MILLENNIUM
Journal of International Studies

Article

The Big Bangs of IR: The Myths That Your Teachers Still Tell You about 1648 and 1919

Millennium: Journal of International Studies
39(3) 735–758

DOI: 10.1177/0305829811401459
mil.sagepub.com
SAGE

Benjamin de Carvalho
Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), Norway

Halvard Leira
Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), Norway

John M. Hobson
University of Sheffield, UK

Abstract

International relations as we know them emerged through the peace of Westphalia, and the discipline of International Relations emerged in 1919 and developed through a First Great Debate between idealists and realists. These are the established myths of 1648 and 1919. In this article we demonstrate how historical and historiographical scholarship has demolished these myths, but that the myths regardless are pervasive in the current textbooks that are used in teaching future IR scholars. Disciplinary dialogue seems to have failed completely. Based on a detailed reading of the myths and their perpetuation, we discuss the consequences of the discipline's reliance on mythical origins, why there has been so little incorporation of revisionist insight and what possibilities there are for enhancing the dialogue.

Keywords

empire, Eurocentrism, First Great Debate, historiography, historical sociology, IR Theory, textbooks, Westphalia

Corresponding author:
Halvard Leira, NUPI, PB 8159 Dep., N 0033 Oslo, Norway
Email: Halvard.Leira@nupi.no

Introduction

When we were first introduced to the discipline of International Relations (IR) some 15–20 years ago, we were presented with stories of the origin of the discipline's subject matter and development, all of which appeared to be complete and settled as if it was all carved in ancient stone. The years 1648 and 1919 figured centrally then as the formative moments comprising, as it were, the 'big bangs' of the discipline. The small towns of Münster and Osnabrück in Westphalia were presented as the place where the big modern idea of the *sovereign* state and the *anarchic states-system* exploded into being and where the life of empires and other hierarchical political formations ended, while 1919 was presented as the year when the discipline itself exploded into existence with IR scholars becoming for the very first time enthused with theorising about the international as a subject matter in its own right insofar as it constituted an autonomous domain. But in the ensuing years we observed the discipline evolve and, in the process, we encountered a growing number of revisionist attempts that sought to problematise both 1648 and 1919, helping cumulatively, albeit 'sacrilegiously', to recast these canonical dates into little more than myths.

Historical and historiographical discussions began to take root in the discipline and have gained a not inconsiderable momentum of their own, seeking to debunk old myths while offering up alternative, not to mention rich and detailed, accounts of the complex processes of sovereign state formation and the origins of the discipline. But when turning to teaching the discipline ourselves, and having had to make an informed choice over which textbooks students would use as a foundation to knowledge of international politics, we were dismayed to find that most of the historical and historiographical insights of the last two decades have barely been incorporated. And thus the lamentable situation emerges wherein because the mainstream of the discipline has failed to enter into any kind of dialogue with these revisionist works so the myths of yesteryear are perpetuated in the minds of generations of students as they in turn embark upon their journeys into the world of IR.

This is surprising, at the very least, in the context of '1919' given the substantial meta-theoretical and theoretical opening up of the discipline that occurred after 1989, and perplexing given the considerable efforts that have been made by revisionist scholars to establish just such a dialogue. That the dialogue between the mainstream and the revisionist scholars on the emergence of sovereignty seems to be further away than ever is not entirely surprising given the heavily presentist nature of the discipline.[1] But this article will make the case that this lack of dialogue between the left and right hands of the discipline concerning history and historiography is highly detrimental to the discipline and its ability to make sense of the subject matter that it purports to have unique expertise in. Here we shall confront and reconstruct the two central myths or 'mythical big bangs' of the discipline – specifically the 'myth of 1919' and the 'myth of 1648'. The latter

1. For a related argument, see Duncan Bell, 'Writing the World: Disciplinary History and Beyond', *International Affairs* 85, no. 1 (2009): 3–22; and more generally, J.M. Hobson and Stephen Hobden, 'Conclusion: On the Road towards an Historicised World Sociology', in *Historical Sociology of International Relations*, eds S. Hobden and J.M. Hobson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 265–85.

provides a foundational myth about the sovereign state, the anarchic states-system and its underlying principles and institutions, while the former provides a foundational or originary myth about the discipline itself.

The myth of 1648 is detrimental because it provides a distorted view of how the modern sovereign state and states-system came into being – and thus of the naturalness and quality of the basic units that IR takes for granted, the result of which is to produce a rigid statist ontology that is ill-equipped to handle the challenges of global governance, suzerainty, empire and international hierarchy. The myth of 1919 is detrimental in at least four fundamental ways: firstly, because it presents the discipline as an ahistorical extrapolation backwards of current developments and concerns in international relations; secondly, because it allows for a reading of the historiography of the discipline where certain theoretical perspectives win out due to their ability to best explain the so-called 'real world'; thirdly, because it glosses over the Eurocentric and racist foundations of the discipline by providing a Whiggish reading of the discipline's birth on the one hand, while, on the other, providing an empiricist epistemology that is ill-equipped to handle the many-faceted and constantly changing challenges that confront the discipline today; and, fourthly, and following on directly from the third, is the problematic assumption that IR underwent a miraculous virgin birth that occurred almost overnight in 1919 following a gruelling 48-month gestation period on the blood-drenched battlefields of Europe.

In brief, as we explain in this article, these are myths of what we study and how we study it and, as such, it matters a great deal that the discipline continues to perpetuate them. As we shall see, perhaps the two key interrelated lowest common denominators of these two myths is a shared Eurocentric metanarrative on the one hand, and the elision of the role of empire in the theory and practice of IR on the other. In order to build our case the article proceeds in three main parts. The first two sections consider each of the myths in turn, beginning with a brief exploration of how the myths have been repeated in older textbooks before moving on to explore the various revisionist readings and closing with a survey of the state of play in more recent textbooks which reveals how the myths continue to be perpetuated. Finally, we close the article with our Conclusion where we consider why IR has been so reluctant to enter into dialogue with its own history, while also reflecting on the consequences of a continued reliance on these myths and whether it is possible to initiate a proper dialogue that could at least go some way to ameliorate the situation. That said, though, we in no way wish to imply that we have 'got it right', given that this would presuppose a mind–world duality which we do not subscribe to.[2] What we are trying to do, however, is to open up a thinking-space which is necessarily closed down by the traditional myths, while also shedding light on how the myths operate as ahistorical-political constructs.

Before we begin our 'journey of rediscovery', however, a few words are in order concerning the textbooks and our rationale for selecting them. We contend that textbooks are highly important to the general understanding of IR, not only for students, but also for the professionals of the discipline. A predictable consequence of the tendency of the discipline to devolve into increasingly specialised pockets of research is that most active researchers become increasingly reliant on textbook-knowledge of issues that are not

2. Cf. Patrick T. Jackson, *The Conduct of Inquiry in International Relations* (Milton Park: Routledge, 2010).

directly related to their own areas of specialism. While textbooks tend on the whole to go uncited, nevertheless they are vitally important in generating, as it were, a kind of lowest common denominator that usually passes for the 'common sense' of the discipline. And, despite the point that there are indeed some excellent textbooks available, many of which we examine in this article, nevertheless considerations of availability, popularity/frequency of usage, price and name/author-recognition are often the decisive factors in their adoption. The act of choosing appropriate textbooks is also made more difficult by the lack of serious comparative reviews of them in the leading journals in the discipline. And this, in turn, is often a function of the fact that textbooks have an importance that is seriously undervalued and underestimated, with journal articles and monographs weighted far more heavily in promotion rounds as well as research measurement indicators such as the UK's Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) or Research Excellence Framework (REF).

In the absence of any comprehensive and up-to-date data set on the usage of different textbooks, our choice of which ones to review has necessarily been somewhat eclectic. While we have attempted to cover the most widely-used textbooks, we have also tried to provide a broad overview. Our first choice, based on the centrality of the English language and the US and the UK as the sites of some of the leading universities in the discipline, was to focus on English-language textbooks, particularly those used in the US and the UK. For initial guidance we used a combination of the bestseller and relevance lists for International Relations textbooks, found at Amazon.com and Amazon.co.uk.[3] Combining the results provided us with a list of books, most of which are on their third or even higher editions, thereby implying a continuous market for them.[4] Nevertheless, the number of online sales is at best only a rough guide to what students read and what can be found on curricula. To this initial list we thus added books that we have personally encountered as well as those that are known to be either in wide use or held in high esteem. However, because a number of textbooks that were consulted did not engage either with the myth of 1648 or the myth of 1919, for the sake of space we have chosen not to cite them here.

An Ontological Big Bang: The Myth of 1648

The ontology of IR, of course, starts with Westphalia. For IR orthodoxy has conventionally (and conveniently) dated the ontological emergence of the sovereign state, the anarchic states-system and the interrelated end of the suzerain/heteronomous order of the Respublica Christiana to the end of the Thirty Years' War and the Treaties of Westphalia in 1648.[5] But this account has recently been subject to a growing number

3. Because these lists are updated hourly it should be noted that we consulted them at irregular intervals during the autumn and winter of 2010/11.
4. And as far as possible we have consulted the current editions of the selected books. While a comparison of the same books across editions could potentially yield valuable additional insight, we have left this aside for reasons of space.
5. The Peace of Westphalia consisted of two relatively similar treaties: the Treaty of Münster (*Instrumentum Pacis Monasteriensis* or IPM) and the Treaty of Osnabrück (*Instrumentum Pacis Osnabrugensis* or IPO). Sweden participated in the negotiations in Osnabrück and guaranteed the treaty, while a French delegation

of persuasive historical and historiographical revisions, the cumulative result of which is the relegation of the traditional story of the emergence of the statist ontology of IR to the status of a myth. Authors such as Benno Teschke, Stephen Krasner and Andreas Osiander figure prominently among these 'myth-busters', and their attempts have been published in prominent IR journals and by established university presses.[6] The key feature of these revisionist accounts is the argument that neither the modern state nor the anarchic states-system originated in 1648, and that the enshrining or initiation of sovereignty was all but missing within the Treaties of Westphalia, which in fact comprised a constitutional document for the Holy Roman Empire (HRE). From these accounts alone one would anticipate that IR might at least begin to depart from the cosy Westphalian account.[7]

Critically, the 'Westphalian axiom' is so entrenched that one need not look too far to find examples of it. No less a figure than Hans Morgenthau, for instance, writes in *Politics among Nations* that 'the Treaty of Westphalia brought the religious wars to an end and made the territorial state the cornerstone of the modern states system'.[8] Leo Gross refers to the Peace of Westphalia as 'the end of an epoch and the opening of another',[9] while, likewise, Adam Watson tells us that '[t]he Westphalian Settlement legitimized a commonwealth of sovereign states'.[10] Last but not least, David Held informs us that the Peace of Westphalia 'entrenched, for the first time, the principle of territorial sovereignty in inter-state affairs'.[11] Either way, though, such references have abounded throughout the IR canon.

---

was present in Münster and guaranteed that the treaty was to be followed. The Holy Roman Emperor and a number of representatives from different political units of the Empire were parties to the treaties. There are a number of translations and editions of the treaties, many of which are available online. The most authoritative editions, however, can be found on the website *Acta Pacis Westphalicae* ('Document edition of the Peace of Westphalia'), available at: http://www.pax-westphalica.de. Last accessed March 11, 2011. The treaties of Westphalia are also sometimes taken to include the settlement of the Eighty Years' War between Spain and the Netherlands, as it was also negotiated in Münster. That treaty, however, was signed on 30 January, while the Treaty of Münster traditionally referred to was signed on 24 October.

6. See Stephen D. Krasner, 'Westphalia and All That', in *Ideas and Foreign Policy*, ed. Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 235–64; Stephen D. Krasner, 'Compromising Westphalia', *International Security* 20, no. 3 (1995): 115–51; Stephen D. Krasner, *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999); Andreas Osiander, *The States System of Europe 1640–1990* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); Andreas Osiander, 'Sovereignty, International Relations, and the Westphalian Myth', *International Organization* 55, no. 2 (2001): 251–87; Benno Teschke, *The Myth of 1648* (London: Verso, 2003). See also: Claire Gantet, 'Le "Tournant Westphalien": Anatomie d'une Construction Historiographique', *Critique internationale* 9 (2000): 52–8; Benjamin de Carvalho, 'Den westfalske fetisj i internasjonal politikk: Om den suverene stat og statssystemets opprinnelse', *Internasjonal Politikk* 63, no. 1 (2005): 7–34; and Benjamin de Carvalho, 'Keeping the State: Religious Toleration in Early Modern France, and the Role of the State', in *European Yearbook of Minority Issues*, I (2001/2) (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2003), 5–27.
7. Tracing the origins of the Westphalian myth falls beyond the scope of the present work. For attempts to trace the myth, see Osiander, 'Sovereignty'; de Carvalho, 'Den westfalske fetisj i internasjonal politikk'.
8. Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations*, 6th edn (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1985), 254.
9. Leo Gross, 'The Peace of Westphalia, 1648–1948', *American Journal of International Law* 42, no. 1 (1948): 28.
10. Adam Watson, *The Evolution of International Society* (London: Routledge, 1992), 186.
11. David Held, *Democracy and Global Order* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), 77.

'Westphalia and All That': Debunking the Myth of 1648

The texts of the treaties signed in Münster (IPM) and Osnabrück (IPO) on 24 October 1648 tell a very different story to the conventional narrative. Far from inaugurating the era of sovereignty, the Westphalian settlement turned out to be a momentary *retreat* from an already established *idea* of a modern system of states, constituting instead the recapitulation of an earlier and more feudal and medieval heteronomous order. Indeed, the idea that rulers had final authority over their territory – which followed more from the Reformation than any other event, and which had been so clearly enunciated in the Preamble to the English Statute of Appeals (1534) as well as the Peace of Augsburg in 1555 – was actually *limited* by the treaties of 1648.

Indeed, the Peace of Westphalia constituted a step back from an already established *idea* (and to some extent practice) of state sovereignty; itself the product of decades of political practice, political theory and even the internal order of the HRE as sanctioned by the Peace of Augsburg a century earlier, in 1555. For the Peace Treaties of Westphalia make no mention of sovereignty or *cuius regio, eius religio*. Indeed, where the Treaty of Augsburg gave the polities of the HRE the right to choose their own confession, this right was *retracted* in 1648. The result of this was the reversion to the status quo ante, to a date arbitrarily set to 1 January 1624, such that religion was no longer something over which rulers within the HRE could decide upon.[12] Thus, with respect to religion, 'Westphalia was less consistent with modern notions of sovereignty than Augsburg, which had been concluded almost a century earlier'.[13] Nor was Augsburg a European-wide treaty. The principle of *cuius regio, eius religio* was a principle which in 1555 was valid only for the *internal* affairs of the HRE.[14] Thus, both the treaties of Augsburg and Westphalia have been misread by the scholars of IR as applying to Europe in general, as opposed to the HRE in particular. It might, however, be claimed that Westphalia entailed the right of states to have their own foreign policy and to join alliances. But this, it turns out, applied only to the polities of the HRE,[15] and was in any case not a new initiative. Moreover, this right had in fact been retracted during the Thirty Years' War through the 1635 Peace of Prague.[16]

A complementary claim of the '1648 myth' is that it entailed the defeat of the Holy Roman Emperor's universal aspirations. The orthodoxy in IR has generally presented the Thirty Years' War as a war between two main parties. These comprised the representatives of an imperial or universalistic order, mainly the Holy Roman Emperor and the Spanish king, who were loyal to the Pope on one side, and the representatives of a more particularistic and anti-hegemonic order advancing the modern idea of state sovereignty,

12. Art. V, 2 IPO and §47 IPM. While the Peace of Westphalia confirmed the Treaty of Augsburg, this was nevertheless done with a few reservations, as it stated that the Peace of Augsburg was *not* to be valid with respect to 'certain Articles in the said Transaction [Augsburg] which are troublesome and litigious'; see Art. V, 1 IPO and §47 IPM.
13. Krasner, 'Westphalia and All That', 244.
14. Even so, the principle of *cuius reigo, eius religio* of 1555 was not consistent with sovereignty. The Reformed Confession, Calvinism, was not recognised at Augsburg.
15. Art. VIII, 2 IPO and §63 IPM.
16. Randall Lesaffer, 'The Westphalian Peace Treaties and the Development of the Tradition of Great European Peace Settlements Prior to 1648', *Grotiana* 18 (1997): 71–95.

mainly France, Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands, on the other side.[17] But some revisionist accounts of the Thirty Years' War have questioned in a number of ways whether the war was actually about containing the universalistic ambitions of the Habsburgs. Firstly, the Emperor was already weakened when the war broke out in 1618, and the Habsburg Empire was already divided politically and militarily between a Catholic alliance, the League, and an anti-Catholic alliance, the Union. In the early stages of the war, the potential consequences of Habsburg collapse were more feared in Europe than was their hegemonic ambition.[18] Secondly, the interventions of Denmark, Sweden and France were motivated more by their desire to take advantage of the weak position of the Habsburgs than by a fear of their hegemonic aspirations.[19] What kept the war going was not that the Habsburgs represented a threat or that they had universal aspirations. Indeed, '[t]he war was not fought because the Habsburgs were straining to expand their role, but because other actors were seeking to diminish it'.[20]

All in all, then, the Treaties of Westphalia do not tell a clear-cut and neat story of transformation. Rather, they are better understood within a very complex story of advances, setbacks and messy entanglements of feudal suzerainty with some rare elements of what we now call modern state sovereignty. Illustrating the feudal (as opposed to sovereign) character of Westphalia is the point that both France and Sweden were awarded fiefdoms over several territories formerly under imperial jurisdiction, with the Swedish monarch being made a vassal of the emperor.[21]

This emphasis that we accord the HRE provides a clue that enables us to finally bring into view the hitherto invisible elephant in the room of '1648': that of hierarchy both inside and outside Europe. For while elements of hierarchy continued within Europe, so imperial hierarchy developed outside of it, notwithstanding the point that within the various countries of Europe domestic sovereignty was compromised in some way or another right down to the early 20 century.[22] The typical Eurocentric conflation of Europe and the world leads to the problematic assumption that sovereignty soon became a universal feature of world politics once the big bang of political modernity had exploded at Westphalia. But such an emphasis necessarily obscures the existence of various hierarchical international political formations, especially of an inter-civilisational nature, that have existed not just in the pre-1648 era,[23] but above all within the post-1648 'anarchic' era. The immediate problem here is that the *post*-1648 era witnessed a *proliferation* of international imperial-hierarchies, which comprised a series of

17. See for instance Torbjørn Knutsen, *A History of International Relations Theory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 85; David Boucher, *Political Theories of International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 290; Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 32.
18. Osiander, 'Sovereignty', 253–4.
19. Ibid., 255–8.
20. Ibid.
21. Art. X, 15 IPO.
22. J.M. Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilisation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), ch. 12.
23. These would necessarily include a range of Eastern formations that were the leading 'powers' in the world such as the Ottoman Empire and the Chinese tribute system, as well as the much weaker regional power of medieval Christendom.

single sovereign colonial powers, each of which stood atop a conglomerate of dependent non-sovereign polities. And, no less significantly, it was not until well into the postcolonial era, indeed the final two decades of the 20th century, that the sovereign state became the generic political unit of the global system – even if there are all manner of imperial legacies that have continued on into the 21st century. In short, international hierarchies, albeit under anarchy, have been the norm in world politics in the last 400 years, the sovereign state the bare exception.[24]

In sum, then, neither sovereignty nor the anarchic international system originated at Westphalia. Indeed Westphalia has been awarded a weighting that its limited achievement simply cannot bear. Ultimately, the emergence of sovereignty and the anarchic states-system were the result of a long process of change rather than a clear-cut break with the feudal system of Christendom that occurred in the space of one year following a gruelling 30-year gestation period on the bloodied battlefields of Europe.[25] As we have shown above, in spite of the many references to the Westphalian birth of the statist ontology of IR, scrutiny of the treaties themselves and revisionist scholarship published over the last two decades make a strong case for relegating that story to the world of myth-production, while simultaneously requiring us to be at least wary of the tales that textbooks have for so long told us. But given the weight of the arguments and the central place 1648 has been accorded in historical debates about the discipline, one could reasonably expect this wariness, if not an outright rejectionist proclivity, to have trickled down to more recent texts and textbooks.

What Our Teachers Still Teach Us about Westphalia

Given that textbooks are updated more frequently than ever, one might assume that part of the rationale for this would comprise the need to take into account not only the latest developments in international politics, but also the core debates about the discipline of IR. Certainly some of the texts and textbooks have taken parts of these revisionist analyses into account. Notably, in a 2007 textbook, Heather Rae asserts that:

> There is much debate over exactly when the process of early modern state formation started, with some scholars looking as far back as the eighth or tenth century. Others cite the early fifteenth century, with the convening of the Council of Constance of 1414–1418, treaties agreed upon at the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, or the eighteenth century as the most significant dates in the development of the state.[26]

---

24. J.M. Hobson and J.C. Sharman, 'The Enduring Place of Hierarchy in World Politics: Tracing the Social Logics of Hierarchy and Political Change', *European Journal of International Relations* 11, no. 1 (2005): 63–98. See also Darel E. Paul, 'Sovereignty, Survival and the Westphalian Blind Alley in International Relations', *Review of International Studies* 25, no. 2 (1999): 217–31; Barry Buzan and Richard Little, 'Why International Relations Has Failed as an Intellectual Project and What to Do About It', *Millennium* 30, no. 1 (2001): 19–39.
25. See for instance Joseph R. Strayer, *On the Medieval Origins of the Modern State* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970); Hendrik Spruyt, *The Sovereign State and Its Competitors* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994); Teschke, *Myth of 1648*.
26. Heather Rae, 'Theories of State Formation', in *International Relations Theory for the Twenty–First Century*, ed. Martin Griffiths (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 124.

Another good example is found in a 2005 textbook: 'What we would now recognize as the modern state system gradually evolved in Northern Europe between 1500 and 1688 and was consolidated by the rise of nationalism in Europe between 1800 and 1914'.[27] Moreover, the 2010 textbook by Keith Shimko hints at a more nuanced understanding of the emergence of sovereignty:

> Although 1648 is a convenient dividing point, the modern state system did not just appear overnight in that year: The world of 1647 did not look much different from the world of 1649. The emergence of the modern state was in reality a slow, gradual process driven by several important economic, religious, and military developments that eventually undermined the feudal order and replaced it with a new way of organizing European politics.[28]

But this hint leads the reader only into a cul-de-sac given that four pages later she will read that '[w]hat the treaty established was the modern notion of sovereignty – that rulers were not obligated to obey any higher, external authority',[29] that 'the modern sovereign state emerged from the maelstrom of the Thirty Years War and the Peace of Westphalia (1648)', and that '[t]he idea of national sovereignty was codified in the peace of Westphalia (1648) as the only feasible solution to the religious conflict that gave rise to the bloody Thirty Years War (1618–1648)'.[30] Similarly, Paul Viotti and Mark Kauppi tell us that '[t]he peace agreement at Westphalia in 1648 helped solidify the trend of increasing power to the modern state at the expense of other political forms.… With the realignment of territorial borders, the notion of the sovereignty of the state also came to the fore';[31] and, moreover, that '[t]he prince or sovereign authority could even determine the religion of the inhabitants of a state'.[32]

Overall, this tension between an account that is sensitive to the revisionist scholarship of international politics while simultaneously maintaining the mythical story of 1648 is symptomatic of many of the textbooks. Moreover, in the process many administer a strong dose of classical realist ontology, to wit: 'The Treaty of Westphalia (1648), more than any other event, demarcated the change between the old and new systems. With the sovereign state at its center, this newly evolving system is anarchical'.[33] Or again, Russell Bova tells us that Westphalia 'laid the foundation of the anarchic system of sovereign states that structural realists still emphasize today. Inherent in this new anarchic era were all the consequences – self-help, security dilemmas, wars – that those realists might anticipate'.[34] And, again, 'the 1648 peace of Westphalia … marked the birth of the modern international system.… [T]he dissolution of the empire cleared the way for the

27. Jill Steans and Lloyd Pettiford with Thomas Diez, *Introduction to International Relations: Perspectives and Themes*, 2nd edn (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2005), 117.
28. Keith L. Shimko, *International Relations: Perspectives and Controversies*, 3rd edn (Boston: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, 2010), 4.
29. Ibid., 8.
30. Ibid., 217, 243.
31. Paul R. Viotti and Mark V. Kauppi, *International Relations and World Politics*, 3rd edn (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2007), 63–4.
32. Ibid., 70.
33. John T. Rourke, *International Politics on the World Stage*, 11th edn (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2007), 60.
34. Russell Bova, *How the World Works* (New York: Longman, 2010), 45.

emergence of sovereign political units within the old empire.'[35] That the HRE was not dissolved until 1806 and coexisted with other European polities – be they states, empires or other units – clearly does not figure in the story that the discipline tells its youngest disciples.

Even some of the very best textbooks repeat the standard 1648 mantra.[36] Thus, in spite of some passages suggesting to the reader that there may be an issue of contention about the meaning that should be accorded to 1648,[37] we can still read in the book known to most British IR students as 'Baylis and Smith' that '[t]he Westphalian Constitution of World Order: The Peace Treaties of Westphalia and Osnabruck (1648) established the legal basis of modern statehood and by implication the fundamental rules or constitution of modern world politics'.[38] The book also exhibits a text-box underlining what it sees as the key elements of this constitution: territoriality, sovereignty, autonomy – to wit: '[i]n codifying and legitimating the principle of modern statehood the Westphalian Constitution gave birth to the modern states-system'.[39] Yet another textbook by Oxford University Press tells the students a story of pre-Westphalian chaos, relieved in 1648 by the advent of the modern state:

> This treaty established the important principle of sovereignty that remains the foundation of contemporary international politics. In an obvious blow to the Church, this meant that kings could decide domestic policy, such as the official religion within their domains, free from outside interference. The principle of sovereignty recognized in the peace of Westphalia represents an essential element in the creation of the modern nation-state.[40]

This view is no less predominant in US textbooks. Thus, for example, in spite of acknowledging that the treaties of Münster and Osnabrück did not enact the principle of sovereignty as we know it, Joseph Nye and David Welch seem to have mistaken the Treaty of Westphalia for that of Augsburg:

> The Peace of Westphalia effectively entrenched the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio*, whereby each ruler would have the right to determine the religion of his or her own state. The treaties did not amount to a full endorsement of the principle of state sovereignty as we know it, as they contained rights of intervention to enforce their terms.[41]

To Nye and Welch, the ontology of IR after 1648 is nevertheless statist: 'For most of the Westphalian era, sovereign states had only to worry about other sovereign states'.[42] But

35. Ibid., 44; also 9, 42.
36. This problem is not, however, exclusive to English textbooks. One Norwegian introductory text, for example, tells us that 'the principle of sovereignty … was ratified at the Peace of Westphalia in 1648'; Jon Hovi and Raino Malnes, eds, *Anarki, Makt og Normer*, 2nd edn (Oslo: Abstrakt forlag, 2007), 32.
37. John Baylis, Steve Smith and Patricia Owens, eds, *The Globalization of World Politics*, 4th edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 46–7.
38. Ibid., 23–4.
39. Baylis et al., *Globalization of World Politics*, 23–4.
40. Steven L. Spiegel, Elizabeth G. Matthews, Jennifer M. Taw and Kristen P. Williams, eds, *World Politics in a New Era*, 4th edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 59.
41. Joseph S. Nye and David A. Welch, *Understanding Global Conflict and Cooperation*, 8th edn (Boston: Longman/Pearson, 2011), 72.
42. Ibid., 307.

overall, given that the 1648 myth is repeated in all IR textbooks that deal in some way with the origins of sovereignty, our survey is necessarily representative even if it only scratches the surface of the massive IR textbook market. Accordingly, in the interests of space, we provide an extended footnote of other notable examples.[43]

Even our short tour of widely used IR textbooks produces a clear verdict: the traditional tale of the ontological 'big bang' of IR has not given way to recent historiographical scholarship. What is written about Westphalia is seldom referenced; 1648 is doxa. It just is. Finally, while we shall consider why this remains the case in the conclusion, one of the key lowest common denominators of the myths of 1648 and 1919 is an underlying Eurocentrism. For what is almost never questioned in the stories of the rise of the sovereign state – either in orthodox or critical IR scholarship – is the assumption that it was entirely a product of European exceptionalism and was created by the Europeans all by themselves. But, as has been argued elsewhere, this elides the considerable extra-European influences that helped promote sovereignty, including those from China, India and the Middle East, as well as through the imperial encounter with the Americas after 1492.[44] And just as the issues of imperialism and Eurocentric thinking have been ignored in the 1648 story, so their 'recessive presence' in the conventional '1919 story' is something that we shall resuscitate in the next section.

An Epistemological Big Bang: The Myth of 1919

The myth of 1919 is a less distinct myth than that of 1648, not least because it has a number of prongs to it. The usual context in which it emerges within standard textbooks is as an appendage to the First Great Debate that was allegedly conducted between 'idealists' and realists. Indeed, standard introductions recount the lineage of the discipline in terms of the three great debates, with the first one emerging after the 'birth of the discipline' in 1919. That said, the myth of 1919, important though it is within the self-image of the discipline, is one that is overall recounted less often than its '1648 twin'.[45] In what follows we shall cover textbooks even though we will also argue from personal experience and anecdotal evidence given that the myth of 1919 is more commonly transmitted through the classroom than through the textbook.

The myth of 1919 consists of three interrelated elements: firstly, that the discipline was born in 1919; secondly, that the discipline was born out of the calamities of World War I and was established as an idealist attempt to solve the problem of war; and, thirdly,

43. See, for example: Karen A. Mingst, *Essentials of International Relations*, 4th edn (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008), 24–5; Henry R. Nau, *Perspectives on International Relations: Power, Institutions, and Ideas* (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2007), 56; J. Martin Rochester, *Fundamental Principles of International Relations* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2010), 19, 33, 36; Joshua S. Goldstein and Jon C. Pevehouse, *International Relations*, 9th edn (New York: Pearson Longman, 2010), 60, 61; Michael G. Roskin and Nicholas O. Berry, *IR: The New World of International Relations*, 7th edn (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2008), 5–6.

44. J.M. Hobson, 'The Other Side of the Westphalian Frontier', in *Postcolonial Theory and International Relations*, ed. Sanjay Seth (London: Routledge, 2011); J.M. Hobson, 'Provincializing Westphalia: Eastern Origins of Sovereignty in the Oriental Global Age', *International Politics* 46, no. 6 (2009): 671–90.

45. Cf. Brian C. Schmidt, 'Lessons from the Past: Reassessing the Interwar Disciplinary History of International Relations', *International Studies Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (1998): 433–59, and esp. 438.

that interwar idealism lost out to realism in a First Great Debate, due to idealism's failure in theory and practice either to prevent or explain the increasing interstate violence of the 1930s that culminated in World War II. The myth is a fully externalist account of the origins and early development of the discipline, based on a Whiggish reading that posits the notion of continuous progress towards both a better understanding of the international system and a solution to the problem of war.

In contrast to the myth of 1648, the myth of 1919 is of much more recent origin, given that there was very little historiographical consciousness within the discipline until the publication of *The Aberystwyth Papers* in 1972.[46] As Jack Donnelly notes, even as late as the early 1980s the standard overview of the discipline only started with the classical realists of the post-war generation, in effect creating an abbreviated foundational myth.[47] The key figure that is most closely associated with this foundational myth – the classical realist, E.H. Carr – would nevertheless fit seamlessly into the myth of 1919 when the earlier history of the discipline was rewritten. Realism was the dominant theoretical approach in International Relations by virtue of its embrace of positivism as a means of explaining the so-called 'realities' of international relations, rather than founding its analysis on an a priori 'idealist-political' foundation. That historiographical interest was piqued for the first time around 1970 is due to various factors. It was partly a result of the 50th anniversary of the founding of the first IR chair at Aberystwyth; partly an aftermath of the methodological differences of the 1960s that was later codified as the Second Great Debate;[48] and partly a result of the inspiration from Kuhn and the idea of scientific paradigms. The immediate result was to extend the history of the discipline further backwards to 1919, and to incorporate a 'misguided generation' of 'idealists' which had been triumphantly swept away by the rising tide of classical realism, with E.H. Carr and Hans Morgenthau riding its crest. This early historiography was thus largely an exercise in reaffirming the dominance of realism in general, presenting its victory in the more exotic philosophy of scientifism.

From the early 1980s, the discipline (and its dominant realist strand) was subjected to a rising tide of criticism from a range of alternative theories, particularly with the advent of the Third Great Debate (sometimes referred to as the Fourth Great Debate). By presenting the ongoing discord as another moment in a procession of 'great debates' so it was possible to normalise dissent. That is, deep-rooted debates are thought to be a normal and healthy intellectual way in which disciplinary knowledge progresses. The final codification of the myth of 1919 and the First Great Debate was thus a result of a number of disparate claims of status that emerged in the Third (or Fourth) Great Debate.[49]

---

46. Brian Porter, ed., *The Aberystwyth Papers: International Politics 1919–1969* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972); cf. Peter Wilson, 'The Myth of the First Great Debate', *Review of International Studies* 24, no. 4 (1998), 1–15, esp. p. 8.
47. Jack Donnelly, 'Realism and the Academic Study of International Relations', in *Political Science in History*, eds James Farr, John S. Dryzek and Stephen T. Leonard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 175–97, esp. 181.
48. Joel Quirk and Darshan Vigneswaran, 'The Construction of an Edifice: The Story of a First Great Debate', *Review of International Studies* 31, no.1 (2005): 89–107.
49. The Third Great Debate, which saw positivism come under sustained attack by post-positivists, is referred to as the Fourth Great Debate only when the 1970s'/1980s' 'inter-paradigm debate' is elevated to the status of a 'great debate'.

'1919 and All That': Debunking the Originary/Foundationist Myth of the Discipline

At the very time that the myth of 1919 was being expanded it was also being challenged at its very core. Of particular note here was a critical interrogation of E.H. Carr as well as the Utopians/idealists/liberals that he so forcefully challenged. The first stabs were directed at Carr's realism, with a number of writers suggesting that he was less of a realist than previously believed, or even that he was not a realist at all.[50] The perception of Carr was challenged from internalist, externalist and contextualist perspectives, stressing the polemical, political and dialectic character of *The Twenty Years' Crisis* and its debts to a Mannheimian reflexivist sociology of science.[51] Indeed, it would be fair to say that much of what he wrote had a certain Marxian quality to it. Either way, although no consensus has been reached on how best to characterise Carr, the large majority of those who have dealt with his work in any systematic fashion agree that the label 'realist' fits rather awkwardly.[52]

While Carr was put under closer scrutiny, the ones who were supposed to be his erstwhile opponents were simultaneously placed under the analytical microscope. The end of the Cold War led to renewed interest in the theories that had been developed before 1947, with a boost for liberal theorising after 1989 leading to a revived interest in liberal theorising before 1939. The immediate result was a wide-ranging reconsideration of the 'idealists', revealing a breadth and diversity of thought that had been completely glossed over by the myth of 1919.[53] Increasingly, writers dropped the terms 'Utopian/idealist' and began applying the label 'liberal' (or some variety of it) to the writers of the interwar period.

To this can be added two further points concerning the myth of 'idealism': firstly, that the so-called idealists frequently argued positions that had much in common with certain realist precepts. Most notably, as Leonard Woolf put it, summarising Norman Angell: 'It

50. Cf. Ken Booth, 'Security in Anarchy: Utopian Realism in Theory and Practice', *International Affairs* 67, no. 3 (1991): 527–45; Andrew Linklater, *The Transformation of Political Community* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 159–68; J.M. Hobson, *The State and International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 55–61.

51. See, for example, Charles Jones, *E.H. Carr and International Relations: A Duty To Lie* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Wilson, 'Myth of the First Great Debate'; Peter Wilson, 'Carr and His Early Critics: Responses to the Twenty Years' Crisis, 1939–46', in *E.H. Carr: A Critical Appraisal*, ed. Michael Cox (London: Palgrave, 2000), 165–97.

52. One exception that proves the revisionist rule is Seán Molloy, who reaffirms Carr as an important realist, albeit one of a very different kind than most later realists. Paradoxically, although confirming Carr's realism, Molloy contributes both to the re-evaluation of Carr and the undermining of the myth of 1919; see his *The Hidden History of Realism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), ch. 3. We thank Luke Ashworth for this reference.

53. See, for example, David Long, 'J.A. Hobson and Idealism in International Relations', *Review of International Studies* 17, no. 3 (1991): 285–304; David Long and Peter Wilson, eds, *Thinkers of The Twenty Years' Crisis* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); Schmidt, 'Lessons from the Past'; Cameron G. Thies, 'Progress, History and Identity in International Relations Theory: The Case of the Idealist–Realist Debate', *European Journal of International Relations* 8, no. 2 (2002): 147–85; Brian C. Schmidt, 'Anarchy, World Politics and the Birth of a Discipline: American International Relations, Pluralist Theory and the Myth of Interwar Idealism', *International Relations* 16, no. 1 (2002): 9–31; Lucian M. Ashworth, 'Where Are the Idealists in Interwar International Relations?', *Review of International Studies* 32, no. 2 (2006): 291–308.

is not human nature … which makes war "inevitable". War in the modern world springs from what has been aptly called the international anarchy.'[54] Indeed, Kenneth Waltz could not have put it much more succinctly himself. And secondly, far from ignoring power in favour of purely utopian sensibilities many of the so-called idealists, as we shall argue very shortly, actively supported the cause of European imperialism in general and especially British imperialism in particular.

If the idealists were not idealists and Carr was not exactly a realist, the next step was to denounce the idea of a First Great Debate between these so-called Manichaean combatants as but a myth.[55] While Carr's book certainly created reaction at the time, there was, however, no wide-ranging debate and certainly no feeling that any 'idealist' position had been demolished.[56] Likewise, surveying the interwar period more generally, one can obviously find debates, but nothing resembling a 'great debate' between liberals and realists.[57] More plausible would be the claim that there were debates between different approaches to politics in general, some of which would feed into post-World War II realism as well.[58] The process of defining 'realism-triumphant' against 'idealism-defeated' in the immediate post-World War II years was not so much about an actual debate between these two 'genres', but rather constituted a political move that sought to enshrine a specific foreign policy as well as to insulate the field of international politics from behaviouralist political science.[59] And, not least, it relied on the politics of amnesia – that is, of forgetting much of the non-realist research that had been undertaken.[60]

With historiographical attention escalating after 1989 even the dating of the birth of the discipline came under heavy challenge. There can be found many important antecedents for disciplinary IR, starting in the last two decades of the 19th century, particularly in debates regarding imperialism, geopolitics and trade. The three key scholars of note here are Brian Schmidt, Robert Vitalis and Torbjørn Knutsen. While Vitalis argues that IR became institutionalised around 1910, Knutsen specifies the 1890s, while Schmidt claims that its institutionalisation was secured in 1880 when the study of IR began within the first Political Science Department in the US that was opened at Columbia University by John W. Burgess.[61] To this Schmidt adds the claims that IR was advanced by the study

54. Leonard Woolf, 'Introduction', in *The Intelligent Man's Way to Prevent War*, ed. Woolf (London: Victor Gollancz, 1933), 10–11; Norman Angell, 'The International Anarchy', in Woolf, *Intelligent Man's Way*, 19–66; See also, for example, G. Lowes Dickinson, *The International Anarchy, 1904–1914* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1925).
55. Wilson, 'Myth of the First Great Debate'; Andreas Osiander, 'Rereading Early Twentieth-Century IR Theory: Idealism Revisited', *International Studies Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (1998): 409–32.
56. Wilson, 'Carr and His Early Critics'.
57. Lucian M. Ashworth, 'Did the Realist–Idealist Debate Really Happen? A Revisionist History of International Relations', *International Relations* 16, no. 1 (2002): 33–51.
58. Thies, 'Progress, History and Identity'; Quirk and Vigneswaran, 'Construction of an Edifice'.
59. See Nicolas Guilhot, 'The Realist Gambit: Postwar American Political Science and the Birth of IR Theory', *International Political Sociology* 2, no. 4 (2008): 281–304; see also Stanley Hoffmann, 'An American Social Science: International Relations', *Daedalus* 106 (1977): 41–59.
60. Samuel Barkin, 'Realism, Prediction and Foreign Policy', *Foreign Policy Analysis* 5, no. 3 (2009): 233–46.
61. Brian C. Schmidt, *The Political Discourse of Anarchy* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1998); Robert Vitalis, 'Birth of a Discipline', in *Imperialism and Internationalism in the Discipline of International Relations*, eds David Long and Brian C. Schmidt (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2005), 159–81; Robert Vitalis, 'The

of colonial administration after about 1900 and that the world's first IR book emerged in 1900 – Paul Reinsch's *World Politics at the End of the Nineteenth Century*.[62] Vitalis adds to this a series of developments in the consolidation of the discipline, not the least of which is the establishment of the *Journal of Race Development* in 1910; a journal that was renamed *Foreign Affairs* in 1922.[63] While the concern with Eurocentrism and racism exists, albeit in rather latent form, within Schmidt's analysis and in rather more explicit form in Knutsen's, it is, however, a central component of Vitalis's work. For it is his key claim that the discipline's rationale was founded on a racist 'white supremacist' outlook.[64]

While this fascinating avenue concerning the pre-1919 origins of the discipline could be explored as a whole article in itself a few points are noteworthy, not least so as to provide a bridge to the ensuing discussion. Above all, while 1919 is by no means an insignificant moment in the development of the discipline, in a way the onus of proof should more properly lie with those who wish to support the 1919 birth date claim. For it seems curious, if not a product of wishful thinking, to believe that the infant discipline all of a sudden sprung up out of nowhere in some kind of miraculous virgin birth in one year. Three points in particular avail themselves here. Firstly, many of the scholars we associate the interwar period with were writing in the two decades prior to 1919, including John A. Hobson, Norman Angell, Harold Laski and, not least, Woodrow Wilson. And many of the ideas that they developed in the interwar period had been formulated well before 1919. Secondly, if we accept the point that many of the interwar theorists drew on Hobson's 1902 book,[65] whether this be the critique of what Hobson called 'insane' imperialism that is found in Laski, Brailsford, Bukharin and Lenin, or equally the support of 'sane imperialism' that is found in Wilson, Zimmern, Angell and Buell, then the image of 1919 is necessarily blurred or muted. Thirdly, and most importantly of all, the very Eurocentric and racist narratives that underpinned the majority of interwar scholarship emerged in the 18th century and especially the 19th, thereby bringing the pre-1919 intellectual context much more into the foreground of our revised picture of 1919. How then did these metanarratives infect interwar scholarship and what is the significance of this claim for our overall argument about 1919?

To answer the second part of this question first, bringing the 'dark side' of the discipline into the open necessarily punctures the 'noble myth' of the birth of IR that Carr's reading bequeaths the discipline. Carr's legacy very much remains with us today, with the belief that the discipline was born in 1919 when the world's first department of International Politics was established at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth. Moreover, on the atlas of ideas Aberystwyth and Versailles are in effect presented as twin towns. For both

Graceful and Generous Liberal Gesture: Making Racism Invisible in American International Relations', *Millennium* 29, no. 3 (2000): 331–56; Torbjørn L. Knutsen, 'A Lost Generation? IR Scholarship before World War I', *International Politics* 45, no. 6 (2008): 650–74; Torbjørn L. Knutsen, 'En tapt generasjon? IP-fagets utvikling før første verdenskrig', *Internasjonal Politikk* 65, no. 3 (2007): 9–44.

62. Paul S. Reinsch, *World Politics at the End of the Nineteenth Century, as Influenced by the Oriental Situation* (New York: Macmillan, 1900); Schmidt, *Political Discourse*, 70.
63. Vitalis, 'Birth of a Discipline', 166. Schmidt also sees the study of colonial administration as important; *Political Discourse*, ch. 4.
64. Vitalis, 'Birth of a Discipline'; Vitalis, 'Graceful and Generous Liberal Gesture'.
65. John A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1938/1968).

are thought to have initiated noble ideas and practices that sought to set the world on the path to peace following the carnage of World War I. In this reading, then, IR is presented as a noble discipline that was born in order to solve the tragedy of war for the benefit of all peoples. While we do not wish to denigrate the importance of Aberystwyth in the progress of IR as a discipline, nevertheless the overall noble image obscures an 'inconvenient truth': that the overwhelming majority of international theory throughout its existence has been imbued with a specific moral/political purpose – to defend and promote Western civilisation – and that the narratives of the discipline have in one way or another always constituted a 'West Side Story'.[66] In the process, the deep paradox emerges wherein the discipline's prevailing mythical self-image can only be maintained through a deep structural amnesia that coexists with a highly selective recollection of the discipline's 'origins'.

In the external events-context we argue that international theory in the interwar period emerged in the context not simply of World War I, but also in the milieu of the colonial racial revolt against Western imperialism that took off in the interwar period, with the year 1919 marking the launch of the enterprise known as the *empire strikes back*. Far from expressing a highly optimistic vision of a coming peace, much of the liberal and left-liberal interwar scholarship exhibited or reflected a deep sense of anxiety in the Western imagination as the fault-lines of the West's imperial hegemony appeared to be cracking. As noted above, far from fatally 'ignoring power', many such scholars sought to maintain an imperialist hierarchy of racial and/or civilisational power of the West over the East. Nevertheless, while there was also a significant group of anti-imperialists, it is significant that most of these thinkers still worked to defend the West because their writings were founded on various Eurocentric or racist metanarratives, as opposed to some kind of universalist cultural pluralism that yielded a tolerance of the Other. On the imperialist side these comprised a *paternalist Eurocentrism* (e.g. Zimmern, Angell, Woolf and Murray), and an *offensive racism* (as in Wilson and Buell), while on the anti-imperialist side these comprised an *anti-paternalist Eurocentrism* (e.g. Laski, Brailsford, Lenin and Bukharin), and a *defensive racism* (e.g. Stoddard and Grant).[67]

While space, of course, precludes a detailed discussion here, it is worth summarising a few key figures to support our case. Woodrow Wilson is, of course, thought of as one of the discipline's founding icons, simultaneously doubling up as the founding father of 20th-century liberal internationalism. But Wilson's academic writings were steeped in explicit scientific racism of a neo-Lamarckian nature.[68] And they reveal the point that for Wilson self-determination was to be granted only to the (relatively) civilised Eastern Europeans but should be withheld from the non-white races. For it was vital to maintain imperialism, albeit the internationalised variety that was institutionalised by the League of Nations Mandate System, so that the inferior races could be brought to maturity

66. John M. Hobson, 'The Myth of International Relations: Constructing Eurocentrism and International Theory, 1760–2010' (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
67. For a full discussion of all these writers, see Hobson, 'Myth of International Relations', ch. 6.
68. See especially the following publications by Woodrow Wilson: 'The Reconstruction of the Southern States', *Atlantic Monthly* 87, no. 519 (1901): 2–11; 'Democracy and Efficiency', *Atlantic Monthly* 87, no. 521 (1901): 289–99; *A History of the American People*, V (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1902); *The State* (New York: D.C. Heath & Co., 1918).

through gaining the right sort of 'character' that was in turn the necessary prerequisite for the future awarding of self-determination. This reflects his key argument that was central to his book *The State*: that constitutional political development is something which occurs only over a very long period of time. It was precisely this gradualist idea that underpinned his advocacy of the League of Nations Mandate System. Of course, while Wilson is famous in IR for his enunciation of the concept of self-determination, it is less well known that he turned round almost immediately and issued a denunciation of it as far as the colonies were concerned. For clearly regretting the fact that he had inadvertently let the self-determinist genie out of the imperialist bottle (as his adviser Colonel House had warned him), he asserted on 9 May 1919, in the context of the anti-colonialist upheavals that raged around the colonial world, that he was disturbed by

> the unqualified hope that men have entertained everywhere of immediate emancipation from the things that have hampered them and oppressed them. You cannot in human experience rush into the light [of self-determination].… You have to go through the twilight into the broadening day before the noon comes and the full sun is on the landscape.[69]

More generally, the essential formula of maintaining imperialism, especially British imperialism, through the Mandate System formed the normative lynchpin of many interwar books that are normally associated with the so-called idealists.[70] Of course, it is certainly the case that for these advocates the Mandate System represented something new and that it offered up the possibility that the colonies would not be exploited as they had done when national-imperial control was 'absolute' and 'unregulated'. Indeed, it is this which defined that which Hobson called 'sane' imperialism against the 'insane' imperialism of the previously unregulated national forms of imperialism. Nevertheless, it was still very much a form of imperialism that worked from precisely the same premise that the old idea of the civilising mission rested upon: the notion that the non-Western peoples were in one way or another inferior and could only be brought into civilisation under Western tutelage and only once the 'correct and rational' Western institutions had been delivered. The only real difference lay with the 'form' or 'method' by which these superior Western institutions would be delivered.

Finally, the common association of Eurocentrism and racism with imperialism elides the point that these discourses also yielded anti-imperialist visions. The extreme case, which can be used to support this point, is found with the interwar scholar Lothrop Stoddard, who embraced an anti-imperialist Eugenics. In a string of books he argued that white supremacy was under severe threat following World War I, which had succeeded only in undermining and dividing the white races, and which in turn came at the very same time when the coloured races – specifically the Yellows and (Islamic) Browns – were

---

69. Wilson cited in Erez Manuela, 'Dawn of a New Era: The "Wilsonian Moment" in Colonial Contexts and the Transformation of World Order, 1917–1920', in *Competing Visions of World Order*, eds Sebastian Conrad and Dominic Sachsenmaier (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 147.
70. See, for example, Alfred Zimmern, *The Third British Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1926/1934); Norman Angell, *The Defence of the Empire* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1937); Leonard Woolf, *Imperialism and Civilization* (London: Hogarth Press, 1928/1933); Raymond L. Buell, *International Relations* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1925).

rising with a vengeance.[71] His was a 'defensive' variant of scientific racism, for his key point was that the white races needed to restore their unity and protect their homelands (what he called the 'inner dikes') from the rising tide of colour. This could best be achieved by ending Western imperialism in Asia on the one hand, while blocking the 'colored immigration peril' by erecting prohibitive immigration controls on the other. This was vital because if the coloured races were to enter the citadel of the white West, they would flood the gene pool with inferior and contaminating influences that would inevitably lead to white racial degeneration. And to close this discussion more generally, while the anti-imperialist Eurocentrics provided an entirely different rationale for the critique of imperialism, and were indeed highly critical of the West, nevertheless the Eurocentric give away lies in the point that they reified the West and denied the East agency.[72]

What our Teachers Still Tell Us about 1919

Turning now to current textbooks, a large number omit historiography altogether. In those which do include disciplinary history, the most obvious change in tenor over the last two decades has been the shift from 'idealist' to 'liberal' as the moniker for the theories of the interwar years. This move is by no means all-encompassing, but a growing number of scholars seem to agree that the term 'liberal' is more appropriate. This development has quite obviously been related to the concurrent attempts at cementing present-day liberalism as a solid, permanent and viable competitor to realism that enjoys its own long lineage. Significantly, one does find comments on how idealism was a term that realists constructed to discredit their opponents,[73] even though some still see the unreconstructed term as applicable.[74] Others have noted the changing nomenclature, though without pushing it through to its conclusion:

> The body of theory known typically today as liberalism went by the term idealism for most of the twentieth century…. After World War I demonstrated the horror that humans could wreak on each other, idealists sought to create institutions that would mitigate violence and greed…. World War II, and especially the Holocaust, as well as the collapse of the League of Nations, effectively undermined idealist theory.[75]

From this perspective, liberalism is not a retroactively specific term for the interwar writers given the assumption that they were idealists; and, moreover, the relation

---

71. See the following books by Lothrop Stoddard: *The Rising Tide of Color against White World Supremacy* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920); *The New World of Islam* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1922); *Clashing Tides of Colour* (London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935). We are particularly grateful to Robert Vitalis for alerting us to Stoddard's anti-imperialism.
72. Hobson, 'Myth of International Relations', ch. 6.
73. For example: 'Modern realist theory developed in reaction to a liberal tradition that realists called idealism'; Goldstein and Pevehouse, *International Relations*, 44.
74. Shimko, *International Relations*, 43.
75. Jeanne K. Hey, 'Power, Conflict, and Policy: The Role of Political Science in International Studies', in *International Studies: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Global Issues*, eds Sheldon Anderson, Jeanne K. Hey, Mark A. Peterson and Stanley W. Toops (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2008), 25, 27.

between the world wars and theoretical change remains unquestioned – thus after idealism collapsed, Morgenthau codified realism.[76]

The twin beliefs that the discipline was born in 1919 and that there was a subsequent transformation away from interwar idealism in 1945 are still taken more or less for granted. Thus, we are still told that 'International Relations was born out of the human tragedy of war',[77] and that 'Realism … developed after World War II as a response to the failure of the interwar period's (1919–1939) idealism'.[78] A more elaborate narrative deserves to be quoted more extensively:

> In the twentieth century the idealist paradigm was most closely associated with Woodrow Wilson and the other thinkers who were prominent in the interwar period…. Idealism's reign as the dominant paradigm ended with its failure to anticipate and prevent World War II…. It was the idealists' failure to comprehend the forces leading to World War II that gave rise to realism as the dominant paradigm in the immediate postwar period after 1945.[79]

In the same textbook, the student of IR is informed that '[i]t was out of the ashes of World War I that idealists claimed to have learned certain lessons about the dynamics of international relations and what was needed to prevent another major war'.[80] In this imaginary, then, idealism equals Wilson; idealism is in effect a 'paradigm'; and it was eclipsed by realism due to its inherent intellectual and political failure. This trotting out of the old 1919 myth could hardly be less attuned to the last two decades of historiographical research. And when we are told that '[i]n the period between World War I and World War II, the major challenger to the realist perspective was idealism', it is surely as if the last two decades of revisionist scholarship had never happened. Or, to put it differently: the maintenance of the 1919 myth presupposes the assumption of the 'revisionist myth'.[81] Thus we have to conclude that the notion of something called idealism still persists in the IR imagination, even if slightly less unproblematically than before, and that the wholly exogenous/external events story of the emergence of the discipline and of idealism in 1919 as noble responses to World War I, as well as subscribing to the victory of realism in 1945 following the carnage of World War II, still remain largely uncontested within current IR textbooks.

For this reason it is not surprising to learn that the idea of a First Great Debate is still nurtured as well. This is a staple of IR textbooks and is found even in the very best ones. Thus, Robert Jackson and Georg Sørensen, in what is an otherwise exemplary textbook, tell us:

> There have been three major debates since IR became an academic subject at the end of the First World War and we are now in the early stages of a fourth. The first major debate is

76. Ibid., 25, 27. Moreover, according to Roskin and Berry, Morgenthau 'founded the "realist" school of international relations'; *The New World*, 27.
77. Steans and Pettiford with Diez, *International Relations*, 229.
78. Spiegel et al., *World Politics*, 35.
79. Rochester, *Fundamental Principles of International Relations*, 19, 21.
80. Ibid., 19, 21.
81. See the discussion in Bova, *How the World Works*, 20.

> between utopian liberalism and realism…. The first major debate was clearly won by Carr, Morgenthau, and the other realist thinkers.[82]

While avoiding the term 'idealist', this narrative sticks to the counting of debates, sees Carr as an unproblematic realist, and the realists as winners of a debate that it has been persuasively argued never in fact happened. Placing the debate a little later, Viotti and Kauppi, while giving a valuable and balanced introduction to the work of John Herz, maintain that Herz and Morgenthau 'found themselves in the center of a great realist–idealist academic debate'.[83] And even among scholars who are attuned to the revisionist historiographical literature, we still find references to the First Great Debate. Another otherwise exemplary textbook, having noted the problems inherent in the discussion of the great debates, tells us that '[s]ome of the debates, however, were genuine…. The first debate refers to the exchanges between the realists and idealists before, during and immediately after the Second World War'.[84] But as our survey of the revisionist literature suggests, it is not an inconsiderable irony that the interwar exchange between realists and idealists is held up as an example of one of the *genuine* debates within the discipline.

Others, however, simply ignore the revisionist historiography altogether. Peu Gosh, in an introductory text aimed at the Indian market, tells us that:

> When the Second World War (1939–1945) finally broke out, the idealists were blamed for their utopian thinking and their legalistic-moralistic assumptions were alleged to be far from the realities of power politics. IR soon came to be occupied with a critique of liberal idealism and out of this emerged a new paradigm – Realism, sometimes also known as Realpolitik – an anti-thesis to Idealism…. This was the emergence of the first 'Great Debate' in IR in the post-World War II period.[85]

With its externalist approach, its lumping of idealists into a single category, its stark dichotomising and the reference to 'the first "Great Debate" in IR' (after World War II), this text could just as well have been written 20 years ago.

That it is nevertheless not impossible to write textbooks with a more principled nod to the revisionist historiography is demonstrated by Richard Devetak when he notes that 'the very idea of narrating the discipline's history as a series of "great debates" is questionable'; though notably, he adds: 'Even so, it is important for students to learn how the discipline has told stories about itself, which is why I persist with the narrative'.[86] Nevertheless, a reflexive approach seems to us to be the only viable one – both recalling the disciplinary grand narratives and simultaneously deconstructing them.

---

82. Robert H. Jackson and Georg Sørensen, *Introduction to International Relations: Theories and Approaches*, 4th edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 30, 38.
83. Viotti and Kauppi, *International Relations*, 90.
84. Milja Kurki and Colin Wight, 'International Relations and Social Science', in *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity*, eds Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki and Steve Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 15–16.
85. Peu Gosh, *International Relations* (New Dehli: PHI Learning, 2009), 6.
86. Richard Devetak, 'An Introduction to International Relations: The Origins and Changing Agendas of a Discipline', in *An Introduction to International Relations: Australian Perspectives*, eds Richard Devetak, Anthony Burke and Jim George (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 10.

There are obviously also examples of writers taking the insights of the revisionist historiography to heart, but overall it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the impact has been marginal. Even those who show knowledge of the revisionist literature tend to provide cursory or even obligatory nods to it often by inserting various conditional adjectives such as 'alleged' and 'so-called' in front of the offending nouns. The one area where some progress has been made has been in the reassessment and rebranding of the motley crew previously known as utopians or idealists. In conjunction with the ongoing construction of a liberal body of theory to rival realism, interwar scholars have acquired a new name, and more attention has been paid to them. But even so, this has been done through an ahistorical extrapolation backwards of the present idea of liberalism so as to impute its presence there at the 'birth' of the discipline. And because the substitution of liberalism for idealism allows for the perpetuation of the myth under a different name, and glosses over the pluralism of interwar theorising, so we conclude that this can only really count as a step backwards rather than a progressive move forwards.

Conclusion: Why Does the Discipline Continue to Hold These Myths to Be Self-evident Truths?

In the light of our analysis we feel it warranted to conclude that conventional modern IR works on the basis of a false prospectus in relation to its key foundationist assumptions. And despite the point that the discipline has got its ontological and epistemological geneses twisted, the pervading myths still persist. This then gives rise to the conundrum as to why this false prospectus persists despite repeated attempts to prosecute the myths in the revisionist court of IR scholarship. Here we consider a number of possible reasons taking each of the myths in chronological order.

Firstly, it could be argued that like most research articles, the historical literature on 1648 is barely read. But this can be discounted on the grounds that the key revisionist articles and books are cited hundreds of times, and even the more specialised literature on the myth of 1919 is cited more than 50 times. Even so, this only deepens the puzzle given that while the works are cited, their insights are not taken on board. A second possible reason is that under conditions of extreme specialisation, and with books and journals proliferating in ever more daunting numbers, IR scholars often find that they have little choice but to rely on standard textbook discussions in areas that they themselves do not research. One consequence of this is not infrequently that new editions of a particular textbook tend to be updated by way of adding either a few recent citations or by adding a new chapter on the latest event or theory of significance. Accordingly it is not surprising that the historical aspects of the discipline tend to get left behind, not least because these are neatly packed away in the filing cabinet of 'settled knowledge'.

A third partial explanation, related to the previous one, is IR's inherent tendency towards presentism. History, as a matter in its own right, is of little or no interest to much of the discipline. Often it appears as little more than a useful site or shallow quarry from which can be garnered or sifted certain facts which are brought out into the open and held up triumphantly to confirm certain 'present truths' that are pertinent to a particular

theory.[87] Accordingly, a deeper engagement with historical matters becomes surplus to requirements – for 'that is what they do in History or other related disciplines'. It would seem that much of IR would happily go along with Henry Ford's historophobic assertion that '[h]istory is more or less bunk. It's tradition. We don't want tradition. We want to live in the present, and the only history that is worth a tinker's damn is the history that we make today'.[88] Thus when seen through this angle it is not surprising that the rich historical gems that lie deep beneath the surface of these shallow quarries lie undisturbed.

The problem of presentism leads directly into a fourth explanation: that one reason why these historical insights are ignored is the fact that they represent radically different perspectives or 'takes' on the discipline that necessarily confront the normalised and settled subject matter. The myths have had a tremendous function in disciplining our thinking about fundamental issues in international politics, 'normalising' it as common sense and providing the parameters or outer boundaries within which the disciplinary field is contained or homesteaded. A genuine commitment to revisionism would necessitate a reconceptualisation of many of the fundamental frameworks of the discipline, as well as the need to reset its parameters or boundaries, not to mention invalidating the past as a (re)source from which we can pick historical data points at our leisure. This itself has several ramifications, one of which is that the Westphalian myth serves as a matter of intellectual convenience providing a simple and tidy story about the origin of sovereignty and the anarchic states system.[89] But in so doing it effects an ahistorical temporalist sleight of hand, wherein 1648 marks the boundary of an endless and synchronic present, separated from the temporal Other of the pre-1648 era, which comprises the world where 'there be imperial dragons and hierarchical demons'.

But it is precisely at this point where we confront perhaps the profoundest paradox. For painting the pre-1648 era as one in which imperial hierarchical formations dominated enables Eurocentric scholars to sanitise the post-1648 era of its imperialism and the very Eurocentric metanarratives upon which this has been founded. But the paradox emerges in the point that much of IR embodies a Eurocentric imperialist narrative of the creation of modern world politics, of which 1648 provides the initial moment. That is, in the Eurocentric imaginary, 1648 constitutes the first step of the two-step Eurocentric big bang theory of modern international relations. The first step entails the single-handed creation of the sovereign state, which could only have occurred in Europe owing to its civilisational exceptionalism. And having created sovereignty in the absence of non-European help and non-European encounters, so the second step flows on ineluctably, where Europe expands outwards and graciously bequeaths sovereignty and Europe's panoply of civilised and rational institutions to the inferior Eastern societies, thereby remaking, as far as possible, the world in its own image. To break with this imperialist imaginary, upon which the myth of 1648 ultimately rests, is to fundamentally confront

87. See the discussion in J.M. Hobson and George Lawson, 'What Is History in International Relations?', *Millennium* 37, no. 2 (2008): 415–35; also Leonard Seabrooke, 'Why Political Economy Needs Historical Sociology', *International Politics* 44, no. 4 (2007): 390–413.
88. Interview in *Chicago Tribune* (25 May 1916).
89. On this point, see Osiander, 'Sovereignty', 266.

the Eurocentric identity of the discipline. And given that such a leap is one that would be too confronting for most, it might well be *this* problem which ensures that the revisionists are often seen but rarely heard.

This Eurocentric identity-problem also lies behind the myth of 1919, which argues that the discipline was born on the back of a painful 48-month gestation period on the blood-drenched battlefields of Europe. For it is this tragic external event that furnishes the Whiggish reading of the birth of the infant IR and the development of the interwar idealist adolescent, blessed as it was with the noble if not utopian purpose of finding ways to solve the universal problem of war for the benefit of all peoples. But when the birth-year becomes stuck or frozen in this way, despite repeated attempts to budge or thaw it, then this provides a clear pointer to the possibility that there is an identity-based function that lurks beneath the 'sovereignty of 1919'. This, we suggest, lies in the point that 1919 provides the IR community with a heart-warming rendition of the basis or function of their discipline: to find ever-better ways to solve the universal problem of war. But resuscitating the dark side of the discipline that lies deeply sublimated within the deep recesses of the IR imagination, as *inter alia* we have done in this article, is vital not just to complete our narrative, but also to alert our readership to the need to question the very noble identity of the discipline that has been cherished for too long. For if these temporal boundaries have been set on the basis of a provincial European myth, rather than the universal aspirations which the discipline upholds, it is surely high time that these boundaries be transgressed and their border controls disbanded. Naturally, though, to tamper with the most cherished and heart-warming of Whiggish self-beliefs is extremely confronting. But it is necessary because while most myths in life are constructed precisely to make us feel good about ourselves, they often entail all sorts of detrimental consequences that are ignored or simply denied and covered up. For myths can be used in different ways and serve different functions. On the one hand, their quotidian or everyday meaning of myths are stories commonly held to be true, but which are not. On the other, myths can be anchors or 'building blocks' for thinking and theorizing, or 'the frame into which other phenomena are fitted and then interpreted.'[90] Our argument about the myths of 1648 and 1919 is that these are myths in both ways. While they are stories held to be true which turn out to be false, they have also served as a matrix for further thinking in IR. This might be one of the reasons why they have proved so difficult to dislodge.

How, then, might we begin to dismantle the border controls that characterise 1648 and 1919 within the discipline? Or, put differently, what are the prospects for bettering the record and for getting the discipline to self-reflexively engage with its own history? We urge a strong commitment to dialogue. Disciplinary dialogue can only work if we no longer accept short hands from students and colleagues that are often relayed through textbooks and lecture notes. There needs to be constant vigilance about references to the Westphalian sovereign states/states-system, to idealists and the great debates, and to the birth of the discipline. As lecturers and textbook-writers we should not fear that the

90. Martin Hall, 'The Fantasy of Realism, or Mythology as Methodology' in *Harry Potter and International Relations* ed. Daniel H. Nexon and Iver B. Neumann, (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 178.

students would thereby lose faith in the discipline, but rather understand our endeavour as a dynamic one where dialogue helps us to gain new and richer understandings of international phenomena. The discipline of IR might more profitably spend its time in taking intra- as well as extra-disciplinary dialogue seriously in order to end the Sisyphean process of endlessly repeating the same old tired mantras. But, ultimately, although most of the revisionist literature fails to confront Eurocentrism, a large part of our argument has been that it is precisely this which needs to be disbanded before we can adequately dismantle the border controls that police the myths of 1648 and 1919, thereby enabling the discipline to finally move on beyond its intellectual prison of its extant Sisyphean prison.

Acknowledgements

We would like to extend thanks to the two anonymous reviewers, and especially to Luke Ashworth, Robert Vitalis and Iver B. Neumann, for many vital pointers. We are also grateful for comments received at the 2010 *Millennium* Conference on Dialogue where the first draft of the article was presented. Of course, the usual rider applies. Benjamin de Carvalho and Halvard Leira are also grateful for funding from NUPI's Centre for Global Governance.

Author Biographies

Benjamin de Carvalho is a Senior Research Fellow at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), Norway.

Halvard Leira is a Research Fellow at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs and Associate Professor (II) at the Norwegian University of Life Sciences.

John M. Hobson is Professor of Politics and International Relations at the University of Sheffield, UK.