

International relations in the prison of Political Science

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Abstract

In recent decades, the discipline of International Relations (IR) has experienced both dramatic institutional growth and unprecedented intellectual enrichment. And yet, unlike neighbouring disciplines such as Geography, Sociology, History and Comparative Literature, it has still not generated any ‘big ideas’ that have impacted across the human sciences. Why is this? And what can be done about it? This article provides an answer in three steps. First, it traces the problem to IR’s enduring definition as a subfield of Political Science. Second, it argues that IR should be re-grounded in its own disciplinary problematique: the consequences of (societal) multiplicity. And finally, it shows how this re-grounding unlocks the transdisciplinary potential of IR. Specifically, ‘uneven and combined development’ provides an example of an IR ‘big idea’ that could travel to other disciplines: for by operationalizing the consequences of multiplicity, it reveals the causal and constitutive significance of ‘the international’ for the social world as a whole.

Keywords

historical sociology, International Relations, international theory, Political Science, uneven and combined development

Introduction

The modern discipline of International Relations (IR) is nearly 100 years old. Its first Chair was established in 1919 at the then University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, and the coming centenary will doubtless witness a variety of celebratory events. There will be much to celebrate. In the decades since the end of the Cold War, public awareness of the importance of international affairs has dramatically increased. Courses in international studies have proliferated across the higher education sector. And the discipline of

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IR itself has opened up intellectually in a truly remarkable way. It has been transformed from a rather narrow study, heavily focused on Cold War military and diplomatic relations, into what sometimes looks like a universal discipline: a thriving intellectual hub where ideas and approaches are imported from right across the social sciences and humanities, and where they meet each other in a rich and enriching cacophony of debate and innovation.

Yet IR today is also experiencing a kind of crisis of intellectual confidence. In 2013, the editors of the *European Journal of International Relations* introduced a special issue on ‘The End of IR Theory?’ by suggesting that the fundamental debates which shaped the discipline as a whole ‘have now subsided and … the discipline has moved into’ a period in which theory-building has largely been replaced by the much narrower activity of hypothesis testing.¹ By contrast, Ole Waever has argued that IR today contains *more* theory than ever – ‘only it is not *IR* theory!’ but rather theory imported from other disciplines.² Christine Sylvester has analysed how all this theory is fragmented among numerous intellectual ‘camps’ which see only by the light of their own camp-fires, and are no longer engaged in a shared conversation about their common subject matter. In this sense, she claims, it is indeed possible that ‘IR theory *per se* is at an end’.³

If so, however, it is apparently not an end that will be particularly noticed elsewhere in the social sciences. For as Chris Brown has recently reminded us, the external impact of IR theory has been more or less negligible. While IR has indeed imported numerous concepts, theories and methods from outside, ‘the exchange between our discipline and the rest of the social/human sciences is pretty much one-way, and not in our favour’.⁴ This fact that IR has produced no big ideas that have influenced other fields has often been lamented in the past.⁵ Today, however, IR’s credentials as an independent discipline are apparently so weak that in 2015, the *Annual Review of Political Science* actually published an article called ‘Should we leave behind the subfield of International Relations?’ In this article, the author pondered whether ‘the IR subfield should be abandoned and its pieces allocated to new subfields of conflict, institutions, political economy, and political behavior’.⁶ He eventually concluded that IR should be left for now, but mainly because breaking it up would result in new boundary problems among its several replacement disciplines. There was no suggestion that IR had a vital contribution of its own to make to the social sciences.

What explains this peculiar situation? Why has the great flowering of IR as a field been unable to shake off this sense of failure and vulnerability? And what can be done about it?

In this article, I seek to answer these questions in three main steps. First, I suggest that at a deep level, IR has never been established as a field *in its own right*. It emerged as an extension of Politics or Political Science and has remained trapped within a borrowed ontology. I call this confinement ‘the prison of Political Science’, and I believe it explains our failure to produce ideas that can travel to other disciplines.

Yet this outcome, I then argue, was not a necessary one at all: no less than more established disciplines like Geography, History, Sociology and Comparative Literature, IR rests upon a fundamental fact about the social world which is full of implications for all the social sciences and humanities. This is the fact that the human world comprises a *multiplicity* of co-existing societies. Knowing how to take intellectual

possession of this fact, how to extend it beyond a narrow argument about geopolitics, and how therefore to draw out its implications for other fields – this is the key to establishing IR in its own right, and to developing ideas that can speak to the other social sciences and humanities.

Finally, I provide an example of one such idea – the idea of uneven and combined development – which is based precisely on this fact of societal multiplicity. As a result, it enables us to reinvent our understanding of the international itself, to reimagine the discipline outside the prison of Political Science, and to expand it in a way that enables the unique insights of IR to travel into the subject matter of other disciplines.

The prison of Political Science

What then is ‘the prison of Political Science’? A powerful illustration can be seen in one of the founding texts of International Relations: E. H. Carr’s *The Twenty Years’ Crisis*.⁷ To be sure, this is a text whose foundational status needs to be treated critically. Its rhetorical structure – above all the claims it makes about the infancy of the discipline and the positions adopted by Carr’s so-called ‘utopian’ opponents – has encouraged a highly questionable intellectual history to consolidate itself.⁸ And yet it also remains the case that through this same rhetorical structure, Carr licensed himself to go back to first principles and make a foundational argument about the study of International Relations itself. What should be its starting point? How should we understand its subject matter theoretically? And where does it stand in relation to the wider social sciences? Carr’s answers to these questions invite us to reflect on our own foundational assumptions – but they also enable us to see the prison of political science while it is still under construction.

The section of *The Twenty Years’ Crisis* where this occurs begins in Chapter 7, about one-third of the way through the book. Up to this point, Carr has concentrated on two preliminary steps. First (in Chapters 1 and 2), he has set out his general argument about the formation of intellectual disciplines. They come into being, he says, in response to some urgent human purpose. And because this purpose precedes and shapes the new enquiry, it leads to an opening pre-scientific stage in which, as he puts it, ‘the element of wish or purpose is overwhelmingly strong, and the inclination to analyze facts and means weak or non-existent’. Only when the utopian schemes of this opening stage have failed is the new discipline forced to turn from aspiration to analysis. And the addition of a realist critique to the founding purpose of the study leads it out of ‘its infantile and utopian period’ and establishes ‘its claim to be regarded as a science’.⁹

Second (in Chapters 3–6), Carr has applied this schema to the development of ‘the science of international politics’. Founded in the aftermath of the First World War, the new science invoked the liberal doctrine of the harmony of interests in order to assert the possibility of constructing a peaceful world. The disastrous failure of its schemes for collective security revealed how far they were from being grounded in any adequate analysis of international politics. And the doctrine itself fell victim to a merciless realist critique which exposed it as the legitimating ideology of the status quo powers.

The scene is therefore set for Carr to turn to the constructive part of his argument, and to rebuild ‘the science of international politics’ from first principles. This is exactly what

he now proceeds to do. And it looks at first as if he gets off to a flying start. ‘Man’, he tells us in the opening sentence of Chapter 7, ‘has always lived in groups’.¹⁰ Let us remove the sexist formulation of the point by changing ‘Man’ to ‘humanity’. And it then appears that Carr has gone straight for that universal fact about the human world that must be the distinctive empirical and theoretical starting point for a discipline of International Relations: the co-existence of a multiplicity of social entities. Surely, if he now reflects systematically on this, he will uncover both the distinctiveness of this object of study and its significance for social existence in general. The disciplinary credentials of IR will be firmly established.

But alas, as the reader soon discovers, this is not what happens next. When Carr talked about humans always having lived in groups, his use of the plural noun – ‘groups’ – was almost incidental. He was not referring to the co-existence of multiple societies. What he was actually referencing was the fact that humans are fundamentally social animals who live together in groups. They do not exist as isolated individuals. And even this apparent positing of a general *social ontology* is actually just a means of getting to the foundational statement he really wants to make, which is a statement about *politics*: because individual humans always exist in a social group of some kind, ‘one of the functions of such a group has been to regulate relations between its members’. And ‘Politics’, he then immediately adds, ‘deals with the behavior of [humans] in such organized permanent or semi-permanent groups’.¹¹

From here, Carr goes on to add three further points. First, this behaviour exhibits both a tendency to individual egoism and self-assertion and a capacity for co-operation and sociability. Second, although *political* society, the state, is unique in being a compulsory association, it too exhibits this duality in the sense that it rests simultaneously on coercion and legitimacy. Both are essential to the nature of politics itself. And finally, this is no less true of *international* politics than of *domestic* politics. The ‘infancy’ of ‘the science of international politics’ lies in the fact that it has not yet come to terms with this basic fact about its subject matter. Only when its initial utopian aspiration has been balanced by a heavy dose of realist analysis will this new field pass out of its infancy and become a social science like the others.

Now, in one sense, it is hard to object to this chain of reasoning. After all, Carr calls this chapter ‘The Nature of *Politics*’. And his fundamental purpose is to emphasize Aristotle’s undeniable claim that because humans live in groups, there is an irreducibly political dimension to their existence.

Nonetheless, something peculiar is happening here. According to the opening sentence of *The Twenty Years’ Crisis*, it is not the science of *politics* that is in its infancy, but the science of *international* politics. The purpose of the current chapter is to formulate the latter’s deepest premises – the ones that will enable the development of this new science. And yet, although the opening sentence at first *appeared* to be a premise about the international condition, this has now turned out not to be the case. It takes only two further sentences for it to become clear that Carr’s argumentation is about relations inside social groups rather than relations between them. And there it stays for the whole of the rest of this short but pivotal chapter until, right at the end, Carr proposes to apply to international politics what has been learned about the nature of politics per se.¹²

And here lies the problem. E. H. Carr is purportedly laying the foundations for a discipline of IR. But the way he proceeds is not to identify what premises of its own the international might uniquely contain. It is rather to extend the premises of Politics into the international sphere. And this procedure grounds IR in an ontology borrowed from Political Science. It is an ontology of political power (operating in the absence of central authority) rather than an ontology of the international per se. Of course, Carr is not alone in this. It is hard to think of a single canonical work in IR which defines the discipline in other terms. To this day, most IR is taught in departments of Politics or Political Science. And in fact it is no part of the current argument to minimize the significance of the ‘anarchical’ nature of international relations. What then is so problematic about Carr’s procedure? To find out, we must reflect briefly on the nature of academic disciplines.

The grounding of disciplines

The study of the human world is distributed across a range of social sciences and humanities. Scholars often lament the resultant fragmentation of social knowledge, with its tendency towards provincialism and reification. ‘[I]t should not be supposed’, warned C. Wright Mills, ‘that, faced with the great variety of social life, social scientists have rationally divided up the work at hand’. For Eric Wolf, the creation of modern disciplines was a ‘fateful … wrong turn’, while Immanuel Wallerstein argued that the actual constellation of disciplines that emerged in the nineteenth century ‘reflected very much the triumph of liberal ideology’.¹³ We thus have every reason to be suspicious of academic disciplines. Nonetheless, the division of labour they embody can bring benefits too. Whether by accident or design, each discipline foregrounds a particular dimension of social reality and makes it the object of an organized enquiry. It analyses both this dimension in itself and its significance for, and interconnection with, wider human affairs. As a result of this specialization, the analysis may go much deeper than it would otherwise have done.

In this way, for example, the discipline of Geography foregrounds the fact that both the human and the natural physical worlds exist in and across three-dimensional space. Human Geography studies the significance of spatial ordering for social life and the way that space is itself socially produced in different historical and cultural settings. It uses a focus on space to construct its analysis of the human world.¹⁴ As Robert Dodgshon once wrote, the special task of Geography is ‘to show how interactions and processes, whether social, economic, political or ritualistic, are configured in space and how their configuration in space is intrinsic or prejudicial to their meaning and effect’.¹⁵ Thus, Geography’s very existence as an intellectual practice subtends on our existence in space.

By contrast, the discipline of History might be thought to be so wide-ranging as to have no core ontological focus of this kind.¹⁶ But in fact all historical thinking involves a conjugation of past, present and future in the production of knowledges, identities and agencies. It subtends on our existence in time – and from this connection arise both its practical and its meta-theoretical preoccupations with historical specificity, chronology, causal sequencing and narrative forms of explanatory method. As Jo Guldi and David Armitage recently put it:

[t]ime in all its dimensions is the special province of the historian ... [It is] something indispensable about the work of historians that is less central to the work of their fellow humanists and social scientists. Historians can never shake off the element of time. It clogs and drags our studies, but it also defines them. It is the soil through which we dig, the element from which history itself springs.¹⁷

Time is thus to History what space is to Geography. In the wider conversation of the human disciplines, historians are the natural ‘theoreticians of temporality’.¹⁸

In a similar way too, Sociology is grounded in the fact that individual human lives are always carried on within wider structures of social relations that produce both aggregate systemic effects and local molecular definitions of human agents in specific ways. ‘Sociology’, says Anthony Giddens, ‘is the study of human social life, groups and societies’.¹⁹ It is therefore no wonder that the ‘agent-structure debate’ is perennial to this discipline. For ‘the idea of social structure is at the very heart of sociology as a scientific enterprise’.²⁰

Finally, to take just one more example, Comparative Literature is the study of the different national traditions of creative writing – of poetry, novels, drama and so forth. But at a deeper level, it is surely also about language itself: how the metaphorical and metonymic properties of language are mobilized to create human meanings – and how, by extension, the social world at large, which is of course also linguistically mediated and produced, exhibits properties of textuality that invite hermeneutic deconstruction and analysis.

In each of these four cases – Geography, History, Sociology and Comparative Literature – an academic discipline has arisen on the basis of a specific feature of social reality: spatiality, temporality, social structure and textuality. This specialized grounding certainly *can* produce fragmentation and even a kind of fetishizing of the feature in question. And yet, crucially, it is also the secret of the transdisciplinary potential of these specialized discourses. Precisely *because* each has taken possession of something that is in fact *general* to the social world, their specialized investigations produce concepts that can suddenly travel and be applied right across the human sciences.

We see this happening again and again. In the 1980s and 1990s, Geographers like Derek Gregory, Doreen Massey and David Harvey used the spatial focus of their discipline to produce analyses of social change that grew into a spatial turn that was taken up in one discipline after another.²¹ Several decades earlier, Annales historians Fernand Braudel and Ernst Labrousse meditated upon the intersecting planes of temporality that come together to produce historical time. And they developed a concept of ‘historical conjuncture’ that has been used far beyond the discipline of History itself. Immanuel Wallerstein’s World Systems Theory has become such an enormous cross-disciplinary academic industry in its own right that we can easily forget that it began in Sociology as an answer to Sociology’s specialized question of ‘what is a social system’? More recently, literary theorists like Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak played a key role in the genesis of post-colonial theory which has gained traction far beyond the specialized discipline of Comparative Literature. In post-colonial studies, Comparative Literature’s specialized focus on language has made it a leading voice in the interdisciplinary conversation about the textuality of the social world.

In all these cases, then, a given discipline can speak to other disciplines (and has something to say to them) precisely because it has specialized in a particular feature of reality that is nonetheless *general* to the social world. (And this also explains why ‘we can ... define each social science only by its core, not by fixing exact boundaries’).²²

The question therefore arises: what general feature of the social world is ‘the special province’ (Guldi and Armitage) of IR as an intellectual discipline? What is the unique focus that enables IR to speak to the other disciplines in our own language about their particular subject matter? If we ask this question of *The Twenty Years’ Crisis*, the answer is ‘nothing’. IR emerges from its infancy not by finding its own voice and object but by accepting that it is simply an extension of another discipline, the ‘science of politics’. Only when the same assumptions are accepted for *international* politics as have been since Aristotle recognized for politics *per se* will the *science* of IR exist.

And here we see the foundations of the prison being laid. After all, if IR is merely a subfield of Political Science, then the only identity available for it is a negative one: it studies politics but in the absence of central authority. Thus, the international itself becomes associated with the narrow version of it provided by political realism. And once that has happened, the possibility of IR producing ideas that can travel to other disciplines seems to disappear.

Even the work of Kenneth Waltz, who certainly did assert the distinctiveness of the international, has two characteristics that *prevent* it from having transdisciplinary significance. First, Waltz defined international theory as international *political* theory: it emphatically did *not* embrace a wider condition of internationality with implications beyond Political Science. (And Waltz repeatedly challenged his critics to show how such an extension could be made without replacing theory with thick description.)²³ Second, Waltz conceptualized the international as separate from, and counterposed to, the domestic realm. About that domestic social world, neorealism – quite literally – had nothing to say, except to note how different it was from the world of international politics that existed alongside it.²⁴

Here the peculiarity of IR’s disciplinary formation finds its extreme manifestation. On the one hand, the local impact of Waltz’s work has been so great that one might almost suggest that for IR, ‘all theoretical development since 1979 has been a series of footnotes on Waltz’.²⁵ And yet on the other hand, ‘however important Waltz’s work is to us, it is at best vaguely recognized within Political Science in general, and pretty much unknown in the broader field of the human sciences’.²⁶

Of course, political realism has not had the field to itself in IR. Numerous other approaches have rejected both its narrow statist definition of the international and the idea of an autonomy of geopolitics. The sheer range of these alternatives – from liberalism, Marxism and feminism through to constructivism, post-structuralism, post-colonialism, queer theory and so on – accounts for much of the vibrancy of IR today. But how many of these challenges have themselves provided alternative, non-realist theories that are based on the unique properties of *the international*? The answer, it seems, is ‘none’.

Liberalism and Marxism, for example, are overwhelmingly ‘second image’ theories which argue that international phenomena are shaped by the historical form of the multiple societies involved.²⁷ Post-structuralism, meanwhile, ‘is not a model or theory of international relations’ at all; it is ‘a critical attitude ... [deriving from] an awareness of

... other branches of the social sciences and humanities'.²⁸ Constructivism too 'is not an IR theory but a metatheory'.²⁹ Even post-colonial theory reasons not from the fact of the international itself, but rather from the particular forms of domination associated with the 'rise of the West'. Like feminism's critique of patriarchy, post-colonialism's critique of Eurocentrism makes an indispensable contribution to international studies. But neither feminism nor post-colonialism, nor any of the other theories just mentioned, makes a foundational claim for IR's subject matter in the way that we earlier saw Geographers, Historians and Sociologists doing for theirs.

Perhaps the reason for this is that they regard the idea of the international per se as part of the toxic legacy of realism – tainted, that is, by association with realist claims about conflict, power politics and the impossibility of progress. This is an understandable phobia, but it carries a heavy price. For it leads them to assume that international affairs must be shaped by other aspects of the social world, and are therefore best interpreted by ideas imported from the disciplines that study those aspects. Yet if we declare that Sociology, or History, or Anthropology holds the key to understanding IR's subject matter, then we effectively turn IR into a subfield of Sociology, History or Anthropology. The downside to IR's creative openness to the other disciplines is that if we have no deep ontology of our own, we become in effect *everybody's* subfield. As Stanley Hoffmann once put it, 'Most [other] fields have something to offer [us in IR]. But a flea market is not a discipline'.³⁰

So perhaps we should not be surprised that no big ideas have travelled outwards from IR. Any such ideas would have to be about the unique importance of the international for the human world, just as the big ideas from other disciplines have come from reflection on their core subject matter of space, time, social structure and textuality. But the realists have defined the international too narrowly for this role. And the anti-realists have steered clear of the uniqueness of the international because they associate it with realist claims about anarchy and power politics that they are determined to refute. The predicament in which we find ourselves has thus been the work of many hands – critical scholars as well as realists and neorealists.

I call this situation 'the prison of Political Science' for three main reasons. First, its ultimate source lies in the continuing failure of IR to break out of its original definition as a subfield of Political Science. (This subordinate identity will end only when we can produce a wider and deeper definition of the international that includes but is not limited to its political dimension.) Second, this failure confines IR within the premises of an alien discipline, preventing it from developing freely and realizing its own potential as a viewpoint on the social world. (Imagine a discipline of Geography that explored only the political constitution of space, and never the significance of spatiality for 'the political', or indeed for all the other aspects of the social world.) And finally, just like in a real prison, IR can receive visits but it cannot repay them. It can import ideas from outside, but it cannot send anything back in return. Whatever significance the international holds for the wider social sciences, it never becomes visible. It remains locked inside the prison.

Yet, this is not a necessary predicament. Just like Geography, History, Sociology and so on, IR has an ontology of its own, one with enormous significance for all the human sciences. This ontology is not the property of any one particular approach. It is our shared inheritance as a discipline. And it is our way out of the prison of Political Science.

The consequences of multiplicity

Let us return then to the big question: if Geography subtends on our existence in space – and if Sociology analyses the relational quality of human life – what general feature of the social world provides IR with its deepest ontological premise?

The answer seems ineluctable: no matter how much we twist and turn it in our hands, the word ‘international’ always ends up presupposing the same basic circumstance, namely, that human existence is not unitary but multiple. It is distributed across numerous interacting societies. This is the elemental fact about the human world that justifies the existence of IR as an academic discipline. No other discipline – not even Political Science³¹ – subtends fundamentally on this fact of societal multiplicity.

Of course, as we shall note later on, *all* the social sciences and humanities encounter the *results* of this fact, just as IR encounters the significance of spatiality, textuality and so on in its own subject matter. In recent years, for example, cultural anthropologists have stressed the significance of ‘primitive warfare’, and other interactions in processes of early state-formation – an emphasis that necessarily presupposes multiplicity.³² Yet, this does not change the fact that what distinguishes Anthropology among the human sciences is its analysis of human worlds through the prism of culture. Anthropology without interacting multiplicity would surely be bad Anthropology.³³ Anthropology without ‘culture’, however, would no longer be Anthropology at all. For ‘culture’, as Clifford Geertz put it, is the concept ‘around which the whole discipline of Anthropology arose’.³⁴ **In a similar way, the discipline of IR ‘arises around’ the fact of societal multiplicity in human life. This is uniquely our ontological premise.**

Still, this claim immediately raises two issues that must be addressed before we can continue.³⁵ First, the idea of ‘societies’ (which implies tightly bounded, internally homogeneous units) is a product of the modern era of nation-states, and is often a misleading guide to reality even there. How then can it possibly cover all the different kinds of social existence that have obtained across world history? Well, as a description of the empirical form of that existence, it surely cannot. But that is not the work that it is called upon to do here. Paired with the concept of multiplicity, its purpose is rather to summarize the fact that social existence has always comprised multiple instances, whatever forms these have taken. In a different context, R. N. Berki once chastised Marx and Engels for not seeing that this fact has a force all of its own for social theory:

It does not matter, of course, whether one now calls it ‘state’, or ‘nation’, or ‘community’ or the ‘administration of things’ (Engels’ renowned phrase from *Anti-Dühring*), as long as what is meant is a plurality of these units.³⁶

And this point continues to hold if we turn our attention from the future (where Marx and Engels were looking) to the historical past. ‘It does not matter’, for the general point at issue here, whether we are dealing with states, empires, tribes, clans or anything else ‘as long as what is meant is a plurality of these units’. Thus, when we refer to multiple societies, what we are actually invoking is not any given form of social existence, but rather the socially and politically fragmented character of human history itself.

And this leads straight into the second issue: by granting this central importance to political multiplicity, are we not now re-grounding IR in the very ontology of Political

Science from which we are seeking to free it? If it is *political* fragmentation that makes the international, is not IR properly *at home* as a subfield of Political Science? The answer to this is twofold. On the one hand, political multiplicity must indeed have a special importance for IR – without it, there would be no plurality of units. **On the other hand, in international relations, the multiplicity of polities, as neorealism rightly says, radically impacts the nature of politics itself – hence, in Waltz's view, the whole need for a separate theory of international politics.** Furthermore, where societal multiplicity obtains, its significance is not restricted to politics and relations of power. It extends into the social, economic, cultural and developmental dimensions too; and its causal implications there, as we shall see below, proliferate beyond any logic deriving from political multiplicity alone.

In the end, therefore, it is multiplicity, not politics, that provides the deepest code of the international as a feature of human existence. And this is why it cannot be contained in Political Science, or Sociology or Geography or any other pre-existing discipline. It demands a voice of its own.

This voice has remarkable consequences for all the social sciences. Some of these consequences are half-known to us already, but we half-know them under the negative sign bequeathed to us by Political Science – the sign of the *absence* of overarching government. We do not yet know them under the positive sign of the international – the *co-presence* of multiple interacting societies. And when it comes to IR finding its own place among the disciplines, switching signs makes all the difference in the world. What, then, are these consequences?

Co-existence

The first and the most profound one is also the simplest: at its highest level of organization, the human world does not culminate in a single authority; but nor does it simply tail off into empty space; instead, it opens out into a lateral field of co-existing societies.

This field of co-existence adds a whole new layer of social reality beyond the internal structures of any individual society. And the result is not simply that the human world is larger. It also contains a whole extra *kind* of social phenomena. For it is not politics alone that acquires special characteristics when it operates across multiple societies. ‘As long as countries exist’, writes Thomas Pugel, ‘international economics will be a body of analysis distinct from the rest of economics’.³⁷ Ethical reasoning too has to adapt its premises when exploring moral obligations that extend across multiple societies.³⁸ And as we shall see further below, co-existence also adds an entirely additional branch of *social causality* to processes of historical development and change.

In short, multiplicity generates the international itself as a dimension of the social world. It is the special remit of IR to bring this dimension into focus and to construct it as an object of study. Let us therefore resist the negative definition inherited from Political Science, and state the matter in positive terms: the international is ‘that dimension of social reality which arises specifically from the co-existence within it of more than one society’.³⁹

By contrast, to define the international as an absence of centralized rule only shows that reflection has begun, naturally enough, from inside one of the fragments of the social

world. It has not yet shaken off the ‘domestic analogy’ which assumes that ‘real’ social existence obtains only when enabled by superordinate authority. It is thus still exploring the international in terms of what it is not. In fact, however, we know from history that human societies have always been multiple – hence their multiplicity is no less definitive of the social world than is the existence of centralized authority inside them.

Moreover, all arguments from absence confront a fundamental problem of referential failure: the absence of central authority cannot itself be the cause of anything because, by definition, ‘it’ does not exist.⁴⁰ Thus, if we are to discharge our remit of bringing ‘the international’ into focus, we need a language that is adequate to explore what *does* exist – and that is the language of multiplicity. For this language alone equips us to derive the nature and characteristics of the international from the positive substance of the phenomenon – the co-presence of more than one society. Will this simply lead us back to realism? To find out, we must unpack the further consequences of multiplicity.

Difference

The *quantitative* multiplicity of societies is also a *qualitative* one. We know this to be the case empirically. We know that societies differ from each other in all kinds of ways – size, power, culture, history and so on. However, difference is also a *necessary* consequence of multiplicity itself. Why?

The reason is partly that multiple societies must vary in their geographical location. And they are therefore differently influenced both by the physical variation of the earth itself, and by the unique relational position that each occupies with respect to all the others. But difference also obtains because the distribution of social development across more than one society *allows* it to take different forms in different places at the same time. As we know, one of the most distinctive attributes of humans as a species is our ability to construct our social existence in radically different ways, and for those ways themselves to undergo historical development and change. ‘In the end’, writes historical sociologist Tim Megarry, ‘it is perhaps this fact of diversity which constitutes the most significant characteristic of human social organisation’.⁴¹

Multiplicity, however, transforms this characteristic: from being simply a *comparative* fact about different societies in different times and places, it now also finds expression in a *concrete* configuration of societies that coexist in space and time. And in this way, the international inscribes difference and multi-linearity into the nature of global social development.

Interaction

But multiplicity is not just about co-existence and difference. It also compels societies into *interaction*. This is because it entails a common condition for all individual societies: they all confront the fact that the human world extends – both quantitatively and qualitatively – beyond themselves. As a result, multiplicity is a source both of dangers and of opportunities.

It is a danger because events, decisions and processes occurring outside any given society can become threats to its interests or even survival. During the nineteenth

century, numerous Asian and African societies were overwhelmed because the industrial revolution elsewhere had transformed the power of other (European) societies whose very existence had barely been known to them before. In the early twenty-first century, the European Union experienced a political crisis due to the influx of refugees fleeing violent conflict occurring outside itself.

But multiplicity is also an opportunity because co-existence and difference mean that the developmental possibilities of any given society are never defined exclusively by its internal social structure and cultural horizon. The existence of other societies creates the basis both for trade and for importing knowledge and resources produced by different patterns of development elsewhere. In fact, the simple knowledge that other societies exist where social life is ordered in different ways, or where constraints that apply in one's own society have been overcome, can become a source of domestic social change.

Karl Marx once wrote that:

No social order is ever destroyed before all the productive forces for which it is sufficient have been developed, and new superior relations of production never replace older ones before the material conditions for their existence have matured within the framework of the old society.⁴²

Perhaps one could imagine some sense in which this statement holds. But if we take it to be a claim about social development as a historical process, then its neglect of multiplicity surely renders it misleading indeed. For on the one hand, the developmental potentials of existing social orders have all too often been interrupted and destroyed by external intrusions. And on the other hand, history is no less full of cases where 'new superior relations of production ... replace the older ones' (either by being introduced ready-made from the outside or by developing through interaction with other societies), without their conditions having 'matured within the framework of the old society'.

So multiplicity leads to interaction because societies *have* to manage their external environment through diplomatic and military means in order to survive; if they want to benefit from the opportunities of difference, they have to develop structures of interdependence too; and interaction also occurs, via the mutual awareness of other societies, in the consciousness (or imagination) of the ruled as well as the rulers. All modern societies experience all these things, all the time. This is international relations as mainstream IR theory knows it – geopolitics and interdependence. It comprises an immense field of social action – of inter-societal conflict, diplomacy, organization, law and exchanges of all kinds. But the implications of multiplicity do not stop here.

Combination

Interaction brings with it a fourth consequence: no society undergoes a history that is truly linear and self-enclosed. All societies must therefore be ongoing combinations of local patterns of development with external influences and pressures of all kinds.

This can apply even to their most apparently indigenous elements. What could appear more English than the English language? And yet we know that it is actually a mixture of the Latin, Saxon, Norse and French languages among others. And those different ingredients are not just linguistic effects: they are the sedimentation in language of the

influence of the Romans, Saxons, Vikings and Normans on Britain's social and political history too. The point should be generalized: 'the internal structure of society is everywhere conditioned, determined or even brought into existence by external factors, so that each society is linked to others, interdependent with them or even shaped by processes of societalization that cut across them'.⁴³

Thus, the international dimension is not simply a matter of external relations: through interaction, multiplicity reaches into the inner constitution of societies themselves.

Dialectical change

But this door swings both ways. If human societies are multiple, varied and interactive, then it also follows that the process of world development overall cannot be uni-linear or even just multi-linear. It must be a fully dialectical process – one in which exchanges among social formations unlock new possibilities and departures through mechanisms that are intrinsic to the phenomenon of interaction itself. Let us consider a famous example.

In 1620, Francis Bacon wrote that the modern world was marked off from the past by the impact of three key inventions: gunpowder, the printing press and the magnetic compass. Between them, he wrote, these inventions had done more than any empire or religion to lift Europe out of the darkness of the Middle Ages. Bacon referred to them as 'mechanical discoveries [that were] unknown to the ancients, and of which the origin, though recent, is obscure and inglorious'.⁴⁴ In fact, however, all three of them had originated much earlier in China and had been transferred to Europe through processes of indirect trade and communication.⁴⁵ This is not just a general point about interconnection. Transposed out of their original Chinese environment, these inventions were now inserted into a different social setting, and they were therefore developed in new directions and with results that they never had in China. The same can be said of the transfer of classical Greek learning from the Arab world to Europe at the start of the Renaissance – or indeed of the original translation of Greek philosophy into Arabic 300 years before.⁴⁶ In all three cases, the dialogical transfer of something out of one society into another set in train a new and different process of development that inflected the wider course of world development itself. Viewed in this wider frame, even the rise of the West turns out to have been rooted in a dialectical causality generated by the interactions of multiple societies.

Co-existence, difference, interaction, combination, dialectics: what do these five consequences of multiplicity tell us about the subject matter of IR? They tell us that the international is something much larger than a subfield of Politics – or even Political Economy. It certainly does include the field of geopolitics and interdependence that Realist and liberal theories focus upon. But it also comprises the implications of societal multiplicity for all the so-called 'domestic' aspects of social life too: social structures, economic systems, intellectual production, cultural phenomena and so on. And through this, 'the international' imparts its own dialectical mechanisms and dynamics to the structure of world history too. To put it another way, a discipline of IR should certainly try to understand what happens in international politics; but it should also elaborate the significance of societal multiplicity for the social world as a whole.

This is our passport out of the Prison of Political Science. It means that we finally have something to say to other disciplines about *their* subject matter. Instead of talking only about the significance of class, gender, language and so on for IR, we can also explore the significance of *the international* for class, gender and language too. And we should not underestimate the contribution this can make across the human disciplines. One of the knottiest problems in the social sciences is what has been variously described as ‘internalism’, ‘uni-linearity’ and ‘methodological nationalism’. It is a problem that, as Robert Nisbet and Friedrich Tenbruck have argued, goes all the way back to the Classical Social Theorists themselves – including Marx, Weber and Durkheim.⁴⁷ We see it in their tendency, at a deep theoretical level, to conceptualize society in the singular and in their failure, therefore, to theorize the consequences of multiplicity for social reality. From this intellectual source, the problem is carried into contemporary theory where, as many writers – from Theda Skocpol (1973) to Zygmunt Bauman (1992) and Ulrich Beck (2007) – have observed, it continues to hamper social analysis.⁴⁸

Overcoming this problem, wrote Bauman in *Intimations of Postmodernity*, is ‘a most urgent task facing sociology’. Yet, he quailed at the challenge: modelling the inter-societal space, he implied, was harder ‘than anything the sociologists tried to grasp intellectually in the past’.⁴⁹ Really? Is it harder than the challenge faced by Marx in constructing and solving the riddle of value as a social product – a challenge that had defeated even Aristotle, and that was ‘never even attempted by bourgeois economics’⁵⁰? Is it harder than Max Weber’s lonely journey into ‘the specific and peculiar rationalism of Western culture’, a journey that fundamentally denaturalized the European Enlightenment itself?⁵¹ Or might it rather be that this sense of overwhelming difficulty is instead a reflection of the under-development of IR as a resource for the human disciplines? Societal multiplicity – and hence ‘the inter-societal space’ – is the general feature of the social world that is specific to IR as a discipline. Yet, if this feature has been defined negatively – the absence of unified authority – and has been locked up inside Political Science, then it is understandable how the international has been the missing piece of the jigsaw of the social sciences. If we now reground IR in its own ontology of multiplicity, that piece can finally be put into place.

Still, for that to happen, we need ideas that operationalize IR’s potential – ideas that make the international exportable to other disciplines by showing its importance for their subject matter. In principle, producing these ideas should not be difficult. We need only ask: what are the implications for politics, economics, culture, social change and so on of the fact that each of these activities occurs in a wider context of multiple societies? Having already posed this question in the field of politics, political realism ought to be able to play a leading role here – which makes it all the stranger it has not pursued this opportunity. Non-realist approaches are well-positioned too: they need to only invert their existing procedures and explore the consequences of societal multiplicity for their chosen focus on class, gender, culture, language and so on. All in all, then, the pent-up potential of IR for the human sciences is surely enormous, and is by no means restricted to any single approach.⁵² And yet as we noted earlier, this potential is largely unrealized because so few IR scholars actually reason from the fact of the international to its implications for the social world in general. Nonetheless, there is one idea that has already

been used to do just that: the theory of uneven and combined development. How? And with what results?

Uneven and combined development

This theory was originally formulated outside IR, by Leon Trotsky at the start of the twentieth century. But it works precisely by operationalizing the five consequences of multiplicity outlined above. This enabled Trotsky to overcome a major instance of uni-linear thinking in his day. And although the idea was subsequently neglected – not only by mainstream social science but even by Trotsky's own followers – it has recently undergone a revival in IR: over 70 articles advocating, applying and criticizing the idea have been published in the last decade.⁵³ Let us first recall the basic elements of the theory, and then consider how it reimagines the international in a way that carries its significance beyond the discipline of IR.

At the start of the twentieth century, Czarist Russia was undergoing rapid industrial development. But it was not retracing the experience of the Western countries as the *Communist Manifesto* implied it should. Marx and Engels had expected capitalism to create 'a world in its own image' wherever it spread.⁵⁴ But state-led industrialization in Russia was producing quite different social structures from those of Western Europe. And since the Russian Marxists drew their worldview from the *Manifesto*, they were increasingly left without a coherent political analysis and strategy. This was the problem that Trotsky solved by arguing that modern world development was not uni-linear but was rather multiple and interactive: uneven and combined. How did he do it?

He began by invoking the first two consequences of multiplicity. For what Trotsky meant by 'unevenness' was precisely that capitalism had emerged into a world of *co-existing* societies of *different* kinds and levels of development. Russia, he argued, 'stood not only geographically, but also socially and historically' between the industrializing capitalist societies in the West and the autocratic agrarian empires to its South and East.⁵⁵ Geopolitical co-existence and sociological difference were (and in fact always had been) essential features of its development.

Next he argued that in the modern period, this unevenness suddenly produced a mixture of dangers and opportunities that intensified the third consequence of multiplicity: *international interaction*. On the one hand, the growing power of the industrial capitalist states imposed a geopolitical 'whip of external necessity' onto all other societies: if they could not reproduce this new form of power inside themselves, they would be consumed by the European empires – as indeed most of them were. By the 1920s, only a handful of non-European societies had escaped outright colonial control by Western powers. On the other hand, this same historical unevenness gave these non-Western societies a paradoxical opportunity too which Trotsky called the 'privilege of historic backwardness'⁵⁶: starting industrialization later, they did not *have* to retrace the slow, haphazard development of the pioneers; they could import its latest technological, organizational and financial results from outside. And in this way, co-existence and difference among societies produced both pressures and opportunities that in turn created the possibility of accelerated development among late-comers such as Russia.

But it also meant – in line with the fourth consequence of multiplicity, namely, *combination* – that these late-comers would not become copies of the pioneer societies. In nineteenth century Russia, the differential temporalities of West and East intersected; as a result, historical phenomena that had elsewhere succeeded each other in time were here rendered paradoxically contemporaneous; and this scrambled the causal co-ordinates of socio-political change. After all, Russian Czarism had no intention of transforming itself into a British-style constitutional monarchy. Czarism was importing foreign inventions and resources in order to shore up its own survival. The result was therefore not repetition but combination – or, as Trotsky called it, ‘combined development’. Elements of modern capitalist society were being grafted on to a semi-feudal social structure to produce a unique hybrid of the old and the new.

What Trotsky was discovering here was the very phenomenon that Berki later accused Marx of missing: the impact of societal multiplicity on the process of capitalist world development. And he realized that as a result of this impact, the overall shape of that process was dialectically altering too.

Trotsky referred to this overall shape as the ‘social structure of humanity’;⁵⁷ and he argued that it did not comprise a homogeneous world of capitalist states that were merely at different stages of a uniform development. Instead, East–West interactions had produced peculiar social structures in the catch-up societies, making them paradoxically closer to anti-capitalist revolution than were the advanced Western societies where Marx had expected the first revolutions to occur.

In this way, the international – conceived as uneven and combined development – had dialectically transferred the trigger of world revolution away from the Western countries. This was an outcome that Marx’s largely uni-linear theory could not have foreseen. But Trotsky’s analysis now transformed it from a baffling contradiction into an enabling condition of political action. Viewed in isolation, Russia’s hybrid social structure (which bizarrely combined a small but militant proletariat with a conservative peasant majority, a semi-feudal state and an all but non-existent capitalist bourgeoisie) was inexplicable in Marxist terms, and certainly provided no formula for socialist revolution. Once it was reinserted into its generative international context, however, all its ‘peculiarities’ became immediately comprehensible. Moreover, from a political point of view, the key question was no longer whether a Russian revolution could itself create a socialist society – Trotsky never believed it could. The question was rather whether the internationally produced instability in Russia would turn out to be one part of a wider, inter-societal logic of causation through which socialist revolution in the advanced countries would finally occur – whether it could function, in Trotsky’s words, as ‘a local avalanche in a universal social formation’.⁵⁸ In this complex and many-sided vision, the international had been fully incorporated into a theory of social change – with truly radical consequences both politically and intellectually.

One need not be a Trotskyist, or even a Marxist, to see the significance of this incorporation. The inner structure of Trotsky’s idea is almost the exact inverse of E. H. Carr’s in *The Twenty Years’ Crisis*. Carr argued from the nature of politics to the nature of the international. **Trotsky’s idea, by contrast, is all about how deeply the international can reshape the dynamics of political development.** And because it inverts the direction of

the analysis in this way, it looks like the kind of big idea that could be exported from IR into the other social sciences.

The grounding of IR in uneven and combined development?

Before considering this possibility directly, however, we have a loose end to tie up: have we actually shown that IR subtends on a truly general feature of the social world – as general as space, time, textuality and so on? After all, as mentioned earlier (and unlike space, time and even culture), the very existence of the nation-state, let alone a global sovereign state system, is a very recent development in world history. How then can the international (conceived as societal multiplicity) be an equivalently general feature of social reality? Concerns like these have led most recent work on uneven and combined development to conclude that its object too is peculiarly modern: it is the result of capitalism's unique ability to draw all the world's societies – whatever their prior histories – into a single structure of socio-economic and political relations.⁵⁹ Some have even argued that any attempt to apply the idea more generally reduces it to triviality.⁶⁰ If this criticism holds, it is not just Trotsky's idea that must be reined in; the claim for a discipline of IR grounded in the general fact of societal multiplicity would fail too.

The solution to this conundrum comes, albeit impressionistically, from Trotsky himself. 'Unevenness', he says at one point, 'is the most general law of the historic process'.⁶¹ Trotsky never elaborated on this comment, but we can see what it means if we consider a snapshot of world development at any point in history.

Figure 1 reproduces a map of the world in 1530, showing the different kinds of society co-existing at the time. And as the pattern of different colours indicates, 'the most general' fact about this human world, viewed as a whole, really is its radical unevenness. It is in fact a tapestry in which several different kinds of human society, which had emerged at different points in history, co-exist in real time.

The brown and purple areas denote the great state-based power centres of the day, each of them based on a different regional civilization, having different histories, different cultural worldviews and different ways of organizing politics and society. But the human world was not only composed of states and empires. Vast parts of it (in pink) were occupied by nomadic pastoralists – tribal societies in constant motion with the seasons, living off their herds of livestock. Other parts (in light brown and green) were still covered by communities of settled farmers organized in family and tribal groupings of the kind that preceded the original emergence of state organizations. There were even large parts of the world (in yellow) that were still occupied only by hunter-gatherer groups.

And of course these different societies were interacting with each other. The nomadic peoples of the Eurasian steppe-lands periodically erupted in great campaigns of conquest that could overwhelm the surrounding civilizations⁶² – a perennial 'whip of external necessity'. When Marco Polo visited China in the thirteenth century, he found that it had been completely conquered by the Mongol nomads.

There were also interactions *among* the civilizations of the time. We have already mentioned the transmission of inventions indirectly from China to Europe. By the time of this snapshot, Europe had also received a transmission of ancient Greek learning from the Arab world that helped stimulate the European Renaissance. And in 1530, the



Figure I. The World, AD 1530, *Atlas of World History*, by John Haywood, (Sheriffs Lench: Sandcastle Books 2006), 4.01.

Europeans were conquering America and unlocking huge resources of silver and gold that would buy them into the Indian Ocean trade of Asian societies that were still much wealthier than Europe. Hence, as is now well recognized, multiplicity and interaction played a key role in the rise of the West.⁶³

Looking further back, we find that Trotsky's own society of Russia originated in a fusion between two completely different types of society. In the tenth century, a branch of the Scandinavian Vikings called the Rus settled into what is now Ukraine, in order to secure their trade with Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine Empire. It was from this relationship that Kiev, the first Russian state, was born, and from which it received the Cyrillic alphabet, the Greek Orthodox religion and the Byzantine code of commercial law. Kiev did not have to reinvent these artefacts of Byzantine civilization – it received them ready-made through the privilege of historic backwardness. (The Cyrillic alphabet was deliberately invented as part of a Byzantine strategy to integrate the Slavic tribes under the regional hegemony of the Empire.)⁶⁴

In fact, the importance of multiplicity and interaction goes all the way back to the very first civilization of which we have record. Ancient Sumer was built on a flood plain, which was ideally suited to agriculture but was completely lacking in the metals and timber and precious stones that became central to Sumerian city life. All these had to be imported through interaction with surrounding communities.⁶⁵

Does it stop even there? Arguably, the prehistoric processes of social stratification that created the first state-like organizations were bound up with interactions (of violence and exchange) between settled communities and their neighbours.⁶⁶ At the dawn of human history, uneven and combined development antecedes and partly generates the emergence of 'the political' (and hence also 'the geopolitical') itself.⁶⁷

Why go back so far? What do all these examples tell us? First, they tell us that Trotsky was right: uneven and combined development really is a universal in human history, and should therefore always have been part of our basic model of social reality. The snapshot of the human world in 1530 could have been taken at any other point in history. And while the nature, shape and configuration of societies would differ radically from one period to another, 'the most general law' of unevenness would always hold.

Moreover, it would always have *causal* significance too. For these examples also show, secondly, that the 'whip of external necessity' and the 'privilege of historic backwardness' are not just descriptors for the side effects of capitalism. They are general metaphors for the pressures and opportunities (cultural as well as material) generated across history by the condition of (societal) multiplicity. Through these effects of multiplicity, uneven development underlies two of the most elemental problematics in human affairs: the problematic of security and the problematic of cultural difference.

And finally, what does all this show us about International Relations? Here we must be careful. We cannot say it shows that 'the international' extends all the way back in history because nations and nation-states are peculiarly modern phenomena. But the claim that needs to be made here is even larger than this. These examples show us what 'the international' really is. It is neither a byproduct of modern capitalism nor simply an absence of world government. It is the form taken today by a central feature of human history: namely the fact that social existence has been multiple and interactive right from the start. This is the perception that the Classical Social Theorists never built into their

models of ‘society’. It is the ultimate warrant for a discipline of IR.⁶⁸ And it finally reveals how IR can export its insights to other disciplines.

After all, we do not need to look far to find truly striking instances of combined development in the world today. The largest, in every sense, is surely China, a country that endured a whip of external necessity so intense and prolonged that it came to be called ‘the century of humiliations’. Using the privilege of historic backwardness, Chinese industrialization is now occurring on an even more accelerated, compressed scale than the other late developers before it. And like others before it, Chinese combined development is also producing a peculiar hybrid social formation. Capitalist industrialization organized by a semi-feudal Czarist monarchy was peculiar enough; capitalism presided over by a communist state is surely the most peculiar, most paradoxical combination so far. But of course it is far from being the only one. In Saudi Arabia, a tribal system of politics has been grafted onto an industrializing society, so that the state, which owns the wealth of society, is itself the property of a 7000-strong extended family of princes. The forcing together of the old and the new does not come more extreme than this. And yet a significant fraction of the world’s energy supply rests on this peculiar political hybrid (and the events of 9/11 showed just how unstable this hybrid could be). Meanwhile in Iran, a theocratic revolution that has no precedent *in Shia Islam*, let alone the textbooks of Western social theory, has been locked in a confrontation with the great powers over its use of advanced nuclear technology. The very name ‘Islamic Republic’ announces the fusion of traditional and modern elements.⁶⁹

Because we live with these examples every day, we forget how truly peculiar they are. Their existence could never be explained by internal development alone – international pressures and opportunities have created these hybrids and woven them into the social structure of humanity. They demonstrate the relevance of Trotsky’s idea in contemporary social analysis.

But they also do something else. They enable us finally to recalibrate the relationship of IR to Political Science. For almost a century, political realists have effectively defined IR as a subfield of Political Science. It should be clear by now that this definition radically understates the scope and importance of our subject: the consequences of societal multiplicity extend across all the different fields of human action and thought. But among these different fields is of course the subject matter of Political Science itself. If it now transpires that the real-world political systems studied by Political Science have themselves been interactively produced, and if this is what explains their individual peculiarities,⁷⁰ then it must follow that in this respect, Political Science is a subfield of IR.⁷¹

The point is worth savouring. But it should not be pressed in an imperialistic way. After all, the logic of our earlier argument about academic disciplines is that *all* disciplines are subfields of all the others with regard to the particular aspects of social reality those others have made their own. All of them should be both importers and exporters of ideas. The anomaly of IR was that it was only an importer. And that was because it had not found an independent foundation of its own, but was imprisoned inside Political Science.

Conclusion

Let us end by pressing the argument one step further, using an example from Comparative Literature. Trotsky notes at one point that ‘Russian thought, like the Russian economy,

developed under the direct pressure of the higher thought and more developed economies of the West'.⁷² That may sound like a mechanical formula; yet it need not be so. It could be the first step in an extension of 'uneven and combined development' (and hence the scope of IR) from the social sciences to the humanities. There it could provide a framework for uncovering the international history of ideas and of cultural production in particular.

A brilliant example of what this might mean has been provided by the Brazilian literary critic Roberto Schwarz.⁷³ Schwarz analyses the rise of the Brazilian novel after national independence in 1822. He argues that this literary trajectory was part of a wider cultural process in which a new Brazilian intelligentsia was scrambling to assemble what were then seen as the accoutrements of a modern civilized society. Among the most prominent of these was the European realist novel, a literary form that gave expression to new kinds of private and public identity associated with bourgeois society. Brazil must therefore produce novels of its own.

But there was a problem. Unlike England and France, nineteenth century Brazil was not a bourgeois society. On the contrary, it was based on aristocracy, clientelist 'favour' and slavery. And this provided no basis for the plot-form of the European novel which explored the fate of socially constructed individuals adrift in a depersonalized world of commercial relations. 'The social molecule composed of property and slavery, and poor dependents without rights, had a logic of its own that did not match the liberal coordinates to which the country officially aspired'.⁷⁴ The result of this mismatch was a first generation of Brazilian novels that were necessarily superficial and inauthentic – not engaging with the reality of Brazilian society at all. The real history of the Brazilian novel began only later, when both the plot-form and the narrative voice of the novel were redesigned. Only then could they express both the different production of individuals in Brazil and the different inner meaning of European ideals when they were transplanted into Brazilian society. And the result was not just the creation of an authentic Brazilian literature. It was also a further development of the literary form of the novel itself, which expanded its possibilities beyond the European originals that had been so slavishly copied at the start of the process:

[W]hen this former colony became an independent nation, its peculiar and in many ways untenable morphology ... imposed new tasks on European literary schools, that involuntarily altered them.⁷⁵

This example redisCOVERS in the sphere of cultural production exactly those consequences of multiplicity that lie at the heart of IR's social ontology: the co-existence and variation of multiple societies, the pressures and opportunities this creates that lead to interaction, the innovation of new forms which emerge from the process of hybridization and finally the dialectical structure of the overall process itself.

[I]n order to analyse a national peculiarity, sensed in everyday life, we have been driven to reflect on the colonial process, which was international. The constant interchange of liberalism and favour was the local and opaque effect of a planetary mechanism ... Thus what we have described is the manner in which the movement of world history, in its cryptic and local results,

repeated again and again, passes into writing, which it now determines from the inside – whether or not the writer knows or wills it. In other words, we have defined a vast and heterogeneous, but structured, field, which is a historical *consequence*, and can be an artistic *origin*.⁷⁶

What Schwarz is mapping here is the invisible causality of the international as it is expressed through the uneven and combined development of the novel as a modern literary form. And in doing so, he both avoids the pitfalls of a uni-linear explanation and yet transcends the limits of a purely comparative analysis too.

But what goes for the novel surely also goes for music, film, architecture – even clothing fashions and cookery. In fact, there is an international relations of just about everything, just as there is a spatiality and a sociology and a politics of everything. And that is because societal multiplicity, like spatiality, social structure and politics, is a *general* feature of the human social world.

Applying uneven and combined development in these other fields will enable them to incorporate the international. But it will also enrich *our* conception of the international itself as we follow its causality into one area of life after another. In this sense, Schwarz's analysis of the nineteenth century Brazilian novel is as much a case study in international relations as is Mearsheimer's critique of Western policy in Ukraine.⁷⁷ Both explore the consequences of societal multiplicity for a particular aspect of the human world.

And so, as the centenary of IR approaches, it is surely time to leave behind the prison of Political Science. When we reflect on the consequences of multiplicity, we find that the foundations for a distinctive, independent discipline already exist. If we turn away from our 'campfires' and look outwards, we start to discover the enormous constitutive significance of the international for the social world in all its dimensions. As we piece together the different elements of this, IR surely *can* become a producer of big ideas for the social sciences and humanities. We may even stop talking about 'the end of IR theory', and start talking about the *beginning* of IR theory. For we will realize that in reality, it is only the prehistory of this discipline that has been ending. And if that is the case, then when the 100th anniversary finally arrives, we will indeed have every reason to celebrate.

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24. An anonymous reviewer has suggested that '[f]or Waltz the domestic did not exist "along-side" the international – it existed "within" it'. Substantively, that must be right. Theoretically, however, matters stood differently: because domestic political structures were hierarchical, the anarchical logic of the international did not extend into them. In this respect, Waltz held, the two spheres had to be the objects of distinct theories. Their real-world interpenetration was not reflected in neorealist theory for which, therefore, they did indeed exist 'alongside' each other.
25. Dunne et al., 'The End of International Relations Theory?' p. 413.
26. Brown, 'The Poverty of Grand Theory', p. 484.
27. Justin Rosenberg, *The Empire of Civil Society: A Critique of the Realist Theory of International Relations* (London: Verso, 1994); Benno Teschke, *The Myth of 1648: Class, Geopolitics and the Making of Modern International Relations* (London: Verso, 2003).
28. David Campbell, 'Poststructuralism', in Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki and Steve Smith (eds) *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 206.
29. Waever, 'Still a Discipline After All These Debates?' p. 303.
30. Stanley Hoffmann, 'International Relations: The Long Road to Theory', *World Politics*, 11(3), 1959, p. 348.
31. 'There is', says Adrian Leftwich, 'one overriding concern of those who study politics, and that is a concern with *power*, political power – and its effects'. In turn, power is found 'wherever two or more human beings are engaged in some collective activity'. Politics thus subtends on power as a universal feature of human sociation. This sociation includes international relations, but politics would exist even in a world of one society, whereas international relations would not. Societal multiplicity is therefore definitive for International Relations (IR) in a way that it is not for Political Science. Adrian Leftwich (ed.), *What Is Politics?* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004), pp. 19 and 100.
32. I am grateful to Andrew Linklater for this point.
33. Eric Wolf argued that Anthropology exhibits a recurrent tendency to retreat into the comparative study of 'separate cases': 'the concept of the autonomous, self-regulating and self-justifying society and culture has trapped anthropology inside the bounds of its own definitions'. *Europe and the People*, pp. 15 and 18.
34. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (London: Fontana, 1993), p. 4.
35. I am grateful to the anonymous reviewers for raising these issues in a very compelling way.
36. R.N. Berki, 'On Marxian Thought and the Problem of International Relations', *World Politics*, 24(1), 1971, pp. 80–105.
37. Thomas Pugel, *International Economics*, 15th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2015), p. 1.
38. Stanley Hoffman, *Duties Beyond Borders: On the Limits and Possibilities of Ethical International Relations* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1981); Chris Brown, *International Relations Theory: New Normative Approaches* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester

- Wheatsheaf, 1992); Michael Walzer, *Thick and Thin: Moral Argument at Home and Abroad* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994).
39. Justin Rosenberg, 'Why Is There No International Historical Sociology?' *European Journal of International Relations*, 12(3), 2006, p. 308.
 40. Waltz was clear that 'permissive causes' are not 'efficient causes'; but strictly speaking, they are not causes at all. Kenneth Waltz, *Man, the State and War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959).
 41. Tim Megarry (ed.), *From the Caves to Capital: Readings in Historical and Comparative Sociology* (Dartford: Greenwich University Press, 1995), p. xii.
 42. Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970), p. 21.
 43. Friedrich Tenbruck, 'Internal History of Society or Universal History?' *Theory, Culture and Society*, 11(1), 1994, p. 80.
 44. Francis Bacon, *The New Organon and Related Writings*, edited, with an Introduction, by Fulton H Anderson (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1960), p. 118.
 45. John Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilisation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 186, 185 and 123, respectively.
 46. Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early Abbasid Society (2nd–4th/8th–10th Centuries)* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1998).
 47. Robert Nisbet, *Social Change and History: Aspects of the Western Theory of Development* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969); Tenbruck, 'Internal History of Society or Universal History?'.
 48. Theda Skocpol, 'A Critical Review of Barrington Moore's *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*', *Politics and Society*, 4(1), 1973, pp. 1–34; Zygmunt Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity* (London: Routledge, 1992); Ulrich Beck, 'The Cosmopolitan Condition: Why Methodological Nationalism Fails', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 24(7–8), 2007, pp. 286–90.
 49. *Intimations*, pp. 61 and 65.
 50. Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), pp. 151 and 139.
 51. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1976), p. 26.
 52. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for pressing this point.
 53. For a comprehensive bibliography of primary and secondary sources, see <http://www.unevenandcombined.com>
 54. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, 'Manifesto of the Communist Party', in *The Revolutions of 1848: Political Writings*, Vol. 1, edited and introduced by David Fernbach (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p. 71.
 55. Leon Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution* (New York: Pathfinder 1932), p. 4.
 56. Trotsky, *History*, p. 5.
 57. Leon Trotsky, *The Permanent Revolution/Results and Prospects* (London: New Park Publications, 1962), p. 9.
 58. Trotsky, *History*, Vol. 3, p. 379. 'Viewed from this standpoint, a national revolution is not a self-contained whole; it is only a link in the international chain'. *The Permanent Revolution*, p. 9.
 59. See, for examples, Sam Ashman, 'Capitalism, Uneven and Combined Development and the Transhistoric', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 22(1), 2009, pp. 29–46; Neil Davidson, 'Putting the Nation Back Into "the International"', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 22(1), 2009, pp. 9–28.

60. Neil Smith, 'The Geography of Uneven Development', in Bill Dunn and Hugo Radice (eds) *100 Years of Permanent Revolution: Results and Prospects* (London: Pluto Press, 2006), pp. 180–95; Benno Teschke, 'IR Theory, Historical Materialism, and the False Promise of International Historical Sociology', *Spectrum: Journal of Global Studies*, 6(1), 2014, pp. 1–66.
61. Trotsky, *History*, p. 5.
62. Wolf, *Europe and the People*, pp. 32–4.
63. Hobson, Eastern Origins; Robert Marks, *The Origins of the Modern World: Fate and Fortune in the Rise of the West* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007); Alex Anievas and Kerem Nisancioglu, *How the West Came to Rule: The Geopolitical Origins of Capitalism* (London: Pluto Press, 2015).
64. Ada Bozeman, *Politics and Culture in International History: From the Ancient Near East to the Opening of the Modern Age*, 2nd ed. (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1994), p. 327ff.
65. John McNeill and William McNeill, *The Human Web: A Bird's-Eye View of World History* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Co., 2003), p. 50; Richard Smith, *Premodern Trade in World History* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), p. 25.
66. Barry Buzan and Richard Little, *International Systems in World History: Remaking the Study of International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 155–6.
67. Justin Rosenberg, 'Basic Problems in the Theory of Uneven and Combined Development. Part II: Unevenness and Political Multiplicity', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 23(1), 2010, pp. 182–5.
68. It can even be argued that multiplicity, like space and time, is a feature of reality that extends beyond the human world. George Novack once argued that 'the law of uneven and combined development is rooted in features common to all processes of growth in nature as well as in society'. What Novack meant by this apparently outlandish claim can be summarized in two points, which he saw as fundamental to the theory. First, '[a]ll the constituent elements of a thing, all the aspects of an event, all the factors in a process of development are not realized at the same rate or to an equal degree'. And second, these differentially realized aspects of any given phenomenon nonetheless co-exist within it, their precise configuration composing its empirical uniqueness as a thing, event or process. These points are indeed as undeniable for the physical sciences as for the study of human history. George Novack, *Understanding History: Marxist Essays*, 3rd ed. (New York: Pathfinder, 1980), p. 84.
69. For a sustained analysis of Iranian history in the light of uneven and combined development, see Kamran Matin, 'Uneven and Combined Development in World History: The International Relations of State-Formation in Pre-Modern Iran', *European Journal of International Relations*, 13(3), 2007, pp. 419–47; and *Recasting Iranian Modernity: International Relations and Social Change* (London: Routledge, 2013).
70. As Trotsky put it, 'The peculiarity of a national social type is the crystallization of the unevenness of its formation'. *The Permanent Revolution*, p. 24.
71. This is a conclusion reached also by Buzan and Lawson: a fully developed discipline of IR, they say, 'would have put Political Science into its place as merely one of its constituent disciplines'. *The Global Transformation: History, Modernity and the Making of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 333.
72. *The Permanent Revolution*, pp. 173–4.
73. Roberto Schwarz, *Misplaced Ideas: Essay on Brazilian Culture* (London: Verso, 1992); and 'A Brazilian Breakthrough', *New Left Review*, 36 (2nd Series), 2005, pp. 91–107. I am grateful to Luiza Franco Moreira and Susan Strehle for drawing Schwarz's work to my attention.

74. Schwarz, 'Brazilian Breakthrough', p. 101.
75. Schwarz, 'Brazilian Breakthrough', p. 93.
76. Schwarz, *Misplaced Ideas*, p. 30.
77. John Mearsheimer, 'Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault', *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2014, pp. 1–12.

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