Why International Relations has Failed as an Intellectual Project and What to do About it

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Why do we say that International Relations (IR) has failed as an intellectual project? In many ways it appears successful. It is a highly attractive teaching subject boasting expanding numbers of students and various independent departments, institutes and degree courses in universities. Its academic associations command rising memberships and budgets and there are many think tanks devoted to its study. IR has generated dozens of quality journals, and its debates are lively and diverse. Although it has not settled the question of whether it is a discipline or a field, it nonetheless serves as a clear node of identity for an intellectual community comprising many thousands of people. The universe of IR is both energetic and expanding, and for most of its citizens it is a fun place to be.

Yet for all its internal dynamism, this universe remains curiously insulated from the other social sciences and history. This insulation takes the form of a semi-permeable membrane that allows ideas from other disciplines to filter into IR, but seems to block substantial traffic in the other direction. In this paper we will challenge the prevailing tendency to assume that theoretical fragmentation constitutes an inevitable state of affairs that we should either endure or embrace, and argue instead in favour of a holistic historical framework based on the potential interdisciplinary appeal of the concept of 'international systems'.

The Boundaries of IR as an Intellectual Project[1]

All disciplines beg, borrow or steal from each other, and in this respect IR is no exception. The Realists who emerged after the Second World War derived their

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1. The outer boundaries of IR are rather fuzzy, blending at various points into area studies, feminism, development studies and several other subject areas. A wide definition would simply incorporate world-systems theorists, world historians, geopoliticians, as well as historical sociologists. For the purposes of this argument, we are thinking of IR as that core community, which is most closely linked to political science and whose main areas of interest are: international security, international political economy, international institutions, and international political theory We are not denying, of course, that there is very important work going on in these areas but this does not eliminate our concern about the ghetto-like character of the discipline.

ideas from sources as different as Saint Augustine and Max Weber.[2] The behaviouralists took their methodological cue from developments in political science. Neorealism borrowed heavily from microeconomics. Systems theorists drew on cybernetics. Postmodernism has roots in continental philosophy, and constructivism in the work of sociologists such as Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann.[3] Strategists relied heavily on the theoretical ideas of Schelling who after having been trained as an economist, was inspired by the work of game theorists.[4]

If, however, we turn the question around and ask what other disciplines have learned from IR, then the cupboard is, if not quite bare, then certainly not well stocked. Schelling's work on the strategy of conflict has proved influential, but most of his ideas came from outside IR. There are exceptions. Michael Mann has argued that historical sociologists went on a 'raiding party' and returned with 'loot' taken from the Realists.[5] This link with Realism, however, was made only after they had independently concluded that 'war makes the state and the state makes war'.[6] Paul Schroeder too, although a trenchant critic of the IR community, emphasising the methodological differences between historians and social scientists, has made the case in his most recent writings for more exchange of insights and avoidance of unnecessary conflict.[7] John Lewis Gaddis, Jack S. Levy and others have also pointed out to the potential for synergy between international history and IR, and the need to avoid academic turf wars.[8] Another positive cross-disciplinary impact has been that of scholars such as Richard Ashley, David Campbell, Michael Shapiro and Rob Walker on critical political geography.[9] No

2. For a discussion of the Augustinian link, see Alastair J. H. Murray, *Rearticulating Realism* (Keele: Keele University Press, 1997). For the link to Weber, see Michael J. Smith, *Realist Thought from Weber to Kissinger* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1986).

3. Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971).

4. Thomas C. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980).

5. Michael Mann, review of *The Empire of Civil Society* by Justin Rosenberg, *British Journal of Sociology* 46, no. 5 (1995): 555.

6. Charles Tilly, 'War Making and State Making as Organised Crime', in *Bringing the State Back In*, eds. Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer and Theda Skocpol (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

7. See Paul W. Schroeder, 'Quantitative Studies in the Balance of Power', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 21, no. 1 (1977): 3-21; Paul W. Schroeder, 'The 19th Century International System: Changes in Structure', *World Politics* 39, no. 1 (1986): 1-26; Paul W. Schroeder, 'Historical Reality versus Neorealist Theory', *International Security* 19, no. 1 (1994): 108-48; and Paul W. Schroeder, 'History and International Relations Theory', *International Security* 22, no. 1 (1997): 64-74.

8. 'Symposium: History and Theory', *International Security* 22, no. 1 (1997): 5-85 and John Lewis Gaddis, 'International Relations Theory and the End of the Cold War', *International Security* 17, no. 3 (1992-3): 5-58.

9. See, for example, John Agnew and Stuart Corbridge, *Mastering Space: Hegemony, Territory and International Political Economy* (London: Routledge, 1995); Gearóid Ó Tuathail, *Critical Geopolitics: The Politics of Writing Global Space* (Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota University Press, 1996); and Simon Dalby, 'Writing Critical Geopolitics: Campbell, Ó Tuathail, Reynolds and Dissident Scepticism', *Political Geography* 15, no. 6/7 (1996): 655-60.

doubt there are other exceptions. But the general rule still holds. IR theory has not travelled extensively or far across disciplinary boundaries.

Furthermore, IR has generated almost no significant public debate outside the academia, in comparison with the work of historians such as E.H. Carr, William H. McNeill, Paul Kennedy, or sociologists such as Immanuel Wallerstein, Michael Mann, or Anthony Giddens. Samuel Huntington achieved some public prominence for his controversial 'clash of civilisations' thesis, and earlier, Henry Kissinger and Zibgniev Brezinski became widely known figures outside the academia primarily because they held high political office. But 'big names' in IR theory such as Hedley Bull, Hans Morgenthau, Robert Gilpin, Stephen Krasner, Robert Keohane, James Rosenau, and Kenneth Waltz are virtually unknown outside the discipline. [10] Perhaps a case could be made for a successful IR export in the growing literature on 'democratic peace', which had a significant impact beyond the field, as reflected, for example, in the widespread popularity of the work of Francis Fukuyama. But it is also worth noting that the numerous problems and difficulties that IR scholars have pointed out have been largely ignored. This paucity of outward-bound traffic seems to contradict the self-conception of IR as a field or a discipline, which hinges on the understanding that its subject matter is inherently inter- or multi-disciplinary; but if multi-disciplinarity simply reflects dependency on other disciplines, its claim for status is weak.

The self-contained quality of IR is all the more curious if one pauses to reflect on the nature of its subject. There is a narrow, somewhat traditionalist view that IR is mainly about relationships among states. This view largely locates the subject within political science, confining its scope to the sub-area of 'international' or 'world' politics. Such a description might have fit early Anglo-American IR, but gradually the understanding of the subject has broadened, albeit with the 'political' element remaining at its core. Since the late 1950s, English School (ES) thinkers took both history and 'international society' seriously, and from the 1970s onward, economics made its way back into the IR agenda. The ending of the Cold War saw an explosion of interest in sociological questions of identity and in moral and legal questions of human rights. Over the last few decades, consciousness has thus grown that the object of study of IR is an international system, which is not just a politico-military construct, but also an economic, sociological, and historical one.

During the 1990s, the catch phrase 'globalisation' has come increasingly to define the preoccupations of IR writers. The scope of globalisation means that the international system has to be understood not just in terms of the relations among states but also in terms of an entire network of interactions that bind people

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10. It might be argued that Susan Strange made an impact in business studies, and Dieter Senghaas in development studies. But the exceptions to the general rule are few and limited in scale. The boundary problem is, if anything, becoming more rather than less problematic in recent years. Writers such as Wallerstein, Mann, and Giddens, whom we would view as having transcended disciplinary boundaries, are increasingly cited in IR literature and taught on IR courses. But since they all come from sociology it seems disingenuous to claim that they are IR theorists and that the case being made here is thereby refuted.

together. IR has thus been making steady progress towards taking as its subject the question of how humankind is organised politically, economically, socially, and ecologically and how the different aspects of its organisation play into each other. This shift of perspective explains both the sustained assault on the state as the central focus of IR, and the inability to move it far from centre stage

If this is an accurate portrayal, then it is hard to escape the conclusion that IR's self-definitions are increasingly casting it as something more than a multidisciplinary conglomerate. It has the potential, and arguably the obligation, to become a kind of meta-discipline, systematically linking together the macro-sides of the social sciences and history. If IR has an obvious role in the intellectual and academic division of labour, it is precisely to build bridges and establish a common ground in ways that transcend disciplinary boundaries. Its comparative advantage lies in its potential as a holistic theoretical framework, which should be able to speak equally well to political scientists, economists, lawyers, sociologists, anthropologists, and historians. Our hope is to show one way in which this underachievement might begin to be rectified. The danger in not taking up the holistic challenge is that the subject matter of globalisation will succumb to fragmentation amongst the other disciplines, with IR becoming simply one sectional perspective among several. Perhaps nothing so underlines this failure as the demonstration by Wallerstein that such a transdisciplinary project is possible.

Wallerstein and World Systems

Wallerstein's theory has had an enormous impact on academic debates across disciplines. In the 1970s, he began to stress that the great weakness of the social sciences was that they all operated as closed systems. He was opposed to the division between political science, economics and sociology and the separation of history from the social sciences because they imposed conceptual boundaries shutting political, economic, and social systems off from a wider world. In order to break them down he stressed the importance of using 'world-systems' as the basic units of analysis. His influence quickly became pervasive and very soon scholars across the social sciences became familiar with his theory and concepts, as well as with the many criticisms levelled against them. Furthermore his work took root in the political debates on left-wing activism and third world critiques of the West.

In some ways, Wallerstein was pushing on an open door that is also available to IR. Many social scientists and historians were aware that they had devoted too much time to observing social units, and too little to investigating either the relations between them, or the systems encompassing them. They have, thus, been searching for frameworks that would allow them to get a handle on macro-analysis. 'World systems' theory addressed that demand. While geographers have drawn on his work to explore contemporary 'world cities',[11] in archaeology and

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11. See Peter J. Taylor, *Political Geography: World Economy, Nation-State and Locality* (Harlow: Longman, 1993) and Paul L. Knox and Peter J. Taylor, eds. *World Cities in a World-System* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

anthropology, his ideas have been revamped and used to considerable effect to describe ancient and non-western systems.[12] World historians accepted his concepts as a challenge to the framework, which took civilisations as the basic units of analysis.[13] Even McNeill, the proponent of this approach, saw Wallerstein's theory as the 'leading candidate' for a macro-historical framework.[14] Indeed, despite the claim made by Vasquez that world-systems theory had failed to penetrate IR, there are now ubiquitous references to the approach, and systematic attempts were made to introduce it into IR.[15]

In the social sciences, there is nothing like the same familiarity with the work of any IR theorist. Beyond the confines of the discipline, the concept of the 'international system', which predates that of the 'world system', is not widely regarded as inherently useful or illuminating.[16] The various metaphors, from billiard balls and cobwebs to layered cakes and egg boxes, designed graphically to describe its nature have failed to convey meaning outside IR. The 'international system' remains a shadowy, unfamiliar concept that has neither become part of popular parlance nor entered the general vocabulary of other disciplines.

Wallerstein's relative success cannot be explained by his superior insights or the ability of his theory to command acceptance and inspire consensus. Despite the undoubted power of his model, a great deal of his theory remains intensely contested, and it is far from being generally acknowledged as providing a satisfactory framework for the analysis of world history. McNeill has noted that world historians are 'still fumbling around in search of a more adequate

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12. See, for example, Guillermo Algaze, *The Uruk World System: The Dynamics of Expansion of Early Mesopotamian Civilisation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); Christopher Chase-Dunn and Thomas D. Hall, *Rise and Demise: Comparing World-Systems* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997); Christopher M. Edens and Philip L. Kohl, 'Trade and World Systems in Early Bronze Age Western Asia', in *Trade and Exchange in Prehistoric Europe*, eds. Chris Scarre and Frances Healy (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 1993); Kristian Kristiansen, *Europe Before History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Michael Rowlands, 'Centre and Periphery: A Review of a Concept', in *Centre and Periphery in the Ancient World*, eds. Michael Rowlands, Morgens Larsen, and Kristian Kristiansen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); and Edward M. Schortman and Patricia A. Urban, 'Living on the Edge: Core/Periphery Relations in Ancient South-eastern Mesoamerica', *Current Anthropology* 35, (1994): 401-30. The most expansive application of world systems thinking, however, is made by Barry K. Gills and Andre Gunder Frank, 'The 5000-year World System', in *The World System: Five Hundred Years or Five Thousand* (London: Routledge, 1993).

13. See Stephen K. Sanderson, ed., *Civilisations and World Systems: Studying World-Historical Change* (Wallnut Creek: Altamira Press, 1995) and William H. McNeill, 'The Rise of the West After Twenty-Five Years', in *The Rise of the West: A History of the Human Community*, ed. William H. MacNeill (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

14. William H. McNeill, 'The Changing Shape of World History' in *World History: Ideologies, Structures and Identity*, eds. Philip Pomper, Richard H. Elphick and Richard T. Vann (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 26-27.

15. John A.Vasquez, *The Power of Power Politics: A Critique,* (London: Frances Pinter, 1983); W. Ladd Hollist and James N. Rosenau, eds., *World Systems Structure: Continuity and Change* (Beverley Hills: Sage, 1981) and Pat McGowan and Charles W. Kegley Jr., eds., *Foreign Policy and the Modern World-System* (Beverly Hills, LA: Sage, 1983).

16. Barry Buzan and Richard Little, *International Systems in World History: Remaking the Study of International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

conceptualisation of human history' and according to William Green, 'debate on this matter is just beginning'.[17] Most IR scholars would contest Wallerstein's argument that the military-political sector of a world-system can be regarded as epiphenomenal and would argue that his analysis only covers certain sections of the globe, treating others as 'black holes'.[18] Finally, whatever the ideological appeal his work might once have had to political activists, his ideas have been largely out of fashion since the late 1980s without reducing the ongoing intellectual attraction of his theory.

It is primarily the growing interest across the social sciences and history in fostering macro-approaches that helps explain why Wallerstein's theory has attracted such widespread interest. Given the rising concern with globalisation and the many dissatisfactions with the study of 'world systems', it is surprising that IR has failed to offer an attractive alternative. There are two broad explanations for this failure. The first centres on the prevalence of a-historical, and sometimes anti-historical, attitudes in formulating the concept of the international system. The second concerns a rather thoughtless embracing of theoretical fragmentation, and a loss of will to pursue grand theory.

IR's Westphalian Straitjacket

As a self-conscious subject, IR was born with its gaze fixed firmly forward. Its founding problematique was defined by the First World War, the point at which war as an institution of the international society came seriously into question. This experience demonstrated to the great powers that their accelerating military capabilities for destruction visibly endangered the continuity of their civilisation if they allowed themselves to get drawn into all-out conflicts. The coming of nuclear weapons in 1945 only made unquestionable what had been apparent thirty years earlier (and visible to a few astute observers for some years before). This orientation towards the policy issues of the present and near future has remained ever since a strong characteristic of IR.[19] Because the past did not contain the problems of industrialised warfare and weapons of mass destruction, it was easy to dismiss history as being of marginal relevance to the enterprise. That tendency has been reinforced, especially in the US, by the dominance of an economistic, natural

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17. McNeill, 'The Changing Shape', 26-27; William A. Green, 'Periodising World History', in *World History*, 62.

18. Michael Adas, 'Bringing Ideas and Agency Back In: Representation and the Comparative Approach to World History', in *World History*, 86.

19. We are not suggesting that IR should abandon this orientation. But we are asserting that a preoccupation with the present and near future should not be bought at the cost of ignoring the past. Indeed, our argument is that it is not possible to assess the significance of contemporary change without an understanding of how the system has changed in the past.

science based understanding of the social world, which contained its own anti-historicist bias.[20]

Thus a dominant attitude, partly against history, partly just indifferent to it, became part of IR's tradition.[21] Gradually it took the form of what we call the *Westphalian straitjacket:* the strong tendency to assume that the model established in seventeenth century Europe should define what the international system is for all times and places. In pursuing this vision, theorists have largely ignored the ES injunction that history requires 'the elucidation of the unlikeness between past and present'.[22] On the contrary, to the extent that they have turned their attention to the past at all, they have been mainly impressed by how similar previous international systems have been to our own.[23] Whenever pre-modern history was present in IR theory, it was largely by way of reference to specific cases that shared the assumption of the anarchic structure of the Westphalian system: the Greek and Italian city states or the Chinese 'warring states'.[24]

This remarkable act of a collective a-historical and Eurocentric arrogance is powerfully reinforced by the uncontested fact that the European system successfully expanded itself to a global scale, and through the processes of colonisation and decolonisation (or in the more clinical language of neorealism,

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20. Note Gaddis's puzzlement over why IR chose a model, so poorly suited to its subject matter, rather than taking geology, palaeontology or biology as its theoretical and methodological template. See 'History, Theory and Common Ground', *International Security* 22, no. 1 (1997): 78.

21. This is not to deny the existence of an important body of literature, which has explored the history of the Westphalian system. See Charles F. Doran, *The Politics of Assimilation: Hegemony and its Aftermath* (Baltimore, ML: Johns Hopkins Press, 1971); Andreas Osiander, *The States System of Europe, 1640-1990* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); George Modelski and William R. Thompson, *Seapower in Global Politics, 1494-1994* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988) and Karen A. Rasler and William R. Thompson, *The Great Powers and Global Struggle 1490-1990* (Lexington, KN: University Press of Kentucky, 1994). But it has not, until recently, extended beyond the reach of the Westphalian system. For nearly two decades, Robert Gilpin's seminal book *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) has simply not been followed up. There are now intimations of change. See Robert A. Denemark, Jonathan Freidman, Barry Gills and George Modelski, eds., *World System History* (London: Routledge, 2000) and Christian Reus-Smit, *The Moral Purpose of the State: Culture, Social Identity, and Institutional Rationality in International Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999). Note also the importance of a world historical perspective in Justin Rosenberg's Marxist assessment of IR. See, *The Empire of Civil Society: A Critique of the Realist Theory of International Relations* (London: Verso, 1994).

22. Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (London: Bell, 1949), 10.

23. An essential feature of the Westphalian straitjacket is the assumption that analysts can unproblematically treat the international system as a closed system of like units. Constructivists, like Wendt, and even some of those IR specialists that are particularly sensitive to historical difference, like Reus-Smit and Rosenberg, do not take sufficient note when examining the Greek city states that they were operating within an all-embracing international system.

24. This tendency to select from history what seems to confirm assumptions about the present, and then to leap to the conclusion that there is no other way of thinking about IR, is not new to the discipline. Nearly 200 years ago, Arnold Heeren produced a manual charting the development of the European 'states-system', where he observed how similar in structure were the Greek and Italian city-states and the Diadochi Kingdoms, formed after the collapse of Alexander the Great's empire. See, *A Manual of the History of the Political System of Europe and its Colonies* (1819; reprint, London: Henry G. Bohn, 1857).

'socialisation and competition') imposed its own political form on the whole of humankind. It is a depressing fact about contemporary IR that a silent acceptance of this cultural bias is virtually universal, not only within the context of a Western-centred parochialism, but also among IR scholars who have tragically abandoned their own quite different historical and cultural traditions.[25] The closed circle of Eurocentric a-historicism inadvertently but effectively isolates IR, and can partly explain why the concept of the 'international system' has failed to travel beyond disciplinary boundaries and address popular debates.

In our opinion, conceptual frameworks in mainstream IR are hamstrung by their failure to build on a long view of history. Indifference to this view might seem as a rational strategy if it involves immediate questions of war and peace, but it becomes problematic if one's task is to understand much wider processes of formation, evolution and transformation of international systems. By conflating the particularities of the European experience with those of all other international systems, the Westphalian straitjacket not only blocks communication with other disciplines, but also limits the scope and insight of what IR theory can achieve.

Assuming that all international systems must have the same features seems to offer possibilities of simplification that can transform the huge scale and nightmarish complexities of world politics into a relatively simple and timeless model. Thus, the main actors must be defined like sovereign states by hard borders and highly centred claims to self-government. Their interaction capacity should be based on adequate transportation and communication capabilities, in order to bring all actors into close enough contact that would allow them, at least in principle, to make war or alliance. Their politico-military interactions should be the defining process that forms the system. War, balance of power, diplomacy, and an anarchical structure are necessary, generating a compelling, dominant logic of survival. The extraordinarily tight interconnection of the elements of this package offer the promise of theoretical simplification that explains in good part why so much of the IR community has been seduced into wearing the Westphalian straitjacket.

Nonetheless there are other visions available. Wight's following remark is intriguing:

> The political kaleidoscope of the Greek and Hellenistic ages looks modern to our eyes, while the immense majesty of the Roman peace, and the Christian unity of the medieval world, seem remote and alien.[26]

Do the Greek and Hellenistic ages really look modern? And are the Roman peace and medieval world as 'remote and alien' as Wight makes out? The work of geopoliticians, like Halford Mackinder, civilisational historians, like Marshall Hodgson and McNeill and comparativists, like Eric L. Jones, offer ideas about how

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25. On the nature of the Chinese 'world order', see John King Fairbank, *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China's Foreign Relations*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968).

26 Martin Wight, *Power Politics* (Harmonsworth: Penguin, 1979), 24

to conceptualise international systems very differently from anything found in IR.[27] All rely on a framework that extends across Eurasia and embraces all cultures as well as the mobile nomads that move across them.

A broader historical perspective can open up new insights into the origins and the future of the contemporary global international system. Indeed one can only explore the significance of this concept and fully understand how it functions today when exploring its history. Such an understanding requires more than merely selecting a handful of periods and locations from the ancient and classical era during which anarchic structures similar to the Westphalian one briefly held sway. It requires scholars to address the question of what kind of system(s), if any, existed before the European powers subordinated them to their own anarchic model.

One example of the insights to be gained by bringing world historical perspectives to bear on IR theory is the question of change. Neorealism, which exemplifies Westphalian thinking in its purest form, searches for the most significant historical transformations in deep structural shifts from anarchy to hierarchy. Given the a priori assumption that international systems must be anarchic, this position is logical, because such shifts effectively bring the existence of the system to an end. But even a superficial acquaintance with classical history challenges these postulates. The transformation from anarchy to hierarchy, and back again, was a perfectly normal feature of ancient and classical international systems, driven by the rise and demise of great empires. McNeill argued that imperial state structures were incredibly resilient and although they could be disrupted by revolts or invasion, they almost invariably reconstituted themselves. Whether the focus is on Eurasia, Pre-columbian America, or Africa, the norm for civilised governance was 'laminated polyethnic empire', not the sovereign state. Thus, anarchic systems habitually gave way to hegemonic empires.[28] From a world historical perspective, change in the structure of the dominant units, rather than the move from hierarchy to anarchy, would represent the most fundamental, era-defining, type of transformation in international systems.

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27. Halford J. Mackinder, 'The Geographical Pivot of History' *Geographical Journal* 13, no 4 (1904): 421-37; Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *Rethinking World History: Essays on Europe, Islam and World History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); William H. McNeill, *The Rise of the West: A History of the Human Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963); William H. McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples* (London: Penguin, 1976); and Eric L. Jones, *The European Miracle: Environment, Economies and Geopolitics in the History of Europe and Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

28. Adam Watson, *The Evolution of International Society* (London: Routledge, 1992); Barry Buzan, Charles Jones and Richard Little, *The Logic of Anarchy: Neorealism to Structural Realism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); Barry Buzan and Richard Little, 'The Idea of "International System": Theory Meets History', *International Political Science Review* 15, no. 3 (1994): 231-55; William H. McNeill, 'The Fall of Great Powers: An Historical Commentary', *Review* 17 (1994): 123-43; Stuart K. Kaufman, 'The Fragmentation and Consolidation of International Systems', *International Organization* 51, no. 2 (1997): 173-208; and Barry Buzan and Richard Little, *International Systems in World History*.

In that respect, it might be counted as a minor tragedy that even when some contact has opened up between IR and historical sociology, the result has been to reinforce IR's a-historicism. Although awareness of world history was raised, the most famous theme remained the idea that 'the state makes war and war makes the state', which was used to strengthen Realist preconceptions about the timelessness of raw power politics as a defining feature of the human condition.[29] Drawing on the belief that the anarchic character of interstate relations helps to account for the persistence of war, these accounts reflect the familiar, impoverished IR view of the international system.[30] Although extremely illuminating in many ways, they very often simply reinforce the long-established view that the essential features of international politics are enduring and unchanging.

Giddens has argued that the emergence of international relations is 'coeval with the origins of nation-states', thus implying that Europe provides the first, and only, example of an international system.[31] Although we agree that the European international system has dominated mainstream IR, we disagree strongly with the idea that the discipline should inevitably derive its foundational theories from such a narrow historical base. Theory and history may sometimes make strange bedfellows, but as Wallerstein has demonstrated, the fruits of their union can be powerful and compelling in a way that neither of them can be when taken alone.

Notwithstanding all of the arguments made above, the dominance of the Westphalian model is by itself insufficient to explain why IR has been unable to generate interdisciplinary debates. After all, Wallerstein's original work, though less so that of his followers, was also largely focussed on the post 1500 AD world, albeit setting that in the context of a specific structural transformation from earlier times. The second key reason for IR's failure lies in its seeming abandonment of the quest for a grand theoretical vision.

Abandonment of Grand Theoretical Vision

Wallerstein's success in communicating world-systems theory across disciplinary boundaries and into the public debate can also be explained by his ability and willingness to attempt a grand theory, setting out a comprehensive macro-scale account of the human condition. Through history, he made theory accessible, and through theory, he gave structure to history. Whether one disagrees or not with his arguments, it should be acknowledged that he offered a big vision bundling together what academic conventions tend to keep apart. As a result, scholars from various disciplines could locate their own concerns within this vision, with a view

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29. Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Tilly, 'War Making'; and Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power: A History of Power from the Beginning to AD 1760* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

30. Steve Hobden, *International Relations and Historical Sociology: Breaking Down Boundaries* (London: Routledge, 1998).

31 Anthony Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence* (Cambridge: Polity, 1985), 4.

both to seeing how world-systems might help them to deepen their insights into their own subjects, and to trying their hand at contributing to the development of world-system theory overall.

The contrast between the communicative success of this synthesising, integrative approach and IR's failure to export its own fragmented one could hardly be sharper. Inside and outside the discipline, the assumption that IR is a 'backward' social science is widespread. Proponents of world-systems theory have argued that it 'has largely been a failure' and called for its replacement.[32] The philosopher Alan Ryan remarked on 'the feebleness of theorising in international relations and the superiority of good narrative history to what is passed off as "theory"'.[33] Ryan's dismissive tone was reinforced by a literature within IR that worries about how theory is becoming fragmented to the point of incoherence.[34]

What exactly is it that explains the self-encapsulation of IR theory? There is of course the normal process by which different areas of academic study insulate themselves from each other by cultivating distinctive vocabularies, journals and professional networks. This process inhibits all cross-disciplinary enterprises by discouraging both outward bound and incoming traffic. But since IR has built itself up by borrowing much of its theory from other disciplines, it should be less vulnerable than most to this problem. One can add two more telling explanations: sectoral narrowness, the fact that mainstream theorists have confined themselves to the military-political sector and a tendency towards fragmentation encouraged by the fact that they have taken too much pleasure in the pursuit of ideological, epistemological and ontological incommensurability.

Sectoral Narrowness

It is usually accepted that a division of labour is needed in order to study the world around us. Fernand Braudel, noted that historians 'simplify matters by dividing history into sectors (and call them political, economic, social and cultural history)'.[35] Approaching the international system in terms of specific sectors defined as types of activities, units, interactions and structures constitutes a long established practice, which has been rarely questioned in dominant IR theory.

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32. Robert A. Denemark, 'World Systems History: From Traditional International Politics to the Study of Global Relations', *International Studies Review* 1, no. 2 (1999): 44.

33. Ryan's jibe can be attacked on the ground that its implicit distinction between theory and history is voided by the search amongst world historians for an effective conceptual framework. Nonetheless the attitude behind the jibe is revealing of the failure of IR to make an impression outside its own borders. See, 'A Theory of Growing Concerns', review of *From Wealth to Power*, by Fareed Zakaria, *Times Higher Educational Supplement* 27, no. 11, (1998): 27.

34. Yale H. Ferguson and Richard W. Mansbach, *The Elusive Quest: Theory and International Politics* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988); Kalery J. Holsti, *The Dividing Discipline: Hegemony and Diversity in International Theory* (Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1985).

35. Fernand Braudel, *The Perspective of the World: Civilisation and Capitalism 15th-18th Century*, vol. III (London: Fontana Press, 1985), 17.

At first sight, it might appear that Wallerstein's theory is similarly circumscribed. After all, he has often been accused of economic determinism because, on the one hand, he is seen to argue that the prime motor of the capitalist world-system is the ceaseless 'accumulation' of capital[36] and, on the other, he exhibits a 'reductionist tendency, viewing political processes as epiphenomenal in relation to economic causation'.[37] But this assessment does not begin to do justice to the ambition and flexibility of his scheme. His theoretical framework incorporates and integrates the sectoral spectrum of economic, political and social phenomena over the complete span of human history. While his scheme can be accused of oversimplification, it cannot be accused of being dull, unimaginative, narrow, unambitious or irrelevant to public concerns. He has at least tried to make sense of the big picture, and it is the all-embracing character of world-systems, incorporating the full sectoral spectrum, that makes it attractive to such a wide range of people.

There is nothing of a similar scale or imagination available within IR. The two leading works of post-1945 American Realism, Morgenthau's *Politics Among Nations*, and Waltz's *Theory of International Politics* make this choice explicit on their covers, assuming that retreat into a single sector is a necessary condition for effective theory-building. Neorealists, for example, see no difficulty about talking of political structure, anarchy-hierarchy, polarity, as *the* system structure, without asking whether there are other forces that might affect the operation of the international system. The once dominant and still very influential Realist body of IR theory is thus locked into a single sector.[38] Alex Wendt's recent text, *Social Theory of International Politics*, continues this tradition.[39] Sectoral narrowness does simplify things and it makes some sense to those preoccupied solely with issues of war and peace. But to outsiders, and increasingly also within IR, it looks hopelessly narrow and oversimplified.

From our perspective, confinement to the political sector massively restricts what can be thought of as an international system and excludes systems that are defined by economic and/or socio-cultural interactions This amputation has two destructive effects. First, it forecloses much of the story of how international systems develop, getting IR boxed into Eurocentrism and ahistoricism. Second, it blocks enquiry into the cross-sectoral linkages that often seem to determine how strongly, and in what ways, the effects of political structure actually manifest themselves.

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36. Taylor, *Political Geography*, 7.

37. Aristide R. Zolberg, 'Origins of the Modern World System: A Missing Link', *World Politics* 33, no. 2 (1980-1): 255; Christopher Chase-Dunn, 'Interstate System and Capitalist World-Economy: One Logic or Two?', *International Studies Quarterly* 25, no. 1 (1981): 19-42; and James E. Dougherty and Robert L. Pfaltzgraff, *Contending Theories of International Relations: A Comprehensive Survey* (New York: Harper and Row, 1990), 257.

38. In fact, Realists tend to conflate military and political structures and treat them as one.

39. Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

Perhaps the most notable IR attempt to construct cross-sectoral theory has been the idea of hegemonic stability developed within IPE. This did try to link political and economic structures, but it was a feeble creature compared to world-systems. It was confined to a narrow range of history, and never sorted out key questions such as the relationship between the domestic character of hegemonic states and the resultant international economic order. Neither, surprisingly, was much attention paid to the huge clash between the idea of hegemonic stability and the Realist arguments suggesting that unipolar systems should be highly unlikely and unstable if they did occur. In the end, IPE has been largely colonised by neorealism. As the neoliberal and neorealist agendas have merged into what Wæver labels the neo-neo, or rationalist, synthesis, it was agreed to debate about rational choice and cooperation under anarchy.[40]

One might have expected the rise of IPE, with its defining liberal impulse, to widen the scope of IR theory substantially into the economic sector. That was certainly the aim of Susan Strange and others. Although some progress has undoubtedly been made, the liberal impulse is itself vulnerable to sectoral narrowness because of its commitment to keeping separate the political and economic spheres. This has made it susceptible to the seduction of the neo-neo partnership and blocked the integration of security studies and IPE.[41] In the end, mainstream IR theory has preferred to think small and narrow rather than big and wide.

Fragmentation

Looking back at the history of the discipline, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that just as people are said to become like their dogs, so mainstream IR has taken on the character of its subject as defined by the Westphalian straitjacket. With some notable exceptions, it prefers fragmentation into the anarchy of self-governing and paradigm-warring islands of theory rather than integration into the imperial or federative archipelago of theoretically pluralist grand theory.

Although there has always been some interest in the idea of grand theory, it seems that scholars have taken too much pleasure in the pursuit of competing programmes that fragment theories into rival camps, the prevailing ethos being in favour of promoting theoretical competition. Paradoxically, this has sometimes had the effect of narrowing down the terms of debate.[42] Nowhere is this penchant for

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40. Ole Wæver, 'Four Meanings of International Society: A Trans-Atlantic Dialogue', in *International Society and the Development of International Relations Theory*, ed. Barbara A. Roberson (London: Pinter, 1998).

41. Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1998), 195.

42. Traditional realists and Liberals, having drawn on radically different schools of thought with their own distinctive normative positions, diverged on a broad range of issues that encompassed economics as well as politics. See Robert D. McKinlay and Richard Little, *Global Problems and World Order* (London: Pinter, 1986). But now the terms of debate are much more circumscribed and usually revolve around the question of whether states pursue absolute or relative gains.

fragmentation clearer than in the tradition of the so-called 'great debates', which have been marked by a sometimes frenzied emotionalism, and have often been staged as choices amongst irreconcilable opposites, each claiming to hold the truth, and to defend IR against the misguided and unhelpful consequences of following the other(s).[43] Furthermore most of them have been imported into IR from other disciplines, reproducing intellectual oppositions formed in the past and within different contexts, lacking very often the expertise that gave rise to them in the first place.[44] In other words, IR is placed in a peripheral zone, where issues that have been fought over and sometimes resolved elsewhere, arrive late and crash through a constituency that is not all that well trained to deal with them.

This somewhat damning assessment is not intended to be dismissive. IR surely has to deal with the methodological, ontological and epistemological issues that bear on its area of study. To the extent that the view that heated scholastic debates about irresolvable epistemological issues somehow represent cutting edge theory prevails, IR has no hope of extending influence beyond its borders. From an inside perspective, it makes the construction of a coherent theoretical framework almost impossible, while looked at from the outside, IR cannot be treated as anything other than divided, directionless and disputatious. The signs from the fourth debate are so far not encouraging, with trench warfare and mutual exclusivity continuing to dominate much of the mainstream. Amongst the rationalists, there remains an imperious and exclusionary commitment to positivist epistemology, and an apparent belief that rational choice is 'grand theory'. Postmodernists threaten to give primacy to a bottomless form of criticism that is antagonistic to the very idea of grand theory. Constructivists, hoping to carve out the middle ground, are generally more open to history, methodological pluralism, and grand theory, but they cannot easily escape the epistemological, ontological and methodological warfare that surrounds them.[45]

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43. Wæver identifies four such debates: Realists and Idealists over whether analysis or prescription should dominate; Behaviouralist and Traditionalists about the role of positivist methods and epistemology; Realists, Liberals and Marxists on the basic ontologies of IR and the appropriate units for analysis; and Rationalists, Constructivists and Postmodernists on epistemology and methods, though with a more sophisticated agenda. See Wæver, 'Four Meanings'.

44. A significant exception to this judgement has recently been provided by Alexander Wendt, who, following on a decade after two other important texts, *World of Our Making* and *Rules Norms and Decisions*, attempts to explore the implications of studying IR from a constructivist position. See Nicholas G. Onuf, *World of Our Making* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989) and Friedrich Kratochwil, *Rules Norms and Decisions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). In contrast to his constructivist predecessors, however, Wendt endeavours to identify a *via media* that accommodates some of the competing arguments made by both postmodernists and positivists. Although he fails to satisfy either camp, he does make a plausible case that many of the methodological disputes in the discipline build on false dichotomies and can in principle be resolved or at any rate be accommodated. See 'Forum on Wendt', *Review of International Studies* 26, no. 1 (2000): 123-80.

45. Wendt, however, provides a very effective mediation service in *Social Theory of International Politics.*

Marrying IR and World History

There is nothing idiosyncratic about a synthesis of IR with world history nor need the argument be confined to the study of international relations. In their assessment of the antecedents of the multinational corporation, for example, Karl Moore and David Lewis conclude that statements about the victory of the Anglo-American model of the economy look distinctly 'naive' when examined against the record of world history.[46] Since both IR and world history stand to gain, there should be no immovable obstacles other than habit and inertia standing in the way. With the concept of international systems, IR theory has the potential to provide a framework that will foster coherent and rich approaches to the task of writing world history. Conversely, we have no doubt that world history can provide the most appropriate setting for developing and testing IR theory. If this synthesis is going to generate mutually beneficial synergies, then the aim should be to find a framework that is both applicable to constructing an account of world history, and open to the questions posed by a long view of world history of international systems.

If approached in the right spirit, world historians should be open to this opportunity. There is renewed interest both in providing overarching frameworks to trace the evolution of human societies across time and space, and in escaping the confinement of histories written from within a specific time period or from a particular national or even continental perspective. Breaking loose from the confines imposed by these familiar and more parochial accounts of the past is not easy and world historians are engaged in a major debate on the kind of frameworks that can best promote a world historical perspective. If our assessment is correct, then the concept of international systems could and should be promoted as a framework for the resolution of these problems.

Trapped in its Westphalian straitjacket, IR theory also needs to find a wider stage. Without a fuller understanding of all the forms that international systems can take, and all the variables that shape them, one cannot theorise properly about either structure or process, and can hardly theorise at all about system transformation. Because the interstate system has obviously existed throughout the modern era, little or no thought has been given to the conditions under which other international systems come into existence, evolve and are transformed. Consequently there are real difficulties in trying to conceptualise where our current, increasingly globalised, system might be going.

If the idea of international systems is to be extended to world history, it is essential to open up both to sectors and structures other than the politico-military. We need, for example, to be able to identify empires as international systems. Instead of viewing the history of the Roman Empire as that of a city state expanding into a large and complex form, we could view it as a phase in the longer

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46. Karl Moore and David Lewis, *Birth of the Multinational: 2000 Years of Ancient Business History: From Ashur to Augustis* (Copenhagen: Copenhagen Business School Press, 1999), 18.

history of a Mediterranean international system, during which political structure took a hierarchical rather than an anarchic form. At a very minimum, this change of labels matters in metaphorical terms, just as it made a difference during the Cold War whether one thought of the Soviet Union as a state or as an empire (and thus as a kind of submerged international subsystem). And the significance is more than metaphorical. Viewing the Roman Empire and the Soviet Union as types of international systems, forces one to reassess what is meant by the term and how it should be conceptualised, giving rise to a pressing search for a new vocabulary and new analytical tools that would allow scholars to describe both the past and the future.[47]

Cultivating Theoretical Pluralism

Although we agree with Waltz that parsimony in theorising is a virtue, we think that without a 'thicker', more holistic form of theorising, massive and complex macro-phenomena, such as international systems, simply cannot be adequately grasped since they cannot be successfully approached by any single sector or epistemologically monist theory. Therefore the first task for international systems theorists must be, instead of showing how opposed, or incommensurable different theories are, to expose their complementarities, to show how a division of labour can be constructed amongst them, and to make clear how static and dynamic elements of systems can co-exist. If the chronic tendency towards fragmentation is to be overcome, theoretical pluralism has to be favoured. The assumption that different stories about IR must be told in opposition to each other has to be replaced by the assumption that it is interesting and worthwhile to tell such stories in parallel.[48] In pursuit of this goal, IR has to cultivate more open-ended approaches to international systems, which do not prejudge the nature of the dominant units in the system, privilege one sector of activity over another or give

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47. There can be no clearer indication that IR lacks the tools to think clearly about either the past or the future than these references to the present in terms of neomedievalism and neofeudalism. For a discussion of neomedievalism, see Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society* (London: Macmillan, 1977) and for a discussion of neofeudalism, Philip Cerny, 'Globalization and the Changing Logic of Collective Action', *International Organization* 49, no. 4 (1995): 595-625. The only obvious feature that binds the medieval and contemporary worlds together is that neither can be accommodated comfortably within the Westphalian model. A more sophisticated framework is needed to see the similarities and differences between the various phases in the history of international systems.

48. The habit of assuming incommensurability may anyway have been a temporary fashion in IR. For a time it suited the discipline to think this way both to end pointless polemics and to establish the right of paradigms other than Realism to exist. As suggested by the 'neo-neo' synthesis, the fashion is swinging back to more tolerance of, or even enthusiasm for, theoretical pluralism, though debate will doubtless remain active as to whether a pluralist approach requires giving all the stories equal weight, or making some more equal than others. Wendt is clearly trying to construct a *via media* between positivist epistemology and post-positivist ontology, and it is probably true that some version of scientific realism is the easiest basis on which to do so. See *Social Theory*, 90 and 155. A more sophisticated set of paths around the incommensurability problem is laid out by Wæver. See, 'The Rise and Fall of the Inter-paradigm Debate', in *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond*, eds. Steve Smith, Ken Booth and Marysia Zalewski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

precedence to one mode of explanation over another. All of these questions have to remain historically contingent.

This kind of theoretical pluralism is not wholly alien to IR theory, but it has gone out of fashion. Morgenthau, often depicted as the progenitor of classical Realism, and Hedley Bull, one of the central figures of the ES, frequently adopted positions of theoretical pluralism that permitted them to conflate different theoretical positions, albeit perhaps unwittingly.[49] This pluralist tradition has been overridden by more methodologically self-conscious writers, at the cost of turning mainstream IR onto theoretically monist tracks. The continuing interest in Morgenthau and Bull is partly explained by the fact that they happily pull together the apparently opposing theoretical positions that exponents of various ideological, epistemological and ontological paradigms seem so keen to keep apart. Neither sees any difficulty in drawing on theoretical perspectives that are conventionally considered starkly incompatible. The task ahead is to revive the pluralist tradition without losing sight of the more self-conscious rigour introduced by Waltz. Only by developing methodological pluralism can IR theory hope to accommodate some of the ideas developed by world historians.

Picking Up the English School?

Why do we recommend picking up an approach that has been well known for four decades, that many see as rather traditionalist, and which has so far failed to take over the mainstream on its own merits? Why should the ES be helpful in crossing disciplinary boundaries when its founders so signally failed to address the economic sector? And how can it help to bring more coherence to IR theory when its 'international society' approach can be seen as just another competitor in the paradigm wars?

ES writers have already started to travel down the path along which the rest of the discipline needs to go. They approached the study of IR from a very different systemic perspective from the one being adopted by scholars working in the United States.[50] According to Hollis and Smith, the latter wanted to tell the story of international systems from the outside whereas the former preferred to tell it from both the inside and the outside, combining positivism with a historicist approach.[51] Attempts to ground a theoretical framework in a world historical setting was pioneered by Martin Wight,[52] whose work has been acknowledged as 'inspired

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49. See Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations* (New York: Knopf, 1973) and Bull, *The Anarchical Society*.

50. This is not the place to enter into the debates triggered by Tim Dunne on the boundary of the ES. See, *Inventing International Society: A History of the English School* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998). For the purposes of this argument, we accept the broad sketch of it given in Barry Buzan, 'The English School: An Underexploited Resource in IR', *Review of International Studies* (forthcoming, 2001).

51. Martin Hollis and Steve Smith, *Explaining and Understanding International Relations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

52. Martin Wight, *Systems of States* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1977).

trail-blazing'.[53] The Wightian tradition has obvious methodological and thematic synergies with studies in both historical sociology and world history and could mark the way forward towards an analysis of international systems in a comparative world historical perspective.[54] Other authors, in particular Hedley Bull, recognised the need to establish a synthesis between American and English systems thinking, *inter alia,* by drawing on an analytical distinction between 'international system' and 'international society'.[55] Although neither historicism nor pluralism have yet been fully worked out, ES thinking constitutes an underexploited resource in IR. Despite the fact that in continental academic circles, the ES has remained the focus of activity, it has operated largely on the margins of an American-dominated IR mainstream.

There is a strong case for seeing the contribution of the ES not as being principally defined by the international society approach as *a via media* between Realism and Liberalism, but as a coherent framework for theoretical and methodological pluralism.[56] Although in the traditional literature, these three traditions are conventionally, and perhaps misleadingly, codified as *Hobbesian*, *Grotian* and *Kantian* or as *Realism, Rationalism* and *Revolutionism*,[57] they can also be understood within a framework based on a tripartite distinction between *International System*, *International Society* and *World Society.*

First, the concept of the *International System*, drawing inspiration from Hobbes and classical Realism is about power politics amongst states, placing anarchy at the centre of IR theory. This tradition is broadly parallel to mainstream neorealism and uses structural modes of explanation and a positivist methodology. Second, *International Society* draws inspiration from Grotius and philosophical rationalism. Being about the institutionalisation of shared interest and identity amongst states, it puts the creation and maintenance of shared norms, rules and institutions at the centre of IR theory. Although parallels can be drawn between this approach and regime theory, it has constitutive rather than merely instrumental implications, using agency-based modes of explanation, and hermeneutic methodology. Finally, *World Society* is linked to Kant and revolutionism, taking individuals, non-state organisations and ultimately the world population as a whole as the focus of global societal identities and arrangements, and puts the transcendence of the state system

53. David S. Yost, 'New Perspectives on Historical States-Systems', *World Politics* 32, no. 1 (1979): 151-68; Adam Watson, *The Evolution of International Society* (London: Routledge, 1992); and Buzan and Little, *International Systems.*

54. Buzan and Little, *International Systems.*

55. Dunne, *Inventing International*, 125.

56. Richard Little, 'Neorealism and the English School: A Methodological, Ontological and Theoretical Reassessment', *European Journal of International Relations* 1, no. 1 (1995): 9-34; Richard Little, 'International System, International Society and World Society: A Re-evaluation of the English School', in *International Society and the Development*; and Richard Little, 'The ES's Contribution to the Study of International Relations', *European Journal of International Relations* 6, no. 3 (2000): 395-422.

57. Gabriele Wight and Brian Porter, eds., *International Theory: The Three Traditions: Martin Wight* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1991). This parallel is less obvious in Wight's original formulation than in subsequent usage of these terms.

at the centre of IR theory.[58] This position might appear similar to transnationalism, but carries a much more foundational link to normative political theory and critical methodology.

This conceptual triad constitutes a flexible way to disaggregate the idea of the 'international system' and lay bare its constituent elements. It is this explicitly theoretical pluralist position acknowledging multiple rather than competing paradigms that underpins the distinctiveness of the ES framework. In that respect, it is important to take into account the synergies between the ES and the Constructivists, who have also tried to find a mode of reconciliation between a Hobbesian international system and a Grotian international society.[59] However in doing so, they have tended to elide the problem by viewing systems and societies as different possible ways of constructing international reality rather than as different elements of the same reality.[60] In an ES framework, what is more significant is the assumption that all three elements can always operate simultaneously, in a continuous coexistence and interplay, the question being how strong they are in relation to each other. Theoretical pluralism transcends the standard treatment of the inter-paradigm debate as being a war between incommensurable approaches and aims instead at what Wæver described as an attempt to 'combine traditions and theories normally not able to relate to each other'.[61] It is this ability that makes the ES potentially much more than just a backward-looking traditionalist framework, or another contribution to the paradigm debates.

In effect, the theoretically pluralist frame requires analysts of international systems to tell three parallel stories about their subject, and to question how these

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58. Revolutionism describes mostly various forms of universalist cosmopolitanism and could include communism, but as Wæver notes, it is usually taken to mean Liberalism. See, 'International Society: Theoretical Promises Unfulfilled?', *Co-operation and Conflict* 27 (1992): 98.

59. Though for a warning on not taking a simplistic view of the parallels, see Ole Wæver, 'Does the English School's *Via Media* Equal the Contemporary Constructivist Middle Ground?' (paper presented at the annual conference of the British International Studies Association, Manchester, December 1999). For a more general overview of how ES theory relates to institutionalism, constructivism and post-structuralism, see Wæver, 'Four Meanings of International Society'.

60. Wendt makes this position very where he builds three models of international culture. In a Hobbesian system, actors relate as enemies, in a Grotian (Wendt refers to it as Lockean) as rivals, and in a Kantian system, as friends. Within any international system, therefore, it then becomes an empirical question about the culture that prevails and the degree of internalisation that has taken place. Although, he makes it very clear that his approach is only one of many that are available, he also asserts that he believes that it is transhistorical assuming that cultural structure can encapsulate the whole of history. Although Wendt suggests that most of world history can be characterised in Hobbesian, and therefore non-Westphalian terms, it seems that the emphasis on states and anarchy makes it difficult to see how his theory can provide the basis for a transhistorical analysis. There is an irony here, because Wendt, along with Friedheim, has provided one of the most interesting analyses of hierarchy in international relations. See Alexander Wendt and Daniel Friedheim, 'Hierarchy under Anarchy: Informal Empire and the East German State', in *State Sovereignty as a Social Construct*, eds. Thomas J. Bierstekerand and Cynthia Weber (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). See also Stephen D. Krasner, 'Wars, Hotel Fires and Plane Crashes', in 'Forum on Wendt', 133.

61. Wæver, 'International Society', 121.

stories line up with each other. Far from demanding the abandonment of existing skills, it optimises them. IR scholars already know how to tell Hobbesian, Kantian and Grotian stories, but as things stand, they prefer to tell them in opposition to each other. IR thinking needs to shift in order to recognise these stories not as alternative, mutually exclusive, interpretations, but as an interlinked set of perspectives, each illuminating a different facet of reality. The interesting question is not which of these stories is right, but what kind of configuration the combination of all of them produces. From a wider perspective, the question is how they evolve together, and how to identify major transformations that define shifts in different eras in the history of international systems.

The ES should be the starting point in crossing disciplinary boundaries through a non-exclusive attitude towards epistemological questions. Nonetheless, although methodological pluralism is considered to be a necessary condition for interdisciplinary co-operation, the actual record is mixed. Overall ES writers have been more successful in engaging with practitioners than in co-operating with people from other disciplines. Despite their notorious indifference to the economic sector, they were serious in their engagement with history, international law, and up to a point, especially in the case of Manning, with sociology. The potential however, is more important to our argument than the past record. The ES has carved out and maintained clear pathways between IR, history and various strands in social sciences and these can and should be built upon. Although it has signally failed to do so with respect to IPE, its trilogy of key concepts can easily and fruitfully, be used for that purpose, most notably, in imposing considerable clarity onto the perennially woolly, but still politically central, concept of globalisation.

Conclusion

Throughout this article our argument has been that the key to reversing the failure of IR lies in the attitude towards history and theory embodied by the ES. In saying this we are under no illusions about the problems with this approach. As it stands, its theory looks like the most promising place to start, but the ES itself will need to be substantially upgraded, and even remade by abandoning its unselfconscious attitude towards methodology. Some of its concepts, particularly 'world society' are as yet poorly worked out, and much remains to be done in bridge building to related disciplines.

Nevertheless, only when IR integrates with world history, and recaptures a vision of international systems as grand theory, will it be able to truly take off the Westphalian straitjacket. Any worthwhile grand theory in international relations has to be capable of structuring a distinctive and interesting account of world history. Only then will it be able to move into a position from which it can play its proper role as a meta-discipline. If it does not do so, it risks being outflanked on its own terrain by intellectual expeditions from other disciplines, and losing the holistic perspective that should be its main strength. As we have shown, many of the disciplinary borders that surround IR are permeable if approached in the right

way. That openness is an opportunity for the discipline, but also a danger if IR allows its natural territory to be colonised by other disciplines.

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