

# **Historical Consciousness in International Relations Theory: A Hidden Disciplinary Dialogue**

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## Abstract

This paper explores the disciplinary dialogue between history and IR theory, which despite the “second great debate” remains a lively dialogue as shown by the recent “historical turn” and the continuing use of historically rich case studies to construct and test IR theory. The paper takes a novel approach for studying this dialogue by examining the importance of historical consciousness to theory-building and knowledge production in IR. Historical consciousness is defined as the understanding of the temporality of historical experience, that is how past, present and future are thought to be connected for the sake of producing historical knowledge. Existing methodological and epistemological discussions of the relationship between history and IR overlook this dimension of the study of history by focusing instead on how to do history in IR and criticizing the (frequent) misuse of the historical record. To uncover this hidden dimension of the disciplinary dialogue between history and IR, the paper first examines the canon of European history from antiquity to identify three genres of historical consciousness in historical writing: history as teacher, history as narrative, history as representation. These are then contrasted with three genres of historical consciousness present in IR theory’s attempt to understand change in the international system: lessons of history (the English School, liberal Institutionalism), escape from history (democratic peace and neo-functionalism) and revenge of history (classical realism and structural realism). In this way, the paper argues that competing genres of historical consciousness, based on different notions of temporality, provide a critical structure for how processes of change are theorized in IR. This conclusion not only serves to clarify

the distinction between the two disciplines but also reveals how IR theory itself is steeped in implicit historical consciousness.

## **1. Introduction**

The origins of international relations (IR) as a discipline are deeply intertwined with historical reflection. So much so that a founding moment in the disciplinary development of IR – the so-called “second great debate” (Bull, 1966; Hobden 2002; Kratochwil, 2006) – was a contest over whether to establish a clearer separation with the discipline of history (and to a lesser extent political philosophy), by basing IR on social scientific methods and epistemology. The contemporary dominance of positivism in IR nonetheless coincides with a renewed attention to the intellectual linkages between history and IR theory (Smith, 1999; Elman and Elman, 2001; Puchala, 2003; Ferguson and Mansbach, 2008). The continuation of this disciplinary dialogue is not just a response to the growing trend in favour of post-positivist epistemology but also a consequence of the enduring use of historically rich case studies to construct and test IR theory (Ikenberry, 2000; Mearsheimer, 2001; Deudney, 2007; Lebow, 2008; Nexon, 2009).

In this sense, the “second great debate” about the relationship between historical understanding and social science positivism in IR certainly continues, meaning that the relationship between the two disciplines is still contested. Most recently, the epistemological and methodological affinities between IR and history have been extensively scrutinized with the principal aim of clarifying the different ways of “doing history” in IR (Hobson and Lawson, 2008; cf. Vaughan-Williams, 2005) and the issues this gives rise to for theory-building and theory-testing (Elman and Elman, 2001, 2008). This includes a particular concern with the possible “misuse” of history based on selection bias and limited interactions with primary sources (Hall and Kratochwil, 1993; Shroeder, 1994; Lieshout et al., 2004; cf. Lustick, 1996). However, despite the historiographical sophistication of this body of scholarship, little attention has been devoted to understanding how historical knowledge itself is shaped by a prior understanding of the temporality of historical experience, how this might affect the use of history in international relations and point to important disciplinary distinctions. The aim of this paper is thus to contribute to this disciplinary dialogue by discussing the nature of historical consciousness both in history as well as IR theory. Hitherto, IR scholars have not only overlooked the hidden

presence of historical consciousness within the discipline of history but also its key role in the formation of IR theory.

Acquiring self-understanding is predicated on negotiating one's relationship with the social world, making it an inherently inter-subjective experience. Thus self-knowledge, or consciousness, is considered crucial in disciplines ranging from social theory (Taylor, 1992) to moral philosophy (Smith, 1984). However, this notion of consciousness – the negotiation between subject and experience – is also fundamental to historical understanding for as Kratochwil explains history 'is the encounter with the self' (Kratochwil, 2006: 15). This gives rise to the phenomenon classified here as "historical consciousness": the student of history's awareness and understanding of the temporality of historical experience, the acknowledged consciousness of living in history. This is, therefore, a subjectivity or situatedness based on defining the nature of the relationship between past, present and future, which profoundly influences the production of historical knowledge since historians are highly conscious of how the history they write is itself part of the fabric of the temporality they experience. Consequently, it is necessary, firstly, to show how different genres of historical consciousness are a crucial component of Western historiography precisely because scholars writing in this tradition have not shared a single notion of temporality. This survey serves as a prelude to a second discussion concerning how the use of history in IR scholarship is dependent on evaluating the role historical consciousness also plays in IR theory, especially the latter's attempts to theorize processes of change in international politics – perhaps the core feature of competing IR theories.

In order to explore the first problem, the paper identifies the presence of three different genres of historical consciousness in the canonical work of European historians since antiquity: history as teacher, history as narrative, history as representation. In addition, given the obvious analogy with the "history as data set" problem within international relations (Thorne, 1983; McCourt, *forthcoming*), the article also briefly address the short-lived attempt by the nineteenth-century German historian Leopold van Ranke and followers such as the British historian Lord Acton to define historical writing as the exact exposition of *wie es eigentlich gewesen ist* [how it actually happened/ the past as it once was] (Iggers, 1968). The reconstructive interpretation of the historian's craft offered here thus does not seek to explain its disciplinary singularities, notably its methods or subdisciplines. Rather, it serves to provide a contrast between the role played by historical consciousness in the writing of history and how historical consciousness appears in the work of IR scholars, especially in the context of theoretical debates over

processes of change in the international system. Moreover, the analysis of different genres of historical consciousness should not be confused with different stylistic or metanarrative approaches to the writing of history such as tragedy, comedy or farce (White, 1975). Although the latter may bear a certain superficial resemblance to different genres of historical consciousness, the argument of this article rests first of all on distinguishing the different ways students of history situate the production and use of historical knowledge over time.

Since the existence and nature of different forms of historical consciousness in the study of history have so far not been problematized in IR scholarship it is also necessary to examine whether they are replicated there. As a strategy to tackle what is a potentially vast subject, the article focuses on the dominant theoretical traditions of mainstream IR, scrutinizing their engagement with and use of the historical record of inter-state relations. In particular, by focusing on their attempts to draw on the past when seeking to devise generalizable theories about processes of change in IR, the analysis examines the extent to which these different theories display a conscious reflection about temporality – the relationship between past, present and future. The theories of IR examined include classical and structural realism, the English school, liberal institutionalism, democratic peace and neo-functionalism. Theories that do not theorize about the evolution of IR over time but are rather in essence methodological and epistemological critiques of positivism, such as feminism (Steans, 2008), constructivism (Kratochwil, 2008) or relationism (Jackson and Nexon, 1999), are thus not included.<sup>1</sup>

Analyzed according to their notion of temporality, IR theories fit into three genres of historical consciousness: lessons of history, escape from history, and revenge of history. This division reflects the extent to which a particular theory conceives of inter-state relations as respectively susceptible to analysis and improvement through lesson learning, marked at a point in time by a fundamental caesura, or immutably predisposed to certain pathological tendencies inherent to individuals or the state. In this way, the paper seeks to show not only how IR theory is grounded in competing genres of historical consciousness largely different to those found in history. It also makes the claim that the often hidden disciplinary dialogue between history and IR is also useful way of mapping differences between theoretical perspectives and their associated predictions about processes of change in international politics. Ultimately, therefore, it appears that a better understanding of the relationship between international relations and history depends on understanding the differing presence of historical consciousness in both

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<sup>1</sup> Of course, such theories have also inspired positivist scholarship designed to test hypotheses about international politics, see for instance Carpenter (2003).

disciplines and how the fault lines within IR theory debates can be understood in terms of competing genres of historical consciousness.

## 2. Genres of Historical Consciousness in Historical Writing

Historical writing obviously has a hugely complex historiography – the latter is itself a significant sub-discipline of history that dates back at least to Lorenzo Valla's fifteenth-century exposure of the spurious nature of the donation of Constantine. Attempts to assign particular significance to different types of histories are controversial because of the absence of consensus over what constitutes (if anything) the canon of European historical writing (Breisach, 1983; Kelley, 1991). In addition, the historians' craft of using sources by definition implies 'a theory of possible history so that the sources might be brought to speak at all' (Koselleck, 1985: 186). Thus not only are there multiple forms of historical writing, there are also myriad theories of historical processes.

However, rather than inquiring into types of historical writing and their concomitant theories about history, the overarching purpose of this paper is to explore the notion of the temporality of historical experience as found in both history and international relations. When viewed in this light, it becomes somewhat easier to provide a taxonomy of the genres of historical consciousness that pervade the works of historians throughout the ages. Within this framework for example, the chronicle, or annalistic approach to history, is considered devoid of historical consciousness as it contains no self-conscious temporal situatedness as a rationale for the inclusion or exclusion of information to record. By contrast, the venerable Bede began his eighth-century *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* with a prefatory dedication to the Northumbrian King Ceolwulf in which he explained that

For if history relates good things of good men, the attentive hearer is excited to imitate that which is good; or if it mentions evil things of wicked persons, nevertheless the religious and pious hearer or reader, shunning that which is hurtful and perverse, is the more earnestly excited to perform those things which he knows to be good, and worthy of God (Bede, 2005: 1).

In this way, Bede was locating his work firmly in the already distinguished lineage of a particular genre of historical consciousness: *history as teacher*.

*History as Teacher*

This genre situates historical knowledge in terms of its pedagogical, moral and practical use for the present and future. This particular form of historical consciousness sees the past as containing a source of enduring inspiration and example (positive and negative) that needs to be recorded and transmitted to posterity in the hope of emulation and enhanced self-knowledge. This kind of historical record is thus self-consciously considered immortal or “an everlasting possession” as Thucydides described his *The Peloponnesian War*.

Cicero rendered this pedagogical approach as *historia magistra vitae* – history as the teacher of life. In the same vein, Plutarch sought to show how the moral character of the individual impinged upon the vicissitudes of human fortune and shaped the course of history in his (now incomplete) *Lives of the Noble Greeks and Romans* (circa 75 A.D.). Despite the importance of the classical world’s contribution to this genre it is by no means an inherently secular tradition. A similar form of historical consciousness linking together the past for the benefit of the present and future can be found in the New Testament (contemporaneous with Plutarch’s *Lives*), particularly the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles that tell the story of Jesus and his disciples to proselytize for a new church in a politically hostile climate. Indeed, this element of the Christian tradition is built upon the notion of history as teacher since the possibility of redemption depends on learning the lesson of Jesus’ death for the sake of bringing deliverance from sin to present and future believers. Nevertheless, the history as teacher genre must be distinguished from hagiography in the proper sense of the history of the saints, as the latter, despite its overt ambitions to educate believers in the correct practice of the faith (the *imitanda*), concentrates on retelling what cannot by definition be actually emulated or put into practice: awe-inspiring miraculous acts, including those from beyond the grave (the *admiranda*) (Hamer and Russell, 2006). Consequently, hagiography does not display the understanding of temporality – based on how past, present and future are connected – defined here as historical consciousness.

However, the history as teacher genre of historical consciousness continues to this day to leave its mark on historical writing. The lives of great individuals continue to be a source of inspiration containing moral and political lessons of leadership and decision-making applicable today, as with James McPherson’s study *Lincoln and the Second American Revolution* (1990). This trope is not, though, confined to recounting the story of great lives for the edification and improvement of generations present and future. A more disembodied take on this form of historical consciousness examines the shifting fortunes of nation-states, as captured in Paul Kennedy’s *Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (1989) with its aim of educating readers about the

factors that determine the fortunes of great powers and which can illuminate America's predicament as sole superpower in the late twentieth century. Here again there is a classical origin to this approach of focusing on what the nations and regimes of the past can teach us about cycles of success and failure in politics (Polybius, 1962; Machiavelli, 1998).

This emphasis on the cyclicity of events or on the enduring need to learn moral and political lessons through historical example shows why the history as teacher genre of historical consciousness should not be confused with the philosophy of history tradition. The latter seeks not to find appropriate lessons for current circumstances but to interpret the purpose or teleology of historical development as manifested over a swathe of time. Perhaps most famously, this teleological interpretation was captured by Marx and Engels' declaration in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) that "the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle". It has remained in common currency thanks to Fukuyama's claim that the demise of the Cold War was tantamount to the end of history given the supposedly unassailable triumph of liberal democratic values (Fukuyama, 1992). This teleological tradition means looking at historical development 'from an absolute point beyond time' (Kratochwil, 2006: 10) since it precludes considering the driving force behind historical development as itself a historically contingent interpretation. The other distinguishing feature of this tradition is that writers of philosophy of history have largely been philosophers (Kant, Hegel, Croce, Collingwood, Althusser) – or even international relations theorists (Carr, 1945; Wendt, 2003) – rather than traditional scholars of history. This explains why, for present purposes, philosophy of history is not treated as a genre of historical consciousness here even if it has been a guiding inspiration behind historical scholarship as with Marxist historians interpreting, for instance, the English Civil War (Hill, 1940) and the rise of feudalism (Anderson, 1974) as the product of the class conflict that supposedly drives history.

### *History as Narrative*

Whereas the history as teacher tradition seeks to render the past meaningful to aid in understanding the present and future predicament of individuals and states alike, the aim of the history as narrative genre is principally to overcome the distance and separation between past and present. As suggested by the emphasis on narration, this form of historical writing tries to make the past accessible by recounting events in a story-like fashion that immerses the reader

in the vivid minutiae of detail.<sup>2</sup> The result is a form of historical consciousness that believes the stories of the past are, with the appropriate skill of retelling, comprehensible in themselves to the present. This means the historical record does not have to be framed as a self-conscious morality play and implies that the same events can be retold with a different narrative in the future as new information comes to light or a new perspective is added. Most importantly, according to this form of historical consciousness, the future is not considered to be at the mercy of how contemporaries appreciate and apply the significant lessons of history or else misconstrue or even misuse the symbols and stories of the past – the latter being, as shown below, a concern pertinent to history as representation.

Thomas Carlyle is a supreme exemplar of this narrative genre, as the detail provided for his account of Marie-Antoinette's execution demonstrates:

At eleven, Marie-Antoinette was brought out. She had on an undress of *piqué blanc*: she was led to the place of execution, in the same manner as an ordinary criminal; bound, on a Cart; accompanied by a Constitutional Priest in Lay dress; escorted by numerous detachments of infantry and cavalry ... On reaching the Place de la Révolution, her looks turned towards the *Jardin National*, whilom Tuileries; her face at that moment gave signs of lively emotion. She mounted the Scaffold with courage enough; at a quarter past Twelve, her head fell; the Executioner showed it to the people, amid universal long-continued cries of *Vive la République* (1837, vol. 3: 273).

The eye-witness effect stands in sharp contrast with Edmund Burke's superimposition of an astringent moral reading of the fate of the same tragic figure in accordance with the history as teacher genre. For Burke – who conceived of history as a 'great volume for our instruction' (1773: 221) – the death of the last French queen was indicative of something much broader and more repugnant than a moving tale of an unjust killing, namely that

Never, never more, shall we behold that generous loyalty to rank and sex, that proud submission, that dignified obedience, that subordination of the heart, which kept alive, even in servitude itself, the spirit of an exalted freedom! It is gone, that sensibility of principle, that chastity of honor, which felt a stain like a wound, which inspired courage whilst it mitigated ferocity, which ennobled whatever it touched, and under which vice itself lost half its evil, by losing all its grossness. (Burke, 1793)

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<sup>2</sup> Here the notion of history as narrative does not therefore entail treating narrative as a species of causal explanation as Suganami (1999) has advocated in IR.

Of course, the history as narrative genre does not preclude the ability to draw lessons from the many tragedies of fate and character littering the historical record, as Carlyle (1866) himself advocated in his lectures on heroes and hero-worship. However, the narrative tradition is based on a wager that the power of the story itself – the characters, the pathos, the denouement etc – triumphs over any formulaic message about relevance or moral guidance as with Simon Schama's exhilarating retelling of the French Revolution (Schama, 1989). Indeed, the heyday of narrative historical writing in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries coincides, at least in the Anglophone world, with the triumph of the historical novel, most associated with Walter Scott. The academic reaction to the former – not unrelated to the taint of an increasingly close relation to fiction – was to place a new disciplinary emphasis on rigour and scientific empiricism, which would also serve to mark out historical study proper from the philosophy of history. This stance is now mostly often connected with the German scholar Leopold von Ranke and his attempt to lead the professionalization of the academic study of history based on primary documents, especially those recording the diplomatic relations of states (Novick, 1988). But amongst von Ranke's followers in Britain it is clear that the desire to explain with greater certainty the major events of history served a purpose other than just to designate the rules for the proper professional study of history.

As Sir John Seeley, the nineteenth-century historian after whom Cambridge University's history library is named, explained 'history fades into mere literature when it loses sight of its relation to practical politics' (quoted in Wormell, 1980: 94). This same point was underscored by Lord Acton, named the first Regius Professor of Modern History at Cambridge in 1895 and tasked with editing the Cambridge Modern History – the supposedly definitive record of how the modern world had taken form based on new sources and methods. In his inaugural lecture, Acton argued that 'the knowledge of the past, the record of truths revealed by experience is eminently practical, as an instrument of action and a power that goes to the making of the future' (1906: 2). Ultimately, this modernized version of the history as teacher genre of historical consciousness saw the accurate study of the past as an inspiration for buttressing moral principles necessary in the turbulent present to avoid an amoral future and even contribute to European imperial aggrandizement (Seeley, 1922).

### *History as Representation*

Yet neither history as narrative nor Acton's project of a reinvented history as teacher genre typifies the contemporary academic discipline of history. Instead, a third genre of

historical consciousness prevails. The genre defined here as history as representation shares the tendency of history as narrative to treat the historical record as a palimpsest, where different meanings and portrayals can be superimposed on the same events. But what matters for history as representation is not the power of the story and the craft of its telling. Rather, this way of thinking about history challenges the present's ability to represent the past by seeking to uncover the signs, symbols and even language that enable us to make sense of the past in its own terms as well as how these same elements have been used to represent a particular version of the past. This implies that the act of representing the past is in itself an inevitably political act whose genealogy needs to be laid bare.

In comparison with history as teacher and history as narrative, therefore, history as representation fundamentally problematizes the present's ability to understand the past – not in terms of the amount and quality of sources, as with Ranke and Acton, but because of the changing as well as contested meaning and use of language, concepts and symbols. As a result, the ambition of this genre of historical consciousness is, unlike history as teacher, not to shape or even control the future. In this sense, to make an analogy with Cox's (1996) categorization of approaches to IR, it is an essentially critical rather than problem-solving approach to the study of history. That is, history as representation is critical about the contemporary misunderstanding and misuse of the past; if there are lessons to be learned from the past they are lessons about how easy it is to misrepresent the past (Smith, 1993).

An early classic in this genre is undoubtedly Alexis de Tocqueville's *The Ancien Regime and the Revolution* (1856). Tocqueville's critical enterprise in this study was to debunk the prevailing assumption that the French Revolution overturned the entire structure of political authority in France by placing popular sovereignty in the stead of feudalism and monarchy. Indeed, this notion of a revolutionary break was very much at the heart of political debate throughout Tocqueville's lifetime, serving to polarize opinion between conservative reactionaries and defenders of an idealized republican movement. Yet this whole debate rested on a historical mistake, he argued. This was the result of an inability to understand the profoundly centralizing tendencies of the last century of monarchical rule; a process that ironically provided a template for the revolutionaries who ostensibly sought to destroy the old order. Thus the claim that the revolution reshaped political authority by rooting out the old structures was precisely based, according to Tocqueville, on a misrepresentation of that old order. This error needed to be put right, for the sake of rescuing French politics from a self-destructive fallacy, by drawing

on previously unexamined and unheralded features of relations between local and central authority as expressed in various provincial administrative archives.

To challenge misconceptions of the historical record, a high degree of magnification is needed; hence the recurring element of history as representation is a focus on the micro-level of historical actors. A modern classic of this genre is Emmanuel Le Roy-Ladurie's study *Montaillou* (1975). This work used archival inquisition documents about the Cathar heresy to reconstruct a thirty-year period in the life of a medieval village in south-west France to demonstrate – against the prevailing view of a benighted medievalism and intolerant Catholicism – the complexity of how its inhabitants understood and experienced the fundamental aspects of daily life, religious experience and family relations. The micro-level of magnification characteristic of much history as representation need not be confined to individuals, as is evidenced by Pauline Maier's *American Scripture* (1997), a history of the American Declaration of Independence. The object of this work typifies the critical and reconstructive nature of the history as representation genre: to re-locate this document in the proper context of its authorship which has become obscured by a naïve form of veneration in the contemporary era.

This broad overview of the three genres of historical consciousness found in historical writing has concentrated on explaining how history as teacher, history as narrative and history as representation understand the question of temporality or the relationship between past, present and future and how this affects self-understanding about the purpose of producing historical knowledge. The first genre seeks to uncover the lessons of the past for the sake of improving present and future conduct; the second aims to provide a narrative that resonates unproblematically with the present but which may be told differently in the future; the third and final genre questions the ability to understand, let alone use, the past for present purposes, preferring instead to show the difficulties of understanding the past in its own terms. Turning now to historical consciousness as it is present in IR, the following section uncovers the implicit presence of differing genres of historical consciousness as found in theoretical studies of the early period of European integration. In particular, I argue that different perspectives on the significance and future progress of the integration project reflected contrasting genres of historical consciousness.

### **3. Genres of Historical Consciousness in IR**

This section examines different theories of IR and how their understanding of processes of change in international politics reflects three competing genres of historical consciousness:

lessons of history, escape from history and revenge of history. All three relate again to the notion of temporality as also reflected in the implicit purpose of producing theories – which fundamentally draw on the historical record – about the nature of international politics, particularly processes of change. The first genre, lessons of history, is present in English School theory as well as liberal institutionalism and claims that theorizing international relations requires, to varying degrees, the assimilation of certain historical lessons about inter-state relations. In this fashion, the aim of such theories is to engage with history in order to draw the correct lessons that help contribute to understanding the present and – to the extent that lessons can be applied in practice – designing the future, as well as warning against false prophets of change who misunderstand history. The second genre, escape from history, looks at the past and posits the existence of a fundamental caesura regarding the avoidance of violent power politics, either in the present or at some undetermined point in the future. This is the form of historical consciousness found in democratic peace theory and the neo-functionalist theory of regional (European) integration; in both, the implicit aim of engaging with history is to reveal the existence of this caesura, one that it is expected will be further reinforced in the future. Finally, revenge of history is a genre of historical consciousness that identifies something immutable in inter-state relations, which means historical knowledge is by definition atemporal. Instead of offering lessons for institution-building or social learning, historical understanding is there to buttress a critique of claims that the present and future can be improved through lesson learning or that there ever can be a fundamental caesura between the known past as compared with the present or future. This is the genre contained in both classical and structural realism.

### *Lessons of History*

Hedley Bull chastised positivist scholars for their ‘lack of any sense of inquiry into international politics as a continuing tradition to which they are the latest recruits’ (1966: 375-6). The English School approach he pioneered sought instead to use the historical record to demonstrate that theorizing about relations between states is dependent on recognizing fundamental lessons about the actual historical practices undertaken by actors within IR. History thus provides the empirical material for understanding the function and evolution of what he saw as the fundamental institutions constituting an international society: the balance of power, international law, diplomacy, war, and the concert of great powers (Bull, 1977: 56-7). It is precisely the role of these institutions that he argued could not be grasped by reducing international politics to a behavioural model of interactions in the vain hope – embodied in the work of Morton Kaplan – of providing probabilistic rules about the evolution of international

politics (Bull, 1966: 371-2). This kind of a-historical modelling, whose causal mechanisms explicitly fail to cover particular periods of international politics, contravened the historical consciousness present in the work of Bull and other English School scholars: the notion that their method for analyzing history can provide certain lessons for the future.

Concerned primarily with the problem of how order is maintained at the international level between competitive and diffident sovereign states, the English School's treatment of history allows for an understanding of how to extend the element of international society that provides the basis for order between sovereign states (Bull, 1977: 315). Of course, such knowledge is by definition historically situated as notably the product of the transition from a European to a global international order based on the spread of the sovereign state, a form of political organization once restricted to Europe alone (Bull, 2000; Watson, 2009). In this way, the lessons of history genre of historical consciousness in IR theory accepts that the future evolution of international politics – as suggested by the English School's analytical category of world society – is not beholden to current conditions. Indeed, the awareness of the historicity behind the ideal-type of "international society" is only possible through a lessons-based engagement with the historical record. The lessons of history provided by English School theory are not only positive in the sense of appeals, for the sake of international order, to strengthen the institution of diplomacy or extend membership of the concert of great powers to new states, In addition, this form of historical consciousness allowed Bull to mount a powerful critique of those who claimed the sovereign state's dominant role was deleterious to international order. There the lesson of history was 'the positive functions that the state and the states-system have fulfilled in relation to world order' (Bull, 1979: 115), which makes possible the fundamental claim that without these two 'there would be no world order at all' (*ibid.*, 123).

A shared concern with world order, particularly in the form of inter-state cooperation that confounds neo-realism's obsession with relative gains and the security dilemma, permeates liberal institutionalism. This branch of IR theory similarly evinces the lessons of history genre of historical consciousness because of its use of history to theorize possibilities for inter-state cooperation. According to this theoretical perspective, the history of institutions (supranational such as the UN, EU or WTO as well as transnational, such as NGOs or MNCs) reveals examples of why and under what conditions states cooperate. Liberal institutionalism thus uses the historical record to provide positive lessons about successful cooperation yielding absolute or joint gains (Ikenberry, 2001; cf. Keohane and Martin, 1995) or, conversely, negative lessons

of failed or flawed institutional cooperation resulting in defection or, more likely, policy blockage based on states' entrenched preference for relative gains (Mastanduno, 1991; Snidal, 1991).

Successful cooperation in a stable world order, according to Ikenberry (2000), is based on the creation, after major inter-state conflict, of institutions to provide for the strategic restraint of the most powerful state. Although these institutions are attempts to regulate world order in a way that favours the victor, the historical record suggests institutions' ability to deliver a stable order is based on the credibility of strategic restraint, namely by preventing the arbitrary exercise of power by dominant actors. Here the historical record invoked by Ikenberry suggests these institutions, especially post-1945 ones created under the leadership of a democracy, the US, such as the UN, NATO and the WTO, are singularly better able to deliver order as compared with earlier balance of power provisions (*ibid.*). These institutions have been successful precisely because they achieve quasi-constitutional restraints on the dominant state in the international system, which in turn is a transparent democratic state that thereby provides other countries with 'some measure of assurance that American policy [will] be steady and predictable' (*ibid.*, 246). Consequently, participants in this web of US-led institutional arrangements are severely constrained from pursuing an alternative order such as balancing or the establishment of competing institutions (*ibid.*, 253). In this way, the liberal institutionalist lesson of history is clear for today: incorporating new actors into a stable global order is dependent on the US adhering to its self-binding commitments or even creating novel institutions in this same vein.

Liberal institutionalism also provides an account of when international institutions fail to have the desired effect of (sufficiently) taming state selfishness and enabling stable cooperation. Here the lesson of history is that international institutions are most successful when they act as autonomous agents capable of changing state preferences, as in the EU example, rather than as merely oversight mechanisms for binding rules, for instance the UN (Jervis, 1999). Moreover, institutionalist theory also suggests that states' encounter with today's multiplicity of international institutions gives rise to problems of selection and creation that establishes a status quo bias (Jupille and Snidal, 2005). This bias entrenches imperfect cooperation in the absence of high stakes and long time horizons as well as hegemonic leadership (*ibid.*) In this way, liberal institutionalism adopts a genre of historical consciousness that does not necessarily offer positive lessons for rational institutional design. Consequently, this branch of IR theory also identifies negative lessons from history that reveal historical shortcomings in institutionalised cooperation. As with the English School, therefore, the lessons of history are both positive and

negative. Overall, theoretical work across this genre assumes a continuity in the nature of the modern international system as defined by state sovereignty – this is what makes historical lessons still applicable today and in the future. Similarly, history will not have its revenge by laying waste to the attempt to use these lessons for instruction about improving the conduct of international relations. This is because the historical consciousness underlying both the English School and liberal institutionalism presupposes that adopting historical lessons enables the taming of certain egregious aberrations of the sovereign state system as well as cautioning against unwise radical new reforms.

### *Escape from History*

As opposed to the lessons of history genre, the form of historical consciousness defined here as “escape from history” does not believe that the historical record is there to offer incremental empirical lessons for international institutional design, improved inter-state behaviour or for not pursuing unwise new departures. Rather, the escape from history genre theorizes from history in order to identify a fundamental caesura in the history of international relations that makes the present very much unlike the past. In this way of thinking, what separates the past from the present or future is the ability to transcend violent inter-state conflict at least within a subset of certain states. From this perspective, the history of international relations is there to reveal the presence of this caesura and explain its causes. In this new political context, the old lessons are no longer applicable precisely because of a new ability to establish an order that can triumph over the imperfections caused by the division of the globe into sovereign states – an order from which the possibility of backsliding is also discounted. Two IR theories fit into this category: democratic peace theory and neo-functionalism. The first proclaims the inherent potential for a global escape from history, whilst the original globalist ambitions of the second have (in the face of the paucity of regional integration worldwide) been reduced to explaining the seemingly sui generis phenomenon of European political integration.

Democratic peace theory is a highly contested paradigm which contends that liberal democratic states have a unique ability to construct enduringly peaceful relations amongst one another (Doyle, 1983; Lipson, 2003; Levy and Razin, 2004). In the conceptual language of Kenneth Waltz, this is a “second image” theory that identifies various features of the domestic political system to explain the nature of the resulting peaceful international relations between democratic states. These features include constitutional checks on executive power, electoral checks on aggressive politicians, political transparency and openness that enable credible

commitments to be made to other states as well as the shared value of resolving disputes through dialogue and negotiation. Moreover, given their transparency and checking mechanisms, domestic democratic systems are more amenable to the creation of institutions for pacific inter-state cooperation that become a mutually reinforcing mechanism for international peace (Lipson, 2003).

All these explanatory elements have of course been subject to criticism based on the empirical record of state belligerence in the post-Westphalian era, which is a minefield of coding and assorted interpretative choices for defining democracy and war (Davis, 2005: 77). In addition, the record of peace between democratic dyads over time is statistically questionable when tested against the null hypothesis (Spiro, 1994), whilst democratizing countries have statistically been shown to be more belligerent than authoritarian ones (Mansfield and Snyder, 2005). However, the purpose here is only to explain the specific genre of historical consciousness present in democratic peace theory. This becomes apparent in the extent to which this theory of IR suggests that democratic states have succeeded in making an irreversible escape from a seeming intractable cyclical history of violent conflict.

This claim can already be found in Kant, who is traditionally taken as the intellectual progenitor of this theory. Already the title of his famous essay offering a rival international order to balance of power, *Perpetual Peace* [1795], indicates the possibility of effecting a move beyond the pernicious history of inter-state war. Peace in perpetuity, to be accomplished by a treaty between well-ordered republics, thus marks a caesura with flawed balancing and dynastic rivalries between European monarchs. Escaping from history means overturning the state of nature between sovereign states by domestic regime changes rather than submission to a new sovereign authority. Moreover, irenic relations between republics – reconceptualized as democracies today – are essentially a “separate peace” (Doyle, 1983: 226; Lipson, 2003) that leaves untouched relations with non-democracies as well as those between non-democracies. In this way the escape from history is exclusive to a particular set of sovereign states based on their domestic regimes. At the same time, the promise of democratization across the globe carries with it the prediction that eventually the entire international arena could escape from the shared history of inter-state war without thereby becoming a global state (Archibugi, 1995).

Neo-functionalism, for its part, equally posits a dramatic historical rupture but only in the specific case of European international relations – although potentially the new model could spread elsewhere. This rupture is based less upon democratic homogeneity (albeit a necessary

but not sufficient condition) than on the post-war establishment of supranational institutions, starting with the European Coal and Steel Community. This institutional rupture, the theory claims, fundamentally changed the incentive structure of socio-political actors, thereby rendering the historical lessons of realism, international institutions as well as federal union, inapplicable. Instead, the process of European integration is read as a radical new departure that transcends power politics but without recreating a federal sovereign state writ large.

The intellectual background to neo-functionalism was functionalism *tout court*: a radical attempt to rethink the conditions for world peace after the envisaged defeat of totalitarianism (Mitrany, 1943). The essential tenet of this theory was a critique of the shibboleth of sovereignty. According to this interpretation of international politics, pre-1939 collective security failed because the legal restrictions placed on state sovereignty – self-help, in effect – could not change the essential political reality of sovereignty, understood as the bundle of powers exercised by states. Hence the functionalist blueprint for a “working peace system” was intended to undermine the sovereign capacities or capabilities of states by redistributing these powers to executive agencies rather than to rely on a straightjacket of legality to curb sovereign states. Furthermore, the theory assumed that individual loyalty to the state was a product of government performance and hence that a shift in the locus of executive decision-making would inevitably correspond with a transformation in political loyalties.

Ernst Haas’ “neo” variant of functionalism retained many of the key elements of Mitrany’s thought but applied the theoretical framework to an empirical study of the course of European integration as well as to the integrative potential of other regional and international organizations. As defined by Haas, political integration is ‘the process whereby political actors in several distinct national settings are persuaded to shift their loyalties, expectations and political activities toward a new centre, whose institutions possess or demand jurisdiction over the pre-existing national states’ (Haas, 1968: 16). As compared with the rest of the world, Western Europe was in a privileged position to be able to escape from its history since this kind of integration ‘fares best in situations controlled by social groupings representing the rational interests of urban-industrial society, groups seeking to maximize their economic benefits and dividing along regionally homogeneous ideological-political lines’ (Haas, 1961: 378). In these propitious circumstances, the creation of supranational institutions pooling states’ decision-making and executive capacities provided the impetus for an alternative to the nation-state, federalism and also collective security. Moreover, this mechanism did not require a conscious

devotion to a particular political project; history could be escaped by default rather than by design.

“Spillover” was the hypothesis supposed to distinguish the new theory of functionalism, derived from the European experience, from its empirically ungrounded predecessor (Rosamond, 2005). The central claim of spillover is that actors who have created an institutional order for integration but who are unequally pleased with the results will ‘attempt to resolve their dissatisfaction either by resorting to collaboration in another, related sector or by intensifying their commitment to the original sector, or both’ (Schmitter, 1969: 162). This means task expansion will take place ‘without necessarily implying any ideological commitment to the European idea’ (Haas, 1958: 297). Thus, supranationalism, once adopted in a specific policy sector, creates an inherent pressure for further integration thanks simply to institutional design predicated on ‘upgrading of the parties’ common interests’ (Haas, 1961: 368) through an institutionalized mediator – in the case of the European Coal and Steel Community, the High Authority (the predecessor to today’s European Commission). In this way, neo-functionalism claims there is an ‘impetus toward extension [of sectoral integration] to the entire economy even in the absence of specific group demands and their attendant ideologies’ (Haas, 1958: 297).

Needless to say, Haas’ explanation of the dynamics of European integration has been the subject of important criticism in the wake of the empirical reality of EU consolidation (Moravcsik, 1998; Parsons, 2003). Nevertheless, it remains a salient theoretical paradigm in EU studies (Schmitter, 2003) precisely because of the inherent failure of supranational integration to materialize elsewhere, including amongst the global subset of democratic countries, thereby requiring an explanation for the specific peculiarity of the EU’s assumed escape from history.

### *Revenge of History*

The third and final genre of historical consciousness present in IR derives from the skeptical tradition of political philosophy. However, it is articulated differently according to the level of influence of the American behaviouralist revolution in the post World War Two social sciences. The revenge of history genre shares the notion that state sovereignty, which is fundamentally self-centred and ultimately autonomous in executing its own preferences, can always eventually trump institutional cooperation, historical norms, democratic peace or even supranational political integration. Classical realism presents this element of revenge in an axiomatic form whereas structural realism couches it in the idiom of positivist social science.

Stanley Hoffmann, a critic of both neo-functionalism as well the liberal institutionalist perspective on European integration, is a pellucid example of the classical realist form of this genre of historical consciousness. Instead of believing in the immanent supranational logic of neo-functionalism or the appeal of a well-designed federation based on appropriate institutional lessons, he discounted Europe's ability to build a successful alternative form of political authority that could successfully transcend sovereignty and balance of power considerations in international politics. Instead, he argued that history – in the shape of the nation-state – would have its revenge on the attempt to reconfigure drastically the political organization of Europe. This was because either integration would lead to a federation, thereby recreating the nation-state, or else existing nation-states would refuse to continue down the path of ever closer union. Hence hierarchy or anarchy was the binary choice facing the continent; history could neither provide useful lessons for overcoming this dilemma nor could this historical straightjacket be overcome through novel institutional means.

The classical realist notion of the revenge of history provided for a critique of the deliberate strategy of ambiguous integration devoid of political finality. On this reading, the functionalist integration of matters of low politics created an institutional project amenable to states and leaders divided on fundamental questions of high politics (*ibid.*). Chief amongst these were the future international role of the consolidated European polity – whether it would be a security community – but also other vexing questions such as membership and the politics of welfare. Consequently, the functionalist logic was viewed by Hoffmann as a fundamental gamble. The wager was one of 'substituting motion as an end in itself, for agreement on ends' (*ibid.*, p. 883).

In particular, this genre of historical consciousness suggested that the careful ambiguity at the heart of the functionalist middle course of abandoning balance of power without recreating a superstate was, ultimately, untenable. After all, 'one cannot be all things to all people all of the time' (*ibid.*). No political system could escape the overarching question of purpose, that is, what is integration for. Here, lessons of history based on federalism or international cooperation could not explain why a federal European state would not replicate the atavistic instincts of balance of power in global inter-state competition (*ibid.*, p. 909). The absence of a consensus over political finality rendered agreement over the means of integration more precarious. Postponing questions of purpose or endpoint meant shifting debate to the nature of the means. In the wake of the 1966 Empty Chair Crisis, when France had deliberately sabotaged institutional decision-making in order to win concessions, Hoffmann invoked the metaphor of integration as a machine for grinding the powers of national sovereignty to remark

that 'haggling about the kind of grinder one wants is a polite method for appearing to want to keep grinding together, while really disagreeing completely on what one wants to put in and get out' (*ibid.*, p. 889). Unsurprisingly, the realist conclusion about the future of integration after 1966 was pessimistic because it suggested the revenge of state sovereignty. Hoffmann was certain that:

Between the cooperation of existing nations and the breaking in of a new one there is no middle ground. A federation that succeeds becomes a nation; one that fails leads to secession; half-way attempts like supranational functionalism must either snowball or roll back (*ibid.*, p. 910).

Structural realism shares this scepticism about the claim that a set of sovereign states can transcend the rivalry and (potentially violent) contestation inherent to the state system. Hence in the specific case of European integration structural realists argue that this instance of supranational innovation has only been possible either by delegating security concerns to NATO or else by mimicking the state's monopoly of legitimate coercion to carry out its policies (Waltz, 1979). Similarly, the caesura posited by democratic peace is rejected in terms of the need for states to balance only against threat, which is more often associated with non-democracies (Walt, 1985) or else the incredible and unprecedented deterrent capacity of the atomic bomb that precludes direct warfare between nuclear rivals (Waltz, 1990; Mearsheimer, 2001). The latter, of course, is the closest acknowledgement by realists that an escape from history might in principle be possible, albeit one still conducted according to the strictures of balance of power – hence the prediction of an inevitable post-Cold War spread of nuclear balancing (Mearsheimer, 1990).

The reasoning behind structural realism's rejection of the other two genres of historical consciousness stems from the post-war intellectual project it derives from. That project, exemplified by Hans Morgenthau's attempt to develop a theory of power politics, was supposed to thwart the behaviouralist, scientific turn in IR. Morgenthau and his acolytes believed the scientific turn in American political science was merely old wine in new bottles because it shared 'the same utopian drive that characterized the legalist vision of the interwar years' (Guilhot, 2008: 299). As Reinhold Niebuhr put it, the new science of inter-state behaviour was predicated on the assumption that 'men [have] mastery over their historical fate' (*ibid.*, 296). Putting realism on a scientific platform, as Waltz eventually accomplished, was thus a way to transform the discipline by recognizing the inherent limitations behind the conceit of using the social scientific study of international relations to improve relations between states.

Revenge of history thus does not place history or historical methods on a pedestal – explaining why realist theorists have shown such little interest in the contemporary revival of the English School. Rather, the historical record is used to demonstrate the futility of imagining either an escape from history (with the partial exception provided for by the invention of nuclear deterrence) or perfectibility based on lessons from the conduct of states or the institutions they have designed together. In this way, history is treated as proof of the continuity of units' intractable self-interest and fickleness in an anarchic world even though change in the nature of those units and the systems they form is mysteriously inexplicable (Buzan and Little, 1996).

#### 4. Conclusions

IR scholarship today variously treats the historical record as a data set (Layne, 1993; Bueno de Mesquita, 1996), seeks to improve historical sensibilities through better use of sources and contextual understanding (Buzan and Little, 1996), or else wishes to problematize the notion of historical understanding as has occurred in the discipline of history itself (Vaughan-Williams, 2005). However, these existing approaches to the disciplinary dialogue between history and IR ignore the existence of different genres of historical consciousness, based on contrasting notions of temporality, and the critical role these play in the historian's craft of producing historical understanding. By extension the presence of different genres of historical consciousness in IR has also been overlooked. Yet as this paper has shown, different forms of historical consciousness are present across various strands of IR theory. Those identified in this paper – lessons of history, escape from history and revenge of history – largely differ from those present in the discipline of history.

History as teacher, of course, bears a striking resemblance to the lessons of history genre that claims historical understanding is needed, if not to improve the present and future, then at least to avoid mistakes that could make things worse. Such lessons, however, are considered within the English School or liberal institutionalism as historically bounded – contingent on context – rather than eternally valid observations about the nature of man and society characteristic of the *historia magistra vitae* tradition. In particular, lessons of history are above all confined to the historical period of the modern sovereign state.

Moreover, escape from history and revenge of history do not seem to have an equivalent in the historical profession just as history as narrative and history as representation do not have an analogue in IR theory. In fact, escape from history is a genre that would be an anathema to

historical scholarship by virtue of its suggestion that understanding the historical record is no longer necessary for present purposes. Furthermore, revenge of history is also not a genre pertinent to historical study (having excluded philosophy of history as explained in section 2) because it assumes an everlasting structure to the interactions between human societies. Revenge of history thus contravenes the most obvious marker of the disciplinary divide between IR and history, that between those 'who see history as a resource for general explanatory statements about the world and those who see the world itself as a historical phenomenon' (Hill, 1985: 132).

What also emerges from this juxtaposition of genres of historical consciousness across the two disciplines is the extent to which IR theory cannot emancipate itself from historical reflection. Not only can it not do without the data – however problematic its use may be in practice – provided by history, IR theory also is fundamentally dependent on reflection on the nature of temporality. Historical consciousness thus runs through both IR theory and historiography, albeit in different ways. Consequently, exploring the nature of historical consciousness reveals the continuing, yet strangely hidden, disciplinary dialogue, between IR and history. Bringing this dialogue to light has been the purpose of this paper, which suggests the need for further exploration of how the dialogue between IR and history contributes to the production of IR theories about the nature of inter-state interactions.

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