacy which are constant companions to world history. Nick Vaughan-Williams (2005: 117), for example, favours an historical epistemology which seeks not to 'resolve history' but to see it as an 'open problem', a realm of 'radical uncertainty' which remains constantly 'out of reach'. Critiquing the 'interpretative closure' of mainstream IR, Vaughan-Williams (2005: 118) argues for the need to destabilise and contest existing accounts of 'the historical record'. In this view, history is not a means by which to assess truth claims, but a space concerned with 'dispersal, difference and alterity across time and space'. Vaughan-

Williams employs the Derridean notion of *différance* to illustrate the ways in which historical meanings occupy a space in-between 'this' and 'that'. As such, history is always ungraspable and its meanings always deferred – there are no fixed points of historical settlement; instead history becomes an 'undecideable infinity of possible truths' (2005: 129). Rather than use history in order to verify pre-existing schemas, Vaughan-Williams prefers to see history as a tool of destabilisation which can reveal the distortions of ontopolitical positions. In short, for Vaughan-Williams, history is a 'butterfly' of contingent hiccups without shape, form or reason, a site of dissidence which can unmask hegemonic readings and, thereby, disrupt prevalent power-knowledge nexuses.

Vaughan-Williams is part of a broader field of post-structuralist scholars in IR, including Rob Walker (1988), David Campbell (1998) and Richard Ashley (1989), who see history as far removed from mainstream accounts of *post-factum* closure. Rather, for these scholars, history is inherently contestable, unstable and disruptive. As such, researchers need to shift from an understanding of history as delivering 'essential truths', 'timeless categories' and 'unchanging reality' to one which sees history as impermanent, contested and contingent (Walker, 1988). For these scholars, history is not a realm of continuity but one of incommensurable difference, particularity and dissent (Campbell, 1998), an 'irruption of contingency' which serves as an invitation to permanent provocation and as a means of unsettling suprahistorical, logocentric accounts of 'history as necessity' (Ashley, 1989).

The benefits of such an approach are clear – in terms of nuance, detail and sensitivity, historical research of this type is unrivalled. And certainly, a number of techniques employed by scholars occupying this broad persuasion – genealogy, multi-perspectivism, agonism, intertextuality – are powerful tools for questioning taken-for-granted assumptions about both the present and the past. However, such an approach also has its difficulties. At the very least, post-structuralist understandings of history run the risk of 'overdetermination' – the provision of a laundry list of causes that includes all sorts of weak or insignificant factors. Perhaps more importantly, by stressing contingency, accident and particularity, there is a possibility of omitting bigger, more important commonalities. As this essay goes on to explore in more detail, where the neo-neo conception of history irons out discontinuities by creating isomorphic transhistorical categories, post-structuralist approaches obscure the sense in which history is a *social* process, one in which historical events, dramas and processes are part of broader concatenations which provide a shape – however difficult to discern – within

historical development. Just as mainstream approaches make history a singular realm of certainty and regularity, so post-structuralist approaches assume history to be a singular realm of difference and instability. As such, where the former fetishise general abstractions, the latter fetishise the particular. Or to put this another way, where the 'history as scripture' approach is historical without being historicist, the 'history as butterfly' approach is historicist without being historical, focusing on deconstruction without reconstructing meaningful analytical narratives. Neither provides much help in terms of building durable links between history and IR theory. And neither provides much help in terms of generating theoretically appealing *and* empirically rich accounts of events, processes and dynamics in world politics.

In many ways, 'middle-way' approaches to IR theory claim the closest association with historical research. Indeed, it could be argued that the English School has the most intimate association with history of any of the major approaches to international relations. Several members of the British Committee on the Theory of International Affairs – the institutional font of the approach – were practicing historians (including Martin Wight and Herbert Butterfield), while many contemporary advocates of the English School (such as Barry Buzan, Richard Little, Hidemi Suganami and Eddie Keene) continue to play an active role in bridging the theory-history divide (e.g. Buzan and Little, 1996, 2001; Suganami, 1998, 2008; Keene, 2008). However, even the English School has a tendency to replicate core features of this divide. On the one hand, a number of English School theorists see history as 'useful knowledge', serving as a means of illuminating concrete puzzles in world politics. But they remain suspicious to the point of hostility at attempts to capture history within broader explanatory frameworks or, indeed, to generate accounts of 'final causes' which, Herbert Butterfield believed, belonged to God alone (Hall, 2002). This understanding of history as a necessarily limited realm stands some distance away from the attempts by figures such as Barry Buzan and Richard Little to test the utility of 'international system' as a transhistorical theoretical toolkit (Buzan and Little, 2001) or to interrogate the impact of globalization on the institutional architecture of international society (Buzan, 2004). As such, although there is certainly an underlying historical sensibility to English School theory, there is no consistent philosophy of history or historical method that can be clearly associated with the approach (Linklater and Suganami, 2007).

It is equally difficult to establish a distinctly constructivist mode of historical enquiry. While there are many strains of constructivist IR, all variants reject a neo-neo instrumentalist rational actor model in which actors' interests are pre-determined and universal across time and space. As such, constructivism is propelled towards accounts of time and place specificity, context and change which render the approach *necessarily* historical in orientation. Chris Reus-Smit (2008) argues that constructivists tend to adopt an interpretivist approach to historical research, giving special attention to processes of social change, 'historically voiceless individuals and groups', and the role historians themselves play in constructing history. However, there is little distinctiveness about the theory-history relationship in constructivist studies bar, as with the English School, a broad commitment to historical research as a means of explicating theoretical work. As such, it is nigh-on impossible to pick out a discrete philosophy of history associated with constructivist IR – there is a degree of fuzziness about the relationship between history and constructivism beyond a general exhortation that such a relationship is important.

Of course, this broad-brush survey of contemporary IR theory is necessarily crude. A number of approaches beyond the standard paradigms such as historical sociology (e.g. Hobden and Hobson, 2002), conceptual history (e.g. Bartleson, 1995) and intellectual history (e.g. Bell, 2009) have sought to combine rich historical insights with major theoretical statements. As such, this essay does not seek to establish a complete account of the relationship between IR theory and history. Nor should the metaphor of 'scripture' and 'butterfly' be seen as an attempt to provide a total or pure form of categorisation. Rather, the goals here are more limited – to (over)simplify the relationship between history and IR as caught between 'scripture' and 'butterfly' in order to tease out a number of issues which lie submerged beneath the surface of existing debates. And in this regard, there are three initial points to note. First, from mainstream approaches comes a sense of history as 'scripture', as context-less data-set or passive record through which abstract formulas, concepts and hypotheses can be assessed. As noted above, this approach is deeply flawed, reducing history to a monochrome flatland by which to confirm or, at best, tweak theoretical claims. Second, from the radical historiography of post-positivism comes a sense of history as 'butterfly' – a contingent realm of ifs and maybes which reveals not truth but the ideological disposition of the researcher. This too is a flawed approach, offering an account of historical disruption without indicating the ways in which historical events form part of broader, more intelligible shapes. Finally, middle-way approaches, although immersed in historical forms of

explanation, offer little clarity when it comes to understanding exactly what the relationship between history and theory building is or should be. Overall, therefore, the diverse plumage of contemporary IR theory is matched by the diversity of ways in which the discipline approaches historical research. From mainstream approaches comes an over-emphasis on continuity and incompatible analogies; from post-positivism comes an over-reliance on history as the accumulation of chance and coincidence. Contra both these understandings, what is required is an idea of history not as cause *or* chance, but a conceptualisation of history as cause *and* chance. Before this approach is sketched out more fully, it is worth looking at the ways in the history/theory binary in IR is replicated more generally in the social sciences.

Scripture and Butterfly Redux: History and Social Science

'Wie es eigentlich gewesen ist' (History as it essentially was). Leopold Von Ranke

'History is a science, no less and no more'. J.M. Bury

'Historia magistra vitae' (History is life's teacher). Cicero

'The art of history is always the art of narrative'. G.M. Trevelyan

'History is not a narrative of events. The historian's difficult task is to explain what happened'. Christopher Hill

'Studying history, my friends is no joke … to study history means submitting to chaos and nevertheless retaining faith in order and meaning'. Herman Hesse

'History is a nightmare from which I am trying to escape'. James Joyce

There is no shortage of ways to think about history: as definitive record, as science, as teacher, as art, as narrative, as happening, as chaos, even as nightmare. Perhaps one of the most common ways to understand historical research is to see the enterprise as free from theoretical speculations, as the narration, chronicling or description of 'what happened next', the tracing of how one-thing-followed-another in the unfolding of events so contingent as to be unrepeatable. In this understanding, tides of history have been turned on the minutest of details: the crux of Cleopatra's nose; a monkey's bite on King Alexander of Greece; Trotsky's fever contracted while shooting ducks in 1923 during the midst of a struggle with

Stalin, Kamenev and Zinoviev over the direction of the Bolshevik revolution.[2] Certainly, this view contains a degree of force. Indeed, a number of historians themselves remain suspicious, even hostile, to attempts at theorising history. As John Lewis Gaddis (2001: 302) notes, 'when theories are right, they generally confirm the obvious. When they move beyond the obvious, they are usually wrong.' If historians do seek to generate broad findings out of their archival burrowing, fieldwork and associated practices, it is argued, they form only the most approximate of representations – the ordering of historical complexity into some kind of rational mess. Many historians are keen to emphasise that a central difference between their work and that of social scientists is that they do not seek to bend reality in order to confirm to pre-existing theoretical scripts. As such, if historical theory appears, it is embedded within overarching narratives rather than serving as a means to confirm pre-existing theoretical dispositions. If historians generalise, it is *from* rather than *to* the particular (Gaddis, 1996). And as a result, history becomes yoked to the particular and the contingent – the butterflies which take human development down one path and not another.

If this is one – perhaps *the* – common understanding of how history differs fundamentally from social science, there is an equally influential understanding of the distinctiveness of social science told from the other side of the 'eternal divide'. Witness, for example, a diverting statement on the subject made by William Robinson (2003), a prominent macro-sociologist. Robinson opens his book on transnational conflicts with an evocative story of the author gazing upon a mural in a major city in Latin America. For Robinson, the 'real mural' only becomes apparent from the 'proper perspective' – the other side of street. At this point, Robinson claims, the array of squiggles, colour and mess begins to take on a coherent form, first into recognisable patterns (half way across the street) and finally into a 'big picture': the macro-structural whole. Using this story as a metaphor for conducting his history-from-on-high of transnational conflicts in Latin America, Robinson argues (2003: 1), perhaps fairly startlingly, that 'the greater the level of abstraction in our analysis, the greater the historical explanation we will provide.'

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[2] As Trotsky put it, 'one can foresee a revolution or a war, but it is impossible to foresee the consequences of an autumn shooting trip for wild ducks.' Bertrand Russell takes this point to the extreme by arguing that the existence of the United States depended on the liaison between Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn. Had this not happened, Russell argued, England would have remained Catholic and accepted the Papal ruling on the New World, leaving North America to the Spanish. On these examples – and more – see Carr (1967).

To some extent, Robinson's stance should be both familiar and comfortable to many social scientists. After all, macro-sociology of the type promoted by Robinson takes as its primary role the identification of determinant causal processes, chains and configurations that, to a great extent, appear out of the control and purview of individuals. In other words, macro-sociology is geared towards study of *principia media* – determinant structural forces that act as the underlying locomotives of historical development. In this sense, Robinson should be right: our level of detachment (or abstraction) enables us to make sense of the historical whole. However, if we start thinking of Robinson's metaphor less as an analogy and more as an actual statement about how to conduct historical research, then problems begin to emerge. On one level, Robinson may be right that, from a distance, we can see the whole of the mural: its patterns, its contours, its overarching shape. But what do we miss? To some extent, everything. Mostly, of course, we miss the detail: the mural's array of shapes, colours and textures. But this array is not just mess, at least not like that of a teenager's room or an academic's office. After all, there are enormous complexities, contingencies and excesses which Robinson's broad view *necessarily* leaves out, a point raised evocatively by Robert Nisbet (1969: 240-241):

> History in any substantive sense is plural. It is diverse, multiple, and particular. There have been innumerable histories since the first history of the first human group began … not only are there many histories, there are many chronologies, many times … many histories, many areas, many times! The mind boggles at the task of encapsulating such diversity within any empirically clear formula or synthesis. It cannot be done.

What Robinson's metaphor reveals, therefore, is a broader debate about appropriate levels of abstraction and, in turn, one about methods of historical and social scientific enquiry. Two points in particular are worth highlighting. First is the sense that social science must be parsimonious when it encounters historical 'stuff'. In this understanding of the social science-history relationship, theorists must skip over the intricacies of historical events – the latter is covered sufficiently by theoretical axioms or simplified radically in order for theoretical positions to retain their coherence. To put this another way, theorists are 'lumpers' to be contrasted with historical 'splitters' – the former are concerned with overarching macro-schemas just as the latter audit the micro-details which Immanuel Wallerstein once described, or derided, as empirical 'dust'. However, the lumper/splitter distinction is a partial, often misleading, picture of the theory-history relationship. Although some historians do see their enterprise as involving minutiae rather than grand theory, there have been no shortage of

historians who have sought to make bold, sweeping general statements, whether this be Thucydides' record of the Peloponnesian Wars in which he aimed to reveal a record that would stand as a 'possession for all time', Arnold Toynbee's conception of the *telos* of world history as governed by the rise and fall of great civilisations, or David Christian's (2004) work on 'big history' which seeks to construct a 'theory of everything' grounded on the human propensity for collective learning. A substantial tranche of the history profession is engaged with 'world history', establishing large-scale narratives of periodisation and causation (e.g. McNeill, 2003), while a number of scholars who explicitly straddle the social science-history divide, such as Charles Tilly, Randall Collins and Michael Mann often describe their work as macro-history (e.g. Tilly, 1984). The Annales School of French historians, amongst them Fernand Braudel and Marc Bloch, were less concerned with the *événéments* of historical detail than with the impact of large-scale conjunctural forces and, on an even bigger scale, the movement of environmental changes which took place over the *longue-durée*. As such, it is not possible to generate a hard-and-fast distinction between theoretical lumpers and historical splitters based on a generic divide over levels of abstraction.[3]

Second, and linked to this point, such an opening of any first-order distinction based on generalist social scientists and particularist historians indicates that there are not one, but many forms of historical research. Just as social science breaks down into macro and micro research, formal models and thick description, ideal theory and action-based accounts, so history too is home to numerous debates about methods, truth, levels of abstraction and the status of historical facts. For example, it is possible to discriminate between a 'correspondence' view of history (associated with Ranke, Acton and Bury) in which the outside observer seeks to establish the 'truth' of historical facts and a 'constructionist' mode of history (associated with Oakeshott and Collingwood) which explores the ways in which the historian's experience itself helps to construct historical knowledge. Or to take an other example, some thirty years ago, a surge of interest in social, economic and demographic history as inspired by Marx, and in cultural history as prefigured by Weber, generated a split within historical circles between 'new history' (a concern with what happened and how) and 'old history' (a concern with why things happened and with what consequence) (Keene,

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[3] This holds equally from the other side of the lumper/splitter divide – there are many social scientific approaches which engage systematically with micro-phenomena, not least ethnomethodology and micro-economics.

2008). The subsequent 'history wars' replicated social scientific debates about method, the notion of science and the importance, or otherwise, of the fact/value distinction.[4] Indeed, this conflict pitched traditionalists against radical historicists in ways which would be familiar to the vast majority of social scientists. Given this, it is worth probing a little deeper in order to test the possibilities – and limits – of the relationship between history and social science. By doing so, it becomes clear that many of the shorthands employed to distinguish history from social science are canards, used to establish and police disciplinary homeland security rather than derived from any first-order intellectual requirements.

Beyond the eternal divide: Context, narrative, eventfulness, ideal-typification

So far, this essay has argued that historians and social scientists tend to talk past each other (when they bother to engage in conversation at all). Each has played their part in fostering a disciplinary partition based on apparently eternal distinctions about appropriate levels of abstraction, degrees of causal determinacy and 'proper' methods. Whether understood as scripture vs. butterfly or as lumper vs. splitter, the result of this failure to communicate is second-order noise masquerading as first-order debate. This section of the essay provides a more measured assessment of the relationship between social science and history based on four mechanisms – context, narrative, eventfulness and ideal-typification. The first two are drawn primarily from history; the latter from social science.[5] By highlighting these commonly used tools, it becomes clear that beneath the surface of disciplinary parlour-games lie a number of ways in which history and social science are co-implicated. As such, assumptions of an eternal divide between history and social science melts away. Neither social science nor history requires a particular level of abstraction, mode of explanation, methodology or epistemology. Rather, apparently essential differences between the two enterprises – nomothetic vs. idiographic, parsimony vs. complexity, general vs. particular – have been constructed from the requirements of disciplinary gatekeeping rather than any hard-and-fast intellectual distinctiveness. Problematising the history/theory binary means

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[4] As Eddie Keene (2008: 385) points out, just as Hedley Bull and other members of the English School were critiquing the 'scientific method' associated with behaviouralist IR, so historians were increasingly 'scientising' their discipline.

[5] This move is not meant to reproduce the social science/history binary by choosing two wagers from either side of the 'eternal divide', but rather intended to demonstrate the *co-implication* of history and social science as mutually reinforcing sensibilities.

acknowledging that history is a social science just as social science, including IR, is necessarily historical.

Context

At first glance, 'context' does not appear to be the most obvious place by which to establish shared focal points between history and social science. Indeed, the modern study of history is often associated with figures such as Barthold Niebuhr and Leopold von Ranke who sought to establish history not as a narrative of specific situations but as a truth-revealing science. Ranke, for example, was broadly indifferent to the context in which historical events took place and in 'stuff' which occurred outside the realm of high-politics. Rather, his concern was to generate a legion of well-trained archivists capable of trawling documents-of-state in order to reveal the true motivations of the great and the good. As Ranke (in Franzoni, 2005: 439) wrote, 'A closed archive is still absolutely a virgin. I long for the moment I shall have access to her and make my declaration of love, whether she is pretty or not.' Or to put this in less odious language: *quod not est in charta, non est in mundo* (what is not in the document is not in the world).

The past two centuries has seen a reduction in Ranke's influence on historical research, albeit with a fair few lurches along the way (cf. the influence of neo-Rankereans such as Geoffrey Elton, 1967). Perhaps most crucial here is the emergence of 'history from below' – the writing of history from the perspective of those who are at once both its principal agents and, just as commonly, its main victims (e.g. Hill, 1940; Thompson, 1966; Rediker, 2008). Advocates of history-from-below argue that history cannot be told merely from a (neo) Rankerean focus on truth-as-high-politics-revealed-by-official-sources. Rather, as E.P. Thompson (1966: 12) passionately argues in the preface to his seminal study of the emergence of industrial capitalism in England:

> I am seeking to rescue the poor stockinger, the Luddite cropper, the 'obsolete' hand-loom weaver, the 'Utopian' artisan, and even the deluded follower of Joanna Southcott from the enormous condescension of posterity. Their crafts and traditions may have been dying. Their hostility to the new industrialism may have been backward-looking. Their communitarian ideals may have been fantasies. Their insurrectionary conspiracies may have been foolhardy. But they lived through these times of acute social disturbance, and we did not. Their aspirations were valid in terms of their own experience; and, if they were casualties of history, they remain, condemned in their own lives, as casualties.

A commitment to history from below does not just require a reconstruction of what it means to be a valid historical subject; it also entails a broadening of historical method towards oral testimony and biography, and away from 'documentary fetishism' (Evans, 1997). Equally importantly, this shift in the status of primary materials has gone hand-in-hand with a more widespread interrogation of the status of historical facts themselves. In the early part of the twentieth-century, Carl Becker (1955) made the case for seeing historical facts less as inviolate truths than as symbolic, contextual constellations made up from a thousand or more discarded events which both surrounded and sustained them. R.G. Collingwood (1994) argued that history revealed little more than the mind of the historian, promoting a form of neo-Hegelian 'historical imagination' in which history became a history of ideas and historical research the re-enactment of past thought. And despite a post-World War Two turn towards cliometrics in the work of Geoffrey Barraclough and others, much history during the Cold War seemed more in tune with E.H. Carr's (1967) desire to see history as a 'selective system', an inherently social process best considered as a dialogue between present and past societies.

For Carr, the first step in studying history was to study both the historian and the broader context (the social, political and economic environment) within which they carried out their research and within which historical facts were accumulated. For Carr, the fact that historical relics could not speak for themselves but were embedded within broader social matrices meant that there could be no absolute truth about the past in the way promoted by Ranke and his fellow travellers. Rather, for Carr, historical explanations were inherently approximate. This did not mean the end of adequate explanation; the conversation between past and present contained within Carr's vision of historical method tasked the historian with differentiating between significant and accidental causes, providing intelligible meaning in a world of incessant change, and remaining open to new interpretations of a subject.

Carr's understanding of the construction of historical knowledge as a fundamentally *social* process rooted in interrogation of the multiple *contexts* within which historical knowledge is produced acts as the first step towards shared conceptualisations of history and social science. Carr saw historical research as concerned with adjudication between rival interpretations based on an open conversation – and contestation – between facts, sources and scholarship. As such, he favoured a historical epistemology in which history was not studied merely by the uncovering of new facts but by immersion in the 'knowledge cultures', modes of thinking

and reasoning practices which emerged in specific contexts and which helped to translate historical materials into social facts. Carr's enquiry points to an understanding of history as 'recollecting the past', the study of events which are always part of broader structures of meaning. This signifies a move away from the 'context of justification' as a means of discriminating between rival historical interpretations towards what Margaret Somers (1996) calls the 'context of discovery' – a focus on how historiography itself enables findings to emerge. History is always viewed from the vantage point of the present – we are, as Friedrich Kratochwil (2006) acknowledges, 'historical beings' in that we are situated in broader milieus within which we conduct a dialogue between present and other times. And, in turn, this lends itself towards the generation of 'working truths' and 'situational certainties' bound by time and space contexts (Kratochwil, 2006).

Although this point may seem obvious, it actually involves a substantial reorientation of (some) social science away from a view of science as equivalent to physics or mathematics and towards 'historical sciences' such as biology or geology which are more suited to the complexities of world politics. Although biology and geology work within broad overarching paradigms – natural selection and plate tectonics respectively – it is only through comparative analysis in which processes are traced, patterns deduced and taxonomies constructed that knowledge is seen to accumulate. In this way, historical sciences knot together initial causes, environmental niches, local conditions and nonlinear interactions into 'impressionistic pictures' which identify trends and connect chains of contingencies both logically and consistency. These 'plotlines', in turn, act as a means for generating scholarly debate about contextually-oriented interpretations (Bernstein et al, 2007). The result is a search for 'nonlinear confluence' and 'plausible causal assertions', understood as the ways in which historical events and processes conjoin in order to produce particular causal chains within bounded social domains (Lebow, 2010).

Perhaps the closest approximation to this form of 'historical science' in IR comes via association with the Cambridge School of historians as represented by figures such as Quentin Skinner, J.G.A. Pocock and John Dunn (on the Cambridge School and IR, see Bell, 2003; Reus Smit, 2008). Skinner (2002) and other members of the Cambridge School attack the Rankerean notion of a historical text speaking for itself and of history being concerned with 'fundamental concepts', 'timeless elements', 'stable vocabularies' and the like, arguing that we can only know history from our own times. As such, for Skinner, reading the past

requires an avoidance of the twin dangers of parochialism and anachronism which transplant concepts (such as balance of power) and viewpoints (such as political realism) to contexts where they are inappropriate. In a similar vein, Skinner critiques 'the mythology of doctrines': the tendency to find advocates of a position in earlier times and earlier places. Hence, Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes et al are taken to be part of a realist canon not because they would have recognised modern usage of the term – or necessarily have related to contemporary language games, concepts and ideas – but because we find affinities between their work and our times. In short, we read us in them. For Skinner, the predilection for 'text without context' generates an overly neat packaging of history, generating a mythology of coherence which makes ideas *appear* translatable beyond their particular utterance. As such, Skinner is dismissive of the fetish towards seeing 'history as scripture' – if scholars have a particular view to peddle, they will find evidence to support it. For Skinner, this is not history but mythology. And it is how much IR theory approaches the subject of history.

Skinner's way out of the 'history as scripture' quagmire comes via asking what an author is trying to *do* when they write a particular text, in other words to seek out their intentions. Importantly, Skinner is concerned more with intellectual and linguistic contexts than he is with establishing the political, economic and social constraints on historical knowledge. In other words, historical research should seek out the uses, practices and performances of texts ('utterances') in order to understand the 'internal tradition' within which they are articulated. In interrogating historical texts and writers, we need to 'see things their way' (2002: 42). Such a viewpoint places Skinner squarely within the tradition of historical research outlined above – the attempt to move away from the testing of abstract lessons and anachronistic fallacies towards acceptance of the contextual limits of both history and our understanding of it. Indeed, such a move allows social scientific research to move away from abstractions towards explanation of specific historical processes, building from identification of processes which take place *within* time-space-linguistic contexts towards establishing the extent to which comparable processes occur in *alternative* milieus. As such, it is rooted in meso-level, mid-range theorising, occupying the messy eclectic centre of social (and historical) theory by combining analytical rigour with conceptual sophistication and empirical reach.

Eventfulness

Historians, it is often claimed, act as process tracers *par excellence*, establishing the ways in events become linked, threaded and sequenced in broader configurations. Although, as

William Sewell (2005) notes, historians often begin with the facts of contingency, complexity and causal heterogeneity, few make the case against there being significance to the sequence within which events take place, or that the context within which they occur is insignificant. In other words, accepting the contingency of events does not preclude these being placed in broader analytical narratives, for example via studying the ways in which certain practices emerge and become enduring. In this sense, Sewell argues, we need two forms of research: synchronic study of the form, content and structure of social relations; and diachronic study of how these social relations emerge, are patterned, reproduced and transformed. As Sewell points out, even events which appear to be new are themselves part of broader dynamics. As such, events themselves can be seen as theorisable categories, part of broader sequences which reproduce and transform existing patterns of social relations. Events have cascading, sequential effects in that they both break and reproduce existing formations. Sewell uses the example of the fall of the Bastille to illustrate his point. The importance of the storming of the Bastille in 1789 was that it was imbued with significance 'beyond itself'. In other words, the event contained a recognition within broader political and cultural fields which broke existing configurations and reconstructed categories of meaning, amongst them notions of 'people' and 'revolution'. And it is not difficult to find contemporaneous events which contain comparable effect: 1989, 9/11 and more.

As Andrew Abbott (1995) argues, events and processes are connected in multiple, overlapping ways: there is no unremitting contingency to these interactions. Rather, regularities emerge in certain contexts, constituting assemblages in which sites of difference are yoked, forming edges and boundaries around social formations. In turn, these relatively fixed patterns of interactions are reproduced in ways which transform them into social facts, entities with a coherent, if always somewhat contingent, form. Although these configurations are always open to contestation, they constitute relatively stable sites for the development of what Duncan Bell (2009: 19) calls 'creole communities' or 'contact languages' between social science and history. Indeed, it could be argued that a 'historical ontology' rests on study of the emergence, durability and diffusion of these 'things', whether understood as concepts or institutions (Hacking, 2002). There are a number of examples of how this plays out in practice ranging from the emergence of government bureaucracies to the development of professions and academic disciplines. And in IR, this form of research lends itself to study of how rhetorical strategies frame events, enabling some policy avenues and closing down others (e.g. Jackson & Krebs, 2007), or how transnational religious networks mobilize around

events in order to disrupt modes of rule and reconstruct others (e.g. Nexon, 2009). In short, an 'eventful' approach allows researchers to see how *historical* events enable *social* formations to emerge, reproduce, transform and, potentially, break down.

If the first step, therefore, in understanding the mutual implication of history and social science is to recognise that temporality is social and, therefore, rooted in contexts which are examinable via social scientific enquiry, the second step is to see events as theorisable in that certain 'happenings' have outcomes which can be studied via the ways in which social formations emerge, become institutionalised and change. As such, history contains a *social* logic, a process of 'eventing' in which moments in time take on relatively stable shapes drawn from the interaction between events and the repertoires of meaning brought to bear on them (Jackson, 2006). Of course, such a move is never complete – alternative readings are always available and always present. But nevertheless, historical events are interpreted within relatively contained plot structures drawn from the intersection of events and the milieus within which they take place. In this sense, historical accounts contain a sense of 'followability': a 'narrative intelligibility' in which contingency is conjoined with an account of adequate causation (Gallie, 1964).

Narrative

As Hidemi Suganami (1999; 2008) notes, historical accounts tend to contain three dimensions: chance (contingency), agency (volition) and mechanism (causation). Although social scientists often focus on mechanism and historians on agency and chance, this does not make the social world beyond the comprehension of either set of researchers. In fact, both historians and social scientists are concerned with establishing 'causal narratives', structured stories which explain events and make them intelligible to others. By focusing on particular moments, events and 'critical junctures', it is possible to attain an explanation of the movement of historical processes alongside broader analytical wagers. This is the method employed by Michael Mann (1986) in constructing his account of world historical development and it is how a number of historical sociologists have defended their interest in periods of rapid change such as organic crises, revolutions and wars. Concentrating on these 'neo-episodic moments', it is argued, illuminates the ways in which moments of temporal heterogeneity morph into fields of 'ruptural unity' (Steinmetz, 2010). Such research is guided not by prefigured analytical boundaries, but by empirical puzzles regarding how certain practices come into being, how they change and how they break down. The result is a

figurational approach to causation, focusing on how historically specific outcomes are the results of processes which are themselves drawn from the complex intersection of events and context (Elias, 2000).

Regardless of sometimes stark disagreements over epistemology, subject matter and sensibility,[6] most historians see one of their core tasks as 'emplotment' – the process by which events are given a sense of order and hierarchy. To put this simply, historians may tell stories, but most consider their stories to be superior to others (Goodin and Tilly, 2006). And although they may be comfortable with the world of alternative futures and unintended consequences, nevertheless most historians generate a logic to their explanations in which ordering events into causal narratives plays a central role. In other words, there may be multiple histories out there, but some histories prove to be stickier than others.

This focus on the ordering of events into intelligible stories provides the kernels of a third way in which social science and history are co-implicated: narrative. The role of narrative in historical research is well chronicled. Some thirty years ago, Lawrence Stone (1979) discerned a 'revival of narrative', a trend most evident in the work of metahistorians such as Hayden White (1975) who, in turn, drew heavily on figures such Paul Ricoeur and Northrop Frye. Ricoeur traced the idea of history as emplotment to Aristotle's *Poetics*, seeing narrative as a means of generating 'concordance in discordance' (order in chaos). White took this argument on a step, perceiving emplotment as the means by which historians mediated between their fields of enquiry, the records they encountered, existing historical accounts and their audiences. White's most radical move was to claim that research of this kind was a 'poetic act' in which historians discerned plot structures largely on aesthetic and normative grounds. As such, historical work developed its 'explanatory effect' via a three-dimensional analysis: aesthetic perception (emplotment), cognitive operation (argument) and ideological prescription (implication). In this way, White (1975: 30) argued, 'the historian confronts the historical field in much the same way as the grammatician confronts a new language.' The task of the historian, for White, was not to produce a final, exhaustive reading of the historical record – indeed, he recognised that there would always be 'surplus meanings' to historical texts (Jenkins, 1991). Rather, historical narratives performed roles of knowledge

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[6] A selection of readings on these 'stark disagreements' includes: Bloch, 1962; Carr, 1967; Elton, 1969; Jenkins, 1991; Appleby, Hunt and Jacob, 1995; Evans, 1997; Marwick, 2001; Cannadine, 2002; Tosh, 2006.

construction, revision and destruction (of existing accounts) which served to render the social world both ordered and meaningful.

White's argument takes the debate on narrative to its extreme – his understanding of the nature of history, the status of historical knowledge and the vocation of the historian have prompted considerable debate, much of it critical (e.g. Appleby, Hunt and Jacob, 1995; Marwick, 2001). But the intricacies of this debate – diverting though they may be – do not appreciably affect the argument being made here. More important is the sense in which narrative as a *social* process can illuminate links between history and social science. Even in White's account is a sense in which emplotment contains a *social* logic in which history is less removed from the social sciences than part of a broader panorama of story-telling disciplines. Perhaps, therefore, it is worth acknowledging that just as 'theory is always for someone and for some purpose' (Cox, 1981: 128), so history too is always for someone and for some purpose. History is not a flat realm of incontrovertible facts for theorists to mine. The same root-and-branch questions over the status of knowledge claims, the value orientations of the researcher, and the ontological facticity – or not – of the social world which have bedevilled social scientists over the years have also been the subject of sustained debate by historians. As such, history should not be seen as some kind of subordinate occupation. Rather, via an understanding of the importance of narrative, whether understood as an analytical tool or as an emplotment device, in *all* social scientific stories, it is clear that history has far more in common with social science than is often considered to be the case.

Ideal-typification

A focus on events, context and narrative in the historical formation of social facts constitutes important points of co-implication between social science and history. After all, it is not often that researchers query the actuality of a specific event; rather, disagreements arise from the status or meaning given to that event. As such, much of both social science and history can be seen as forms of research which attempt to derive connections beyond the lurches of historical events, yet which do not contain a pre-determined script within them. One way of conceptualising such a craft is through the construction of what Max Weber (1949) evocatively called 'thought pictures' (*Gedankenbilder*), ideal-types which serve as heuristic devices for the examination of empirical reality. For Weber, ideal-types served as expository tools by which to clarify history, organising certain aspects of social life into internally consistent, logical constructs. As such, ideal-types were tasked with the 'analytical ordering

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of empirical social reality' (Weber, 1949: 61), a key aspect of the 'empirical science of concrete reality' (*Wirklichkeitswissenschaft*) which Weber developed.

For Weber, ideal-types served as 'simplifications for the purposes of increasing comprehension' (Jackson, 2010: ch. 5). Researchers adopting this methodological tool 'trace and map how particular configurations of ideal-typified factors come together to generate historically specific outcomes in particular cases' (Jackson, 2010: ch. 5). Importantly, ideal-typifications are not meant to represent 'actual history' but to act as simplified maps of historical reality with the goal of specifying causal configurations which, in turn, act as 'portable knowledge' in alternative cases. In short, ideal-types make intelligible the myriad of interactions which take place in historical processes – they are a method for exploring the casual relationships contained in historically specific configurations and, potentially, tools of comparison beyond these specific instantiations, something Weber made apparent in numerous studies, not least his comparison of world religions. In this way, ideal-typification isolates key features of historical events and processes, highlights their most important features and, in turn, examines their salience in alternative arenas. The result, Weber argued, was a means of tacking effectively between empirical material, conceptual abstractions and causal explanations, as Michael Mann (1986) puts it, 'carrying out a constant conversation between the evidence and one's theory'.

There are a number of existing traditions and cognate enterprises which feed into – and illustrate the potency of – this type of research. For example, there is the emergence of what Andrew Bennett and Alan George (2005) call 'typological theory' – the development of contingent generalizations which begin with events and which understand that some occurrences take on path dependencies which can be effectively traced. The task for such research is to identify these events and the complex causal mechanisms which flow from them, examining how they parse into specific configurations and causal sequences. This form of research – what we might call 'nomothetic history'– begins with the identification of specific causal mechanisms *in* time and place allied to how such typifications operate *across* time and place. Such research fits squarely within the tradition of 'classical social analysis' defined by C. Wright Mills (1959) as being mutually occupied by concerns of structure, history and biography. For Mills, interest in structure arises from the fact that human behavior is always involved in, and shaped by, particular patterns of social relationships. History adds the sense that these social structures are always specific to given times and

places, that they vary enormously from one period or setting to another, and that they are themselves subject to change over time. Finally, biography connects these larger-scale phenomena of structure and change to the experiences of individuals – revealing how their lives are shaped by broader social and historical processes and how their agency, in turn, effects these processes. By triangulating these three registers, Mills concluded, 'classical social analysis' produced an idiom of understanding so rich and compelling that it provided the 'common denominator' for the modern social sciences. Examples of this form of 'concretely embedded research' are many, ranging from Michael Mann's (1986) sweeping account of world historical development to IR studies of the global genesis of the modern states-system (Hobson, 2004). These accounts are sensitive to historical particularity and complexity, while retaining a social scientific commitment to 'systematic inquiry designed to produce factual knowledge' (Jackson, 2010). As such, they are exemplars of what we might call 'rich parsimony'. Importantly, this research is rooted in concern not just for the logical ordering of historical events, but with how intuition, imagination and judgement play major roles in deriving analytical narratives. In short, ideal-typification represents a 'science of actuality' (*Wirklichkeitswissenschaft*) which sees history and social science as inexorably conjoined.

Beyond the eternal divide

Ideal-typification enables a form of research far removed from the siren songs of history as either 'scripture' or 'butterfly'. As such, alongside the other tools outlined in this essay, it serves as a vibrant site of connection between history and social science. To date, both sides of the imaginary, but powerfully constructed, 'eternal divide' have been reticent at engaging fully with the other. As a result, a number of unhelpful – at times false – dichotomies have been established, essentialised distinctions that this essay has sought to critique. Although history and social science are necessarily co-implicated in each other, this relationship is often occluded by a focus on secondary differences of method, sensibility and aesthetics. And much of the time, these second-order canards are granted the status of insurmountable differences. If we are to make claims which avoid such a reliance on false binaries, we require tools of mediation between abstractions and empirics, and approaches which consciously incorporate both the sociological imagination (Mills, 1959) and the historian's craft (Bloch, 1964). This essay has taken a first cut at this task via a focus on context,

eventfulness, narrative and ideal-typification. Such an exercise is not meant to be exhaustive and, no doubt, many other fertile points of contact exist.[7] But whichever tools are employed, it is clear that the relationship between social science and history is not one of essentialised incommensurability, but rich in creative possibilities. Much of the time, social scientists and historians converge in terms of their modes of enquiry and tools of explanation, albeit while simultaneously appearing to hide this synergy.

The argument here, therefore, is that history and social science should not be considered as autonomous enterprises separated by virtue of distinct orientations, approaches and subject matters, but as a common enterprise. By focusing on events, by ordering and sequencing these events into intelligible narratives, recognising how people act within certain contexts, contexts that can only be discerned from the vantage points of researchers' historically situated positions, history does not abhor social science – rather, it requires it. As such, the choice is not one between a historical enterprise which can do with or without theory, but acceptance of the fact that history *is* a social science. It is an approach which emplots, narrates and analyses causal stories. In this way, history takes its place as an indispensable part of the panoply of social sciences just as social science appears as one amongst many story-telling enterprises. Both are necessarily implicated in each other, something made clear by a focus on context, eventfulness, narrative and ideal-typification. For the IR researcher, there are at least two steps which follow from this focus on shared ground: first, awareness of the way in which diverse theoretical schools interpret, assess and adjudicate a particular historical subject matter; and second, maintaining an eye for variance, conflict and heterogeneous opinion at least as much as convergence, clusters and patterns of received wisdom (Lustick, 1996). In short, researchers should look to history in order to be wrong, to look for interpretations, surprises and contradictions which do not fit with prevailing theoretical explanations (Trachtenberg, 2006). One method of potential utility here is the use of counterfactuals. As Ned Lebow (2010) points out, counterfactual work is useful in its

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[7] Another possibility, for example, is a genealogical approach most commonly associated with Michel Foucault and, in IR, with Jens Bartleson (1995). Bartleson's 'episodic narrative' weaves together 'families of statements' about sovereignty in order to unravel the ways in which taken-for-granted notions of sovereignty have, in turn, been premised on historical traditions, concepts and practices. These 'systems of discourses' serve as 'semi-permeable membranes' between the past, present and future. As should be obvious, such an approach bears a close resemblance to the type of research favoured in this piece.

capacity for researchers to go 'beyond themselves', breaking the spell of tendencies to see history as closed rather than open, and in Humean rather than nonlinear terms.

Certainly, counterfactual readings serve as powerful forms of demystification, helping to remove forms of cognitive bias which tend to see history as *post-factum* determinant rather than as context-bound narrative. And moving away from this need for 'historical closure' – our apparent requirement for order and predictability – serves to empower researchers by realising the limits of our claims about the social world. Perhaps, then, what is required is a degree of humility about what we can know, an understanding that theoretical explanations are always partial, provisional and contained within tightly bound historical domains. Big events don't require big causes – rather history is best seen as a conjuncture of chance, agency and confluence which comes together in particular sequences which, in turn, can be usefully and powerfully emplotted (Lebow, 2010). The results of such an exercise would not, therefore, seek either total explanation nor the maintenance of a Maginot Line between history and IR, but the generation of 'analytical narratives' which accept that temporality is social, events are theorisable, and that narrativity is an indispensable part to causal stories, best captured by varieties of ideal-typical research. History does not belong to a single theoretical approach in IR: history comes in plural modes rather than in singular form. Indeed, history is, in many ways, the lowest common denominator of theoretical approaches within the discipline. As such, it is particularly important to establish precisely what we mean by 'history in IR' – the scholar's choice of historical sensibility is, in turn, constitutive of the way in which they theorise the international realm. Accordingly, if we are all historians, at least on some level, we are differentiated not simply by our choice of theory but also by our selection of a particular historical mode of explanation. And in developing this selection, it should become clear that both social science and history form part of a single intellectual journey, one in which both are permanently in view and in which neither serves as the under-labourer – or coloniser – of the other.

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