

Why is There No International Historical Sociology?

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Historical sociological studies in IR face a challenge similar to that discussed by Martin Wight in ‘Why is There no International Theory?’ Classical social theorists conceptualized ‘society’ in the ontological singular, leaving their successors with a ‘domestic analogy’ problem which has dogged attempts to provide a social theory of International Relations. Overcoming this problem requires an expansion of the premises of social theory to incorporate those general features of social reality which generate the phenomenon of ‘the international’. This expansion can be achieved using Leon Trotsky’s idea of ‘uneven and combined development’. Specifically, the existence of ‘the international’ arises ultimately from the ‘unevenness’ of human socio-historical existence; its distinctive characteristics can be derived from analysis of the resultant condition of ‘combined development’; and its significance, thus sociologically redefined, entails a reconceptualization of ‘development’ itself — one which removes the source of the ‘domestic analogy’ problem for historical sociology.

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1. The Problem of Historical Sociology in International Relations

Nearly 50 years ago, Stanley Hoffmann suggested that the study of International Relations should be refounded on the methodological basis of ‘historical sociology’.¹ The purpose of this exercise, he argued, was not to dissolve international theory into either Sociology or History; for international theory revolved around an analytical ‘core’ — the ‘decentralized’ nature of the ‘international milieu’ — which fully legitimated its claim to ‘be treated as an autonomous discipline’ (1959: 346–7). Yet this core had never been adequately grasped: the Realists took its analytical autonomy for a substantive one, reifying its determinations into a ‘static field’ (1959: 368).

Meanwhile, however, attempts to break open this reification by importing ‘concepts torn from sociology, economics, cybernetics, biology, and astronomy’ tended to lose sight of the analytical core itself on which the reification had been erected. The solution, wrote Hoffmann, was a programme of historical research which would establish inductively what was distinctive to the field of International Relations, trace its variations over historical time, and explore its interrelation with domestic political life. Thus reformulated, the discipline of IR would be freed from the errors of Realist reification and extra-disciplinary vagary alike.

Half a century later, Hoffmann’s research agenda has been amply and richly filled out.² Yet the historical sociological literature itself continues to be charged with reproducing the very problems it was summoned to overcome.³ One reviewer has even warned that its cumulative effect might be ‘to strengthen the dichotomization of “the international” and the “domestic”’ (Hall, 1999: 108). Why has the problem identified by Hoffmann not disappeared at the touch of historical sociology? What is its source? And can it be solved?

Three main arguments are advanced below in answer to these questions. First, Hoffmann’s problem endures because, despite the wealth of historical sociological contributions, the international itself has continued to elude a genuinely sociological definition. By ‘the international’, I mean that dimension of social reality which arises specifically from the coexistence within it of more than one society.⁴ And by a ‘sociological definition’, I mean one which directly formulates this dimension as an object of social theory — organically contained, that is, within a conception of social development itself. Until such a definition exists, historical sociology must always encounter international phenomena as theoretically external — whatever empirical significance it might allow them in its concrete explanations. Still, easy to call for, such a definition has proven much harder to provide. Why?

The reason, I argue secondly, lies not in the field of international theory per se, but rather in the tradition of Classical Social Theory from which the materials for such a definition would be drawn. An abiding strength of that tradition is its pre-disciplinary, holistic ambition: the classical writers aimed to provide theories of social development as a whole. Perhaps they were bound to fall short; but among the *lacunae* passed on within their ideas, one has been especially significant for international theory. The classical tradition, I shall argue, never formulated theoretically the multilinear and interactive dimensions of social development as a historical phenomenon. On the one hand, it thereby left unoccupied by Sociology the ontological ground on which Realism would later construct its own edifice of geopolitical reification. And on the other hand, to the challengers of Realism

it bequeathed a correspondingly problematic conception of ‘society’ which would lead them into a trap — commonly known as the ‘domestic analogy’ fallacy (Bull, 1966) — whenever they tried to expand its explanatory reach into IR. This dual circumstance, I suggest, is what obstructs a sociological definition of the international. If so, the problem of historical sociology in IR will not be overcome until the unfinished labour of the classics is completed — until, that is, the sway of social theory is finally extended to encompass those properties of social existence which generate the phenomenon of the international.

Once again, this extension is easier to call for than to carry out. Yet my third argument, to which most of the pages below are devoted, is that the means of achieving it are already available in Leon Trotsky’s remarkable idea of ‘uneven and combined development’.⁵

Trotsky’s idea was originally formulated at the start of the 20th century in order to explain the drastic empirical divergence of Russian social development from the prognoses of orthodox Marxism. Capitalist development in Russia, he argued, would not, and *could* not retrace the course of its English and French predecessors. That was ruled out, both by the very different sociological starting point (arising from earlier ‘uneven development’) and by the fact that it proceeded under international conditions already transformed by the existence of more advanced capitalist societies elsewhere (with whose influence the indigenous sources of Russian development were now sociologically ‘combined’).

In Trotsky’s writings, this local argument opened out into an alternative theorization of the spread of capitalism as a historical process. Instead of the homogeneous ‘world after its own image’ (Marx, 1973: 71) projected in the *Communist Manifesto*, this process was actually proliferating a multiplicity of unique patterns of ‘combined development’, whose political instability and international connectedness fundamentally altered the social and geographical coordinates of revolutionary crisis and opportunity.

In the end, however, the implications of ‘uneven and combined development’ could not be contained at either of these levels. As his hesitant and fragmentary but unavoidable criticisms of Marx indicated,⁶ Trotsky’s idea entailed an underlying claim — extending far beyond the analysis of capitalist development — about the significance of the international in human history. And it was here, I shall argue, in his assertion that uneven and combined development was intrinsic to the historical process itself, that Trotsky overcame the obstacles to a sociological definition of the international.

Thus the generalizations made above regarding historical sociology are not intended to belittle the latter’s achievements, but rather to pinpoint the enduring intellectual originality of Trotsky’s conception. Axiomatic assertions that ‘societal totalities are found only within the context of *intersocietal*

systems' (Giddens, 1984: 164), that 'large-scale social change within societies is always in large part caused by forces operating among them' (Skocpol, 1973: 30), or that the '*unitary* conception of society' is so inadequate as to render problematic the very idea of 'society' itself (Mann, 1986: 13, 2) are all true and valuable. Indeed, so rarely are they properly operationalized in social analysis that it is no diminution of their value to say that such points *should* always have been, as Friedrich Tenbruck (1994) emphasizes, obvious. What is still *not* obvious, however, is how the set of circumstances to which they allude (i.e. the international) can be derived from the nature of social development, rather than having to undergo a post hoc re-attachment which leaves the international itself powerfully acknowledged but analytically unpenetrated. It is perhaps due to the regularity of this outcome that these writers, for all their achievements, have repeatedly been charged with attaching an essentialized, Realist conception of the international onto historical sociology (Jarvis, 1989; Hobden, 1998; Buzan & Little, 2001; Halliday, 2002; Smith, 2002).⁷ And it is therefore symptomatic that in none of the above cases have the various interpolations of the international (either in themselves or via their adoption in IR), actually yielded a sociological definition of the international itself. In this respect, and for all that this perception remained implicit and sometimes mangled in his own writings, Trotsky's idea remains both more original and more advanced than those of his successors.

2. *The Classical Lacuna*

Before proceeding, however, we must clarify exactly what is missing in Classical Social Theory, and how that omission might still underlie the problem of historical sociology in IR today. The first of these tasks can be broached by recalling a famous question once posed by Martin Wight (1966): 'Why is there no international theory?' Wight was searching the tradition of Classical Political Philosophy for the intellectual foundations of a normative theory of International Relations. And he could not find them. To be sure, that tradition had a large penumbra of international speculation around it — the writings of irenists and Machiavellians, of lawyers and statesmen, as well as what he termed the '*parerga*' of the political philosophers themselves. But the ideas to be found in this penumbra were, he reported, generally shallow and repetitive. And the more he moved from the penumbra into the core of classical thought, the deeper the theoretical silence on the international became. International theory, he eventually concluded, had no classics of its own. And the intellectual tradition in which they might have been produced, Classical Political Philosophy, had itself constituted the international as marginal, yielding as a consequence, only

parerga. This was the circumstance which gave counter-intuitive force to the question, 'Why is there no international theory?'

Now, what if we were to reformulate Wight's question in order to ask instead: 'Why is there no international *historical sociology*?' Would the foundations for *that* enterprise which we could identify in Classical *Social Theory*, as it developed through the 18th and 19th centuries, really be more substantial?

Remarkable as it seems in retrospect, none of the major classical social theorists systematically incorporated the fact of inter-societal coexistence and interaction into their theoretical conception of social causality — with regard either to explaining the constitution of social orders, or to theorizing the dynamic process of their ongoing historical development.⁸

Of course, they did write about international issues. Marx's two famous articles on the British in India are only the best known items in an *oeuvre* of commentary on international affairs which included quite extensive coverage of the Second Opium War and over 800 pages on the Eastern Question. Moreover, classical ideas have frequently been taken up in order to illuminate some feature of the international realm. Georg Schwarzenberger, for example, turned to the sociological writings of Ferdinand Tönnies for the distinction between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* which became a central reference point in the English School's characterization of 'international society'. And some classical thinkers have even achieved a standing of their own within international theory — Max Weber's writings on the state have earned him the sobriquet of 'the father of modern realism'.

And yet what looks at first like a manifold penetration of classical social thought into international theory reveals nonetheless a peculiar inner *disconnection* whenever we look more closely into it. Marx's writings on the European incursions in India, China and the Middle East take for granted the latter's international context — it is detailed empirically without being conceptualized theoretically. In *Capital*, however (where we might expect a theoretical treatment), this same context is deliberately *abstracted from* theoretically, 'in order to examine the object of our investigation in its integrity, free from all disturbing subsidiary circumstances' (1976: 727). Meanwhile, the taking up of the *Gemeinschaft/Gesellschaft* distinction is at best an analogical redeployment of Tönnies' idea, and one which removes it entirely from its original meaning (not a sectoral distinction between contemporaneous domestic and international realms, but rather an *historical* contrast between pre-bourgeois and bourgeois society). And Weber? Weber produced numerous developmental ideal-types of social action specific to particular world religions; and he also produced (most famously in the 'Protestant ethic' thesis) ideal-types of the historical process by which a given cultural totality might endogenously mutate into a different one; yet nowhere

did he produce a developmental ideal-type of how the reproductive logic of one culture is causally affected by the coexistence and pressure of another. But why not? If difference and change can be theorized, why not interaction and the role of interaction in producing difference and change?

The case, in fact, is general: in the classical sociological tradition we find *dynamic* theorizations of *internal change* over historical *time* (the sequence of ancient, medieval and modern forms of society); and we find *comparative* theorizations of *external difference* across cultural *space* (contrasting European social structures with the Ottoman, Indian and Chinese among others). What we do not find, however, is a drawing together of these dynamic and comparative moments of analysis in order to theorize a specifically inter-societal dimension of social change — even where, as in Marx's analysis of capitalist expansion, the object of analysis necessarily involves more than one society. 'Wanted', Theda Skocpol once tersely wrote: 'An Intersocietal Perspective' (1973: 28). And she was right. For in the classical tradition, the interactive multiplicity of social development as a historical process does not enter into the formal theorization of development itself.

The parallel with Wight's conundrum is thus uncanny: while Classical Social Theory provides enormous resources for enriching international theory, and for throwing any number of illuminating sidelights onto its central concerns, nowhere do we find it taking intellectual possession of those concerns themselves. Quite simply, there *is* no classical sociological theory of 'the international'.

Yet how is this circumstance relevant to the study of IR today? Consider the intellectual form of the problem which historical sociological studies have faced in IR. They confront, in effect, a basic methodological disjuncture between sociological and geopolitical forms of explanation: the first reasons from the nature of societies, the second from conditions generated by the fact of their coexistence. Attempts to bridge this disjuncture from the sociological side have resulted all too often in 'reductionist' arguments which founder on an inability to explain geopolitical imperatives common to disparate forms of society. And that unexplained residue has itself seemed recurrently to legitimate the counter-assertion of a distinctly 'geopolitical' theory, formulated, in turn, in isolation from any more general theory of social development. This 'great divide' (Clark, 1999) reaches from the boundary of the discipline (distinguishing it from others) into its definitional core: arguably, the tension between reductionist and reificatory conceptions of the international underlies that perpetual oscillation between 'Idealism' and 'Realism' which has characterized the discipline's historical development. And from Skocpol (1979) to Teschke (2003), this same divide has stubbornly resisted the best efforts of historical

sociologists too — throwing them back, in the end, on proto-Realist conceptions of the international (Vanaik, 2004).⁹ Hoffmann's problem, then, endures. And not for nothing did Kenneth Waltz once conclude that '[s]tudents of international and external politics will do well to concentrate on separate theories of internal and external politics until someone figures out a way to unite them' (1986: 340).

But will they? After all, each of these forms of explanation — sociological and geopolitical — offers to theorize systematically the very phenomena which the other externalizes as untheorizable contingent variables. And the fact that they appear so methodologically incommensurable could therefore point to a quite different conclusion. It could rather imply that in their existing forms each of them — the sociological and the geopolitical alike — reflects a one-sided intellectual abstraction from the historical process. If so, then no amount of balancing between the two, however ingenious, would remove the theoretical problem which their separated existence reflects. And students would wait in vain for these equally misshapen abstractions to be 'united'. Something more fundamental would in fact be required: a reconceptualization of the historical process itself — one in which the geopolitical dynamics of 'international' behaviour are rediscovered as internal to the overall process of social development.

We return, then, to that basic *desideratum* — a sociological definition of the international. What exactly would such a definition involve? Is it even possible? These are the questions to be answered by reconstructing Trotsky's idea. Uneven; combined; development: taking each of these in turn, I shall argue cumulatively as follows: the phenomenon of the international arises from the socio-historical unevenness of human existence; its distinctive characteristics can be explained by analysis of the resultant condition of 'combined development'; and its significance, thus sociologically redefined, entails a reconceptualization of 'development' itself — one which removes, in fact, the source of the 'domestic analogy' problem for historical sociology.

3. *Uneven Development*

'Unevenness', wrote Trotsky, is 'the most general law of the historic process . . .' (1980: 5). And since 'laws of history' are viewed with suspicion in the social sciences, we should start by noting that the term 'law' here refers in the first instance not to a causal determination but rather to a descriptive generalization (Knei-Paz, 1978: 89): at any given historical point, the human world has comprised a variety of societies, of differing sizes, cultural forms and levels of material development. Empirically speaking, there is not, and never has been, a single path taken by social development. Consequently, if we are to conceptualize that phenomenon in general, we must begin by

recognizing that it has always involved a multiplicity of temporally coexisting instances, levels and forms of society.

What are the sources and dimensions of this unevenness? Trotsky himself never quite formulated them explicitly; and most of the examples he studied lay within the modern period, leaving undeveloped any claim we might want to make about the transhistorical generality of the phenomenon. In order to correct for this, therefore, it may help to examine the concrete configuration of uneven development at an earlier historical point. A similar exercise has been carried out by Eric Wolf, who follows an 'imaginary voyager', travelling across the world in the year 1400 (1982: Ch. 2). And we shall begin with his account. For buried within the empirically obvious diversity of the human world at any given point in history, there lies a theoretical clue of enormous importance.

Wolf's 'imaginary voyager' of 1400 would have encountered a huge range of levels and types of social existence among the 400 million-strong human population then living. Hunter-gatherer bands had everywhere characterized the original peopling of the continents. Even ten thousand years ago, they 'numbered about ten million, one hundred per cent of the earth's population' (Coon, 1976: 13). By 1400, however, that original preponderance had long since been diluted by the spread of varied agrarian and pastoral forms of existence.¹⁰ Confined to the inner and outer margins of the latter's expansion, hunter-gatherer bands now coexisted with them as a small and dwindling fraction of the demographic whole. Only in a few remaining regions did they still comprise a majority — in Australia, in some parts of the Americas and South-East Asia, and in 'a great circumpolar belt from the Baltic to Siberia' (Hawkes, 1976: 45): where they would survive to form part of Trotsky's account of the uneven development of Russia in his own day: '... human development — from the primitive savagery of the northern forests where men eat raw fish and worship trees, to the most modern social relations of the capitalist city ...' (cited in Knei-Paz, 1978: 77).

'To understand this world of 1400', says Wolf, 'we must begin with geography' (1982: 25) — that is, with the pattern of geological and climatic variation of the earth itself. For this naturally given ecological unevenness promoted different forms of human subsistence in different places. Above all, the social 'dichotomy between steppe and sown [which] shaped much of the course of human action in the Old World' was oriented around the great dry belt of steppe and desert which stretched from North Africa to Mongolia, interposing a vast habitat of nomadic pastoralism between the major zones of intensive cultivation in the temperate North West (Europe) and the sub-tropical regions of West Africa, Northern India and China.

In most cases, it was settled agriculture and its expansion which had earlier provided the basis for state-formation, the rise of cities and manufactures,

and the development of literate cultures. In 1400, at least five major culture areas, which had arisen at different times, were now coexisting in different parts of the globe, and developing in radically different ways. Exhibiting 'patently divergent morphologies of State and society',¹¹ these included the centralized bureaucracy of China; the cellular multiplications of Indian caste communities; the 'vast catenary of cities' underpinning the commercial networks of the Islamic world; the crenelated infeudations and sub-infeudations of Christendom; and — so different from all of these as almost to scramble any unitary definition of 'civilization' — the worlds of central and South America: roads without wheels, cities without writing, stone building without developed metallurgy, agriculture without animal domestication.

Significant variation, however, was occurring not just among the civilizations, but also within them. For each culture area itself comprised a multiplicity of political entities, each with its own individual pattern of development, adding a further axis of inner differentiation to the overall unevenness. 'Christendom' contained the extremes of tiny, wealthy, republican Florence on the one hand, and vast, undeveloped, autocratic Muscovy on the other. Sinic civilization comprehended not just China but also Japan, Korea and Vietnam among others — despite the fact that all three of these had by 1400 developed unique cultural variations which set them socio-culturally apart from each other as well as from China itself.

And finally, these qualitative unevennesses were overlain by what we might call an asynchronous simultaneity: all the societies which coexisted in 1400 were at particular, and different, points in their own historical lives. In the Americas, the Aztecs and the Incas were still in the early stages of constructing the empires which would end abruptly with the arrival of the Spaniards a century later. The Ottoman Turks, meanwhile, had a much longer history ahead of them. But at this point, they too had been established in what became their Anatolian heartland for barely a hundred years; and though they had already advanced far into the Balkans, their developing empire had not yet assumed the distinctive institutional form by which it would be known to later historians. Meanwhile, the Byzantine Empire, ten times older, whose remaining provinces the Turks had recently overrun, was by now reduced to a redoubt which extended barely beyond the walls of Constantinople itself. (By a curious coincidence, these roles were reversed at the other end of the Mediterranean, where the old Moslem kingdom of Marinid Granada was now approaching its end at the hands of Castillian Christian conquerors.) Byzantium would in fact receive one last stay of execution when Timur suddenly crushed the rising power of the Ottomans in 1402. But, elsewhere, Timur's campaigns of 1398–9 had already shattered the declining rule of the Delhi Sultanate. Unlike the Ottomans, the Delhi Sultanate would not rise again. And Northern India

was now sinking back into deeper fragmentation — at the very time when Ming China (whose invasion Timur was planning at the time of his death in 1405) was completing its internal recovery following the earlier expulsion of the Mongols.

Wolf's description is far richer than conveyed here. But its relevance to the current argument can already be seen if we 'reverse engineer' one aspect of how it has been assembled. Working his way down from the most general, natural basis of unevenness, he uncovers axis after axis of further differentiation: different bases of subsistence — hunting, pastoral, agricultural; within the last of those, differing civilizations, themselves made up of differing parts, all of these coexisting with all the others, but at differing points in their own differing temporalities. Furthermore, all this would be equally the case, but in a differing configuration, at any point in time which we chose to take our synchronic snapshot of human social development as an actual historical process. '[T]he *unevenness* of historical development', says Trotsky, interpolating this further, temporal axis, '*. . . is in itself uneven*' (1970: 15; emphasis in original).

Yet from all this, what inference can we make? Indeed, how can we distil from this endless empirical complexity of the world in 1400 any general theoretical point at all (especially if we bear in mind that its multiplying axes of variation and particularity extend far beyond the four or five which we have chosen to enumerate)? The answer is that the complexity *is* the point — complexity conceived not as patternless jumble, but as inner differentiation of parts, across many dimensions, but within an ontological whole. For human development is such a whole. It was not, in 1400, a causally integrated whole. But it was an ontological whole nonetheless, marked off qualitatively within the wider, ongoing process of biological evolution by its own distinctive characteristics, and delimited also in time by the immemorial but ultimately finite span of its existence so far. And its texture is indeed radically uneven. This is the observation which, though blindingly obvious as an empirical statement, is surprisingly consequential as a theoretical premise. For once we have said this, the supposedly 'irreducible' fact of political fragmentation which underlies the distinctive problematic of the international can itself be seen to be one embodiment of an analytically more general socio-historical property of human existence — its intrinsic unevenness. And this more general property finds simultaneous expression not only in that quantitative multiplicity of number, but also in the qualitative multiplicities of socio-cultural forms, of developmental levels, of geographical scales and of historical temporalities.

'Over the world as a whole', says the historian Colin Platt, '*. . . there is no political, economic, or cultural sequence that is convincingly universal in its application*' (1979: 11). True enough; and yet this negative assertion is

also capable of a positive theoretical formulation. As Alice Beck Kehoe expresses it:

Once *Homo sapiens* had reached practically all the habitable regions of the world, in the late Pleistocene, adaptation to great environmental diversity coupled with diverse historical experiences of trade, epidemics, wars, and so on, created the great variety of present-day societies. Nineteenth-century theorists who believed our species had followed a single line of cultural evolutionary development from simple to complex societies, from hunting-gathering to urban agricultural-commercial economics, failed to realize that the great evolutionary principle of adaptation *must* produce diversity . . . (1998: 107)¹²

So we can relax the caution with which we originally introduced the idea of a ‘law’ of unevenness — for while the concrete pattern of socio-cultural diversity at any given time is contingent, the fact of this diversity itself is not.

There is one last point which we might try to squeeze from this discussion of the world in 1400. Earlier on, we noted some illustrations of asynchronous simultaneity — the fact that societies which collectively coexist at a single point in time are nonetheless, individually, at different points in the different times of their own histories. Such illustrations provide the raw material for what the anthropologist Jaquetta Hawkes has called the ‘study of contemporaneity’ (1976: 199). And it might seem that this study, at its margins anyway, feeds off a truly idle curiosity. The temporal intersection of the histories of Byzantium and the Ottoman Empire has an obvious significance because it was the matrix of a direct and consequential causal interaction. The simultaneous contrast of Ottoman and Marinid fortunes seems less significant, though they can at least be gathered up as related parts of the overarching history of the single social formation of Islam. Even the observation that Confucius, Lao-Tse, the Buddha, Zoroaster and Pythagoras were nearly all alive at the same time in the 6th century BC might point to some wider developmental process reflected somehow in their near simultaneity. But really, what does it *matter* that, as Hawkes also tells us, the first unification of China coincided with the Punic Wars, or that the historical life of Byzantium and Mesoamerican high civilization were roughly co-terminous (1976: 141, 180, 212)? Without causal interconnection, these temporal coincidences can hardly contribute to a historical explanation of any kind.

In fact, however, the interest which they nonetheless inspire is not as barren as it may seem. For they conjure up in a flickering and fragmented way the wider configuration of uneven development as a social and geographical whole. Throwing a light of comparison between two or more remote points in this configuration, they perforce simultaneously illuminate (by the very ‘distance’ between the points thus connected) the wider

existence of this dimension of social reality, the steepness of its contrasts, the differences of scale and form, the abrupt discontinuities, unseen points of connection and unrelated, unexpected parallels to be found within it. The real significance of Hawkes' correlation of Byzantine and Mesoamerican history, then, lies indeed not in any causal claim (for none can be made) but rather in the ontological perception which it momentarily summons up of this wider dimension. It posits, and requires us to imagine, the single human reality which contained them both at that point in its history.

Thus we have, it seems, established two things. First, and in a stronger sense than we initially dared to propose, it has transpired that unevenness is indeed a 'universal law'. For not only does it descriptively characterize the overall process of human social development at every point in historical time; but also the socio-ecological bases of human subsistence are such (grounded as they are in creative adaptation to a varied natural world) that it necessarily does so.

Second, we have also found that the concept of unevenness contains an ontological premise of 'more-than-one'. And this stretches the referent of the term 'development' across the conceptual space of multiple instances which frames the logical core of any idea of the international. In so doing, however, it also reveals that the plane of number (multiple instances) is only one of several dimensions across which this essential multiplicity of the idea is expressed. For the unevenness of development also entails, distributed across (and ultimately also within) its instances, multiplicity of cultural form, geographical scale, developmental level and historical temporality.

Thus the predicate of unevenness already brings us two steps closer to a sociological definition of the international. It enables us to derive the fact of 'internationality' from an anterior and more general sociological feature of human existence. And it simultaneously invokes *within the concept of development itself* that ontology of more-than-one which has always extended the analytical space of the international decisively beyond the reach of unilinear social theories.

Yet we have further seen that the idea of unevenness also posits a unitary quality of some kind to the overall phenomenon whose inner differentiation it describes. And here we discover the limit of what we have been able to establish so far. For in the example we have been discussing, this unity was almost entirely an artificially constructed, chronological one. The societies which composed the human world in 1400 were linked in our account primarily by virtue of their coexistence at a single historical moment. Yet even if we relaxed that rigid synchronicity into the diachronic flow of historical time, the concept of unevenness as so far developed would be unable by itself to complete the sociological definition of the international. The static multipolarity would resolve into a dynamic multilinearity. We

could picture the different instances of development emerging and disappearing within the common frame — expanding, contracting, mutating and changing their positions relative to the others in the shifting constellations making up the now moving whole. And yet we would still not have moved out of the abstracted space of a fundamentally comparative analysis. In the real space of historical time, however, the spatio-temporal coexistence of societies is also the matrix of their concrete interrelation. And this is why Trotsky immediately goes on to argue that unevenness gives rise to ‘combined development’. Development, he means to say, is not only differentiated: it is also, consequently and intrinsically, interactive. And with this addition, we can move beyond the sociological derivation of ‘the international’, and beyond the identification of its conceptual space: we can start to formulate its relational substance.

4. *Combined Development*

But here, once again, we meet first with the limits of Trotsky’s own development of the idea. Nearly everywhere in Trotsky’s writings, the term ‘combined development’ has a very particular meaning. It refers to the sociological outcome of international capitalist pressures on the internal development of non-capitalist societies — specifically the sociological ‘amalgam’ (1971: 67) of capitalist and non-capitalist forms which resulted from these pressures. Yet just as we saw that unevenness had a much wider and deeper meaning than the coexistence of more with less advanced *industrializing* countries, so the same applies here. Trotsky asserted that combined development was an intrinsic, emergent property of uneven development. And he also claimed (rightly, we decided) that uneven development was a ‘universal law’. The phenomenon of combined development must therefore also have a more general existence. If so, however, it is not one that Trotsky himself ever fully explicated. Hence, we now need to reconstruct the meaning of this concept not as a *concrete* abstraction of the international impact of capitalist society, but as a *general* abstraction of the significance of inter-societal coexistence per se.

Once again, the causal weight of this ‘law’ — that societies do not develop in isolation — is variable; one cannot specify in the abstract the relative scale or qualitative form of its influence. Its descriptive currency, however, like that of unevenness, is all but universal. ‘[H]as there ever been a time,’ asked Eric Wolf rhetorically, ‘when human populations have existed in independence of larger encompassing relationships, unaffected by larger fields of force?’ (1982: 18). Societies cut off completely from outside contact have always, he argued, been temporary exceptions — like the shipwreck of their equally mythical individual equivalent, Robinson Crusoe. The historical

norm, by contrast, is not just that societies coexist in some passive way, but rather that ‘diplomacy’ — in the broadest sense of the negotiated management of inter-societal relations — has been an *institutionalized* feature of just about every known type (or case) of society. That this circumstance extends as far back as written records exist is well known; ‘one of the earliest surviving historical documents of the Sumerians, the “Stela of the Vultures”. . . records the text of a treaty . . .’ (Barber, 1979: 8). What is perhaps more remarkable — because it suggests that the phenomenon is grounded in the condition of inter-societal coexistence itself, rather than in any given historical form or level of development — is its prevalence also across the known world of oral cultures. As Ragnar Numelin puts it, in an empirically detailed study of the latter:

As long as human communities have existed side by side . . . there have evolved certain rudimentary forms of diplomatic usage . . . international thought, or anyhow intertribal thought, is as old as the existence of separate independent political communities . . . (1950: 13, 168–9)

Statements such as this are generally taken to mark the line where social theory ends and international theory begins. But since, as we have seen, the conditions it describes arise from determinations intrinsic to development itself, we need instead to derive its implications within our unfolding argument about the premises of social theory. As we cross this line, therefore, our feet must not leave the ground. We must press the argument forward nonetheless.

The unevenness of development, we have said, entails multiplicity; and this multiplicity, we have added, is everywhere expressed in a condition of inter-societal coexistence which gives rise to diplomacy. But if so, then what we are really saying, in social theoretical terms, is that the conditions of reproduction which define the concrete existence of any given society are not limited to the ‘internal’ structures of social relations which formed the starting point of Classical Social Theory. They always include, by virtue of the bare fact of inter-societal coexistence, those external conditions which are the object of diplomatic management.

The premise of unevenness has already expanded the referent of ‘development’ across this wider terrain. Now we must examine how its corollary — combined development — adjusts the underlying conception of social causality itself in line with what that prior expansion everywhere reveals.

The point may be illustrated by considering for a moment the ‘international’ history of that society which would, in Trotsky’s writings, provide the archetype of modern combined development, namely ‘Russia’. Unlike Trotsky, however, we shall focus entirely on its ‘premodern’ history, in order

to formulate the concept of combined development in the more general terms we are aiming for.

Russian state formation originated in the 9th century, when Scandinavian traders — the ‘Rus’ — plying the water routes between the Baltic and Constantinople, extended their rule over the surrounding East Slav tribes.¹³ Centred on Kiev, the external orientation of this original state was towards Constantinople. There, captured slaves and the surplus of tribute collected in the winter months were traded during the summer. And via this linkage — which included the adoption of Orthodox Christianity, the Cyrillic alphabet and Byzantine commercial law — Kiev was incorporated into the elaborate strategic design of Byzantine diplomacy. However, internal divisions, nomadic predations and the re-routing of Byzantine trade following the Crusades led to early political disintegration. When Kiev was finally conquered by the Mongols in 1240, its lands had already fragmented into a dozen competing principalities. And colonizing movements into the safer wooded areas to the North East were establishing a new centre of gravity in Muscovy. A vassal state of the Mongol Empire, Muscovy now competed with two other legatees of Kiev in the ‘reassemble of the Russian lands’. This three-way struggle — between the semi-republican city-state of Novgorod, the aristocratic feudalism of Lithuania and the Mongol-fortified autocracy of Muscovy — finally ended with Lithuanian defeat in 1677. From now on, says Theodor Shanin, ‘Muscovy was Russia’ (1985: 15). But Russia, through this same process of westward interaction and expansion, was now exposed to an entirely different set of pressures and influences — those arising from its deepening participation in the uneven development of Absolutist Europe — which would reach an early climax in the importing of military and governmental models under Peter the Great.

Now, in this cameo the ‘external’ aspect of Russian development has been deliberately foregrounded. The purpose, however, is not to argue for a general *Primat der Außenpolitik*, but rather to bring into focus the intellectual nature of the challenge: exactly how can these *inter*-societal determinations be understood sociologically? This is the question which the concept of combined development must now answer.

The first step seems simple enough — the course of Russian development was ‘combined’ in the sense that at every point it was causally integrated with a wider social field of interacting patterns of development. The latter’s shifting constellations constantly reshuffled Russia’s (external) conditions of existence: just as Russia itself formed a dynamic element of the external conditions of existence for these other instances of development. Whether Russia survived at all, under what conditions and in what territorial extent (matters of obvious importance to the sociology of its development) were always contingent on the management of these external factors. Yet these

factors, geopolitical though they were, were not supra-sociological determinations. On the contrary, they were the particular consequences, in this particular case, of a general sociological phenomenon — the unevenness (and hence manifold multiplicity) of development itself.

For just the same reason, however, these consequences cannot be figured by extrapolation from any ‘domestic analogy’ of social causation. Hedley Bull rightly stated the problem here: analogical reasoning proceeds by assimilating the properties of one thing to those of another, rather than trying to grasp the former in themselves (1966: 45). He was right too to argue that the nature of inter-societal causality includes specific characteristics which require analysis in their own right — even if he did then, in classic Realist style, falsely infer autonomy from specificity. Still, Bull’s stricture clarifies the next step in our own exercise: we must identify what is sociologically distinctive about this inter-societal causality.

Let us return then for a moment to the year 1400, and try to picture the wider texture of combined development as a (Eurasian) geographical whole. Its causal web appears at first to be quilt-like, linking together a number of regional constellations of uneven development. From within each of these patches of the quilt (such as that of Russia and its neighbours) the outer members appear to interact directly on the margins of other, adjacent constellations, stitching the patches together. In 1400, for example, Muscovy was not directly involved in the regional geopolitics of central Europe, the Middle East or China. Through its interactions with Lithuania and the Golden Horde, however, it was continuously involved with neighbours who were.

This vantage point (with the ‘patches’ thus viewed as both distinct from and yet interconnected with others) enables us to see something often emphasized by world historians. Knock-on effects reverberate serially across two or more constellations, gathering force or dispersing, often changing their form as they go, and impacting indirectly on remote social settings whose members played no role in the genesis of the causal process. Kievan development was unhinged by the geo-commercial impact of the Crusades with which it was itself unconnected. Muscovy’s emergence from Mongol domination was hugely assisted by the otherwise unrelated assault of Timur on the Golden Horde. Earlier, the Mongol unification of East–West communications had unintentionally created the epidemiological bridge which carried the bubonic plague all the way from the Himalayas to Western Europe (McNeill, 1976). Much earlier still, China’s struggle with northern barbarians unleashed a shock-wave across the ‘chain-relations’ of the steppe which played into the destruction of Rome itself (Hawkes, 1976: 213).

The quilt metaphor thus takes us some way. It helps us to imagine an uneven but continuous causal ‘pattern’ without a visual centre. And with

causal assumptions already decentred or multipolarized within each of the patches, it becomes easier to conceive as doubly intrinsic to social development that peculiar condition of latent or active causal interdependence in which, as Waltz once noted, '[e]verybody's strategy depends on everybody else's' (1959: 201).¹⁴

Soon, however, the metaphor starts to break down. For if the causal centre of combined development as a whole is nowhere, it is also everywhere. Every member of every constellation thus imagined is itself the centre of its own unique constellation of entities, even while it simultaneously occupies a range of different positions in the different constellations of each of its neighbours. Not only, therefore, does the 'quilt' have no centre: its pattern cannot even be imagined from a single point of view. And this causal scatter-effect is further compounded if we add the dimension of time, in which different 'patches' of differing sizes are continually emerging, reconfiguring, changing their co-ordinates and redissolving, in line with the (spatio-temporally uneven) rise and fall of 'powers' in different parts of the world.

Thus, a 'multi-perspectival' causality, once identified by John Ruggie (1993) as a 'postmodern' novelty of present-day state-formation in the European Union, is in fact an intrinsic property of social development as an overall historical process — traditionally registered in IR as the structural phenomenon of 'anarchy'. All the peculiar consequences — causal, ethical and cognitive — of multipolarity, reified by Realism into an autonomous zone of geopolitical determinations, arise in fact from this strategic dimension of combined development.

Doubtless, all three of these features of inter-societal causality — quilted, serial, decentred — have their equivalents in the domestic unevenness of social development. Those equivalents, however, operate beneath a higher level of political organization — state or otherwise — which regulates, interrupts and corrals the free play of their effects. In the inter-societal dimension, no such higher agency exists; and those effects therefore operate there in ways regulated only by mechanisms emergent within their peculiar decentred character. Balancing, bandwagoning and sundry other forms of geopolitical manoeuvre may or may not result, driven by the varying diplomatic imperatives of advantage or survival. But in any event, inter-societal 'order' is an emergent, autopoietic property of social reproduction.

This circumstance, as Realists have long insisted, radically distinguishes not only the causal geometry of inter-societal relations but also their 'chemical' composition. With no superordinate check on the possible escalation of means deployed, those relations are chronically attended by the threat or use of violence, suffusing them with the special tension of an ever present 'security' problem. And violence is not the only social practice transfigured in this way: the ambiguities of international law *as law*; money, the measure

of value, suddenly ramified into ‘monies’ with gyrating mutual values; the homogenizing, inclusive quality of ‘national identity’ inverted into a principle of exclusion and otherness: all of these manifest ‘the international difference’ — the additional sociological properties which activities constitutive of ‘domestic’ life take on when they resurface on the plane of inter-societal relations.

In the worldview of the ‘domestic analogy’ such phenomena argue the incompleteness of the international as a sphere of social life, its problems awaiting (dis)solution via the transplanting of a contractual arrangement from the ‘domestic’ sphere. From the point of view of combined development, by contrast, they are what completes the architectonic definition of ‘the social’ itself, reflecting the strategic dimension of development which overdetermines its ‘domestic’ character in ways underivable from any singular conception of society.

Let us therefore give the Realists their due. Bull’s phrase ‘anarchical society’ would capture this very well if it did not bring the usual baggage of reification with it. Waltz too is right to insist upon the significance of what can be reasoned about international relations from this circumstance. And it has been the great failure of earlier critiques of Realism (my own included) that they have generally proceeded by trying to downplay, gainsay or even wish away this strategic dimension, rather than by capturing and decoding its contents within a genuinely sociological definition of the international. In this respect, in fact, the Realists have been keepers of the seal of the international — even if they have also, to the enduring frustration of their critics, kept it sealed away.

Still, Russian development was also combined in a second sense, one well known to existing historical sociological studies in IR: an interdependence not just of events but also of the structures of social, material and cultural life. The quotidian reproduction of Russian society in any given form was always partly accomplished through institutionalized relationships which extended beyond Russia itself, integrating it into regional political orders, cultural systems and material divisions of labour. Trade with Constantinople was not just an ‘external’ activity of the Kievan state. It was the coordinating sinew of princely power inside. The withering of that trade necessarily spelled some qualitative re-formation of the state itself. Over time, the geographical axis and social form of this integration repeatedly shifted — from incorporation into the political structures of Mongol dominance, to the projection of a suzerainty over the lands of Orthodox Christianity, to the development of westward ties with Absolutist Europe and the nascent capitalist society in England.

And finally, combined development also has a third and yet deeper dimension — now fully revealed by the addition of a diachronic optic to the

synchronic snapshot through which we surveyed the world in 1400. At every step of the way, and as a result of the strategic and reproductive relationships already described, the evolving Russian social formation was a hybrid, a changing amalgam of pre-existent 'internal' structures of social life with 'external' socio-political and cultural influences. From the Viking north to the Byzantine south, from the Mongol east to the European west, a succession of external pressures (and opportunities) of radically varying cultural form all left their mark on the inner shape of the Russian state. Yet 'combined development' in this sense was not something that happened 'to' Russia; there had, after all, never existed a 'pre-combination' Russia. On the contrary, combined development identifies the inter-societal, relational texture of the historical process within which the shifting meanings of the term 'Russia' crystallized and accumulated.

What would be the consequence for social theory if this applied not only to Russia, but to every known society? After all, any enduring society — if we 'fast-forward' the replay of its historical life in the way done for Russia above — reveals an equivalent interactive texture to its historical constitution. '. . . [A]ll human societies of which we have record are 'secondary', indeed often tertiary, quaternary, or centenary' (Wolf, 1982: 76).

The consequence is that one would have to abandon at the deepest theoretical level any notion of the *constitution* of society as analytically prior to its *interaction* with other societies. For '[i]n reality, the national peculiarities' which seem to pre-exist and govern international relations are themselves in each case not pre-interactive essences, but rather 'an original combination of the basic features of the world process' (Trotsky, 1962: 23) of human development — that is, of its uneven and combined character.

'Savages', Trotsky once wrote, 'throw away their bows and arrows for rifles all at once, without travelling the road which lay between those two weapons in the past' (1980: 5). In a similar way, Hawkes observes that after its invention around 1600 BC, the light, spoke-wheeled chariot 'spread with such speed among the powers that it is drawn across their history as a synchronistic line' (1976: 117). Yet these military examples secrete the formula of a much more general characteristic of (combined) development. The cultural accoutrements of writing, Orthodoxy and commercial law did not evolve endogenously in Kiev, retracing the varied histories of their original development elsewhere. They were taken, ready-made, from Byzantium (itself a hybrid outgrowth of Graeco-Roman and Asiatic influences) which had its own strategic interest in exporting them. Transplanted in this way, they helped incorporate Kiev into the Byzantine diplomatic system. But they also became the starting point of a different developmental process, one which both altered them and preserved them far beyond the demise of Byzantium itself.

This phenomenon — in which the results of one instance of social development enter into the conditions of another — arises directly from the pressures and opportunities of inter-societal coexistence. Sociologically universal and historically continuous, it everywhere overdetermines the empirical nature of development itself. Consequently, its effects can be uncovered just about anywhere one chooses to look. '[T]his book', says Ponting, illustrating the point,

. . . is written in English, a mainly Germanic language deriving from the impact of the Anglo-Saxons some 1,500 years ago, but also containing very strong elements of French and Latin . . . It is in an alphabetic script invented by the Phoenicians in the Levant some three thousand years ago and itself derived from a multitude of sources . . . [The pages bear 'Arabic' numerals] although they were Indian in origin, as was the idea of positional location. The book is printed on paper which is a Chinese invention . . . (2001: 10)

Here again, as with our earlier discussion of the endless diversity of forms of development, we are confronting a feature of social reality — this time its intrinsically synthetic, 'combined', character — which is so empirically obvious that its theoretical significance is at first unclear. It becomes immediately clear, however, if we ask simply: what would be a method of sociological explanation adequate to this synthetic texture of social reality? The answer can be glimpsed at work in a jotting from one of Trotsky's notebooks. What, he was apparently pondering, had been the social and historical meaning of the fact that a Czarist chief of police (S.V. Zubatov, 1864–1917) had himself initiated and organized labour unions in Russia's factories? Trotsky's answer reached outwards across the modern historical process as an accumulating, interactive whole; ranging back and forth, it wove a dialectical formula of almost *haiku*-like compression:

Zubatovshchina Monarchy + social reforms

Borrowed from Bismarck and Napoleon III,
a presentiment of fascism,

but all of this in truly muscovite style. (1998: 80)

And yet if the 'societal' dimension of reality thus cannot be regarded as analytically preceding the 'inter-societal' one, any attempt to reverse the precedence only produces the nonsensical idea of an inter-societal reality prior to societies. This whole line of reasoning must therefore end with the conclusion that the two are analytically coeval. Hence the definition of social theory must somehow be framed so as to incorporate the inter-societal within the social. Hence, in fact, any social theory which does *not* do this is, to that extent, a false abstraction from 'the real connections and consecutiveness of a living process' (Trotsky, 1998: 77).

At this point we should pause to spell out what this discussion of

combined development has added to the overall argument. The 'law' itself — societies do not exist in isolation — arises directly from the anterior premise of unevenness. Yet, as we have seen, its operation deepens and multiplies the latter's implications — sufficiently, in fact, to bring a sociological definition of 'the international' now within reach. Three main steps have led us to this point.

We began this section by asserting the sociological provenance of inter-societal relations: stipulatively, because they are among the conditions of reproduction of any society; and ontologically, because they can have no source apart from the concrete conjunctions of uneven development itself.

Second, we found that these inter-societal relations nonetheless exhibited distinctive characteristics — the 'international difference'. Not by analogy, but by carrying forward the theoretical implications of unevenness, we were able to define this difference sociologically: 'anarchy', a quality earlier seen to be latent in unevenness, was now activated across a range of socio-cultural dimensions by the corollary of combined development. This was the key to the simultaneous extension and transfiguration of sociological phenomena (violence, law, money, identity, etc.) in the inter-societal domain.

Finally, however, via reflection on the dynamic, synthetic character of social reality interwoven in this way, we touched the issue not only of what, but also of *where* the international really is. In the end, we found, it subsists neither at a level above, nor in a space between, societies, but rather in a dimension of their being which cuts across both of these 'places' and reaches simultaneously into the 'domestic' constitution of those societies themselves. Perhaps it is this slippery, transversal property which has always made it so difficult to grasp.

This third result, in which the international suddenly appears to be everywhere, might seem merely to condemn us at the last moment to a tautological definition. In fact, however, with the first two results already in place, something different follows. While it indeed collapses the false (ontological) distinction between 'the domestic' and the international, it leaves intact a real (sociological) one which nonetheless obtains. And this can now be formulated as follows.

What we call the international arises from an intrinsic characteristic of social development as a transhistorical phenomenon — its inner multilinearity and interactivity. This characteristic is not peculiar to inter-societal relations. Considered sociologically, however, it has always had one consequence which does constitute both the peculiarity and indeed the very existence of the international (in the traditional sense): for reasons which we earlier derived from the unevenness of development, the human social world, throughout its historical existence and whatever the nature of the

societies composing it, has always opened out, at the political apex of social reproduction, into a lateral field of interactive difference and multiplicity.

Never fully detachable from other dimensions of social reality, yet never fully reducible to them either, the international must therefore be defined in a way which captures its transversal quality while nonetheless identifying the distinctiveness of this field in which it appears to come most into its own. In this respect, assertions of ‘the autonomy of international relations’ (Bull, 1966: 36) are as unhelpful as the ‘domestic analogy’ arguments which provoke them. For what we must actually say of this field is that — on the contrary — it is here, and here alone, that the sociological attributes of multilinearity and interactivity overwhelm with their pluralizing determinations even the unifying, coordinating logic of politics itself. And the implications of this fact extend far beyond the zone delimited in any claim of ‘autonomy’; they suffuse, as we have seen, the fabric of the social everywhere. In this respect, Realism has both incompletely specified and radically underestimated the significance of its own central category — anarchy itself.

In contrast, by deriving the existence of this field from characteristics generic to social reproduction, Trotsky’s idea overcomes the otherwise insuperable duality of the international — simultaneously a distinctive field of action and a more general, cross-cutting property of social reality. This was a duality which we left implicit in our opening description of the international — ‘that dimension of social reality which arises specifically from the coexistence within it of more than one society’. We can now replace that description with the more explicit ‘conceptual definition’ which, as Weber argued, emerges only at the end of an analysis (1985: 47–8): the international, quite simply, and in both these senses, is nothing other than the highest expression of uneven and combined development. This is its sociological definition.

Such a definition also clarifies the problem of historical sociology in International Relations — as follows. Social development is a differentiated totality. (Thus spoke the ‘law of unevenness’.) As that differentiation is intrinsic, so the condition of being an interrelated fragment of a wider whole is effectively universal to human societies; and in turn the practical and existential consequences of this condition enter directly, and in principle, into their ongoing relational constitution. (Unevenness ‘gives rise’ to combined development.) The fact of unevenness thus radically infuses with its consequences the nature of social causality itself. And the resultant ‘anarchical’ dimension of *social* causality cannot — in principle — be derived from any notion of ‘society’ implicitly conceived in the ontological singular. Here lies the ‘domestic analogy’ problem for social theory. Yet what does this tell us? Merely that in the methodological stand-off between socio-

logical and geopolitical explanation, one false abstraction has generated another. For it was only in the context of a falsely singular abstraction of 'society' that anarchy was rendered immune to sociological formulation in the first place. And that problem is now behind us.

Yet an even thornier one may still lie ahead. While we have been busy defining the varied meanings of 'uneven' and 'combined', we have allowed a far more controversial concept — 'development' — to rest, undefined, at the core of each of these meanings. This concept has a long history as the easy home of teleological fallacy and ethnocentric prejudice. A dangerous gap in the exercise of conceptual reconstruction must therefore now be filled.

5. *Development*

In evolutionary terms, so far as we know, *homo sapiens* has not changed significantly since the last of the other major related branches of the genus *homo* died out some thirty thousand years ago. Thus if it is true that 'ten thousand years ago all men were hunters' (Coon, 1976: 13), it is nonetheless also true that those hunters were already biologically 'modern' human beings. And from this it follows that any differences which separate the forms and conditions of human social life now from what they were then must be primarily of a socio-historical kind.

One need make no teleological assumptions in order to register the fact that over this period these general social conditions have indeed undergone a number of large changes — changes expressed at their broadest in the existence across time of fundamentally different kinds of society. Hunter-gatherer, agrarian and industrializing societies have in fact predominated in the course of human existence in chronologically successive periods. The rise of cultivation and the first civilization (8000–5000 BC) began only after many thousands of years of hunter-gatherer existence (Ponting, 2001). And the emergence of industrialized societies followed some ten thousand years later again. Here at any rate the world historians agree.

But is this succession only a chronological one? Without making any causal or normative imputations, are there any descriptive dimensions of difference among these broad types of society which their succession in historical time also traces as a cumulative movement? Here too, the broad answer is not controversial. No one disputes that these three types of society are distinguished — each from its predecessor — by 'step-level' augmentations in the productive transformation of nature, the orchestration of social power and the cultural rationalization of knowledge forms. Empirically therefore, there *is* a sequence in historical time in which types of human society which have arisen in succession would also have to be placed each on a 'higher' level than the last in terms of an ascending linear scale drawn

within each of these three abstract, comparative dimensions. There exists, in other words, and on a very broad level, a real historical referent to the term 'development'.

Rousseau was hardly alone in arguing that each step of the sequence entailed losses in human happiness as well as any gains. Trotsky himself once described humans as 'those malicious tailless apes that are so proud of their technical achievements' (1975: 427). Firm as it is, then, the socio-historical fact of development lends no automatic support at all to any normatively charged idea of 'Progress'. Yet insofar as those steps drew out potentialities which, in evolutionary terms, are common to all humans and unique to humanity as a species, the description of their accumulating results as 'human development' seems reasonable. The particular course of development which has occurred is certainly not the only one which could have occurred. We cannot attribute to it an overall causal continuity, for its history is spatio-temporally jagged and discontinuous. We need not even assume that it, or anything like it, was bound to occur. It remains, however, one — *the* one — which has in fact occurred. Attempts to dispense with the term 'development' altogether must therefore always be followed by its reinvention under a different name.

For the present argument, however, there is a more important reason why the term cannot be discarded. In a different register, 'development' connotes processes of directional change over time which can be theorized by analysing the causal properties of particular structures of social relationships. Abandon the idea of development in this sense, and the discourse of historical sociology goes with it, for this is *the* methodological linchpin of any notion that sociology can play a role in historical explanation.

And having separated out this second, analytical meaning, we must now defend it. For in a remarkable work entitled *Social Change and History*, Robert Nisbet has found out its liabilities, and has fashioned them into an intellectual ambush of formidable proportions. Indeed, if the predicates 'uneven' and 'combined' cannot secure this second meaning against his assault, then our reconstruction of Trotsky's idea will fall victim at the last to unresolved problems of a wider social scientific kind. In short, it is the methodological presuppositions of historical sociology itself which must now be substantiated.

The origins of the Western idea of development, says Nisbet, lie in the Greek concept of *physis* ('growth'), through which the life-cycle of societies was metaphorically assimilated to that of biological organisms, each species of which had its own 'nature' which — left uninterrupted — unfolded over the lifetimes of its individual members in a given sequence of stages (1969: 21ff.).

Of course, it was understood that in reality any number of things might — and generally did — interrupt or deflect this unfolding from its natural path

of change. But the contingency and variety of these externalities made them both resistant, and ultimately even irrelevant, to the theorization of the immanent causality of development itself. As Aristotle put it: '[a] science of the accidental', which is what these externalities are, from the point of view of any immanent logic of development, 'is not possible' (Nisbet, 1969: 39). Aristotle therefore distinguished in principle between *development* and *history*; between that which can be generalized and that which cannot; between the logically consequent and the empirically fortuitous; in short, between theoretical necessity and historical events.

Aristotle, says Nisbet, knew what he was doing when he forced this epistemological rupture between development as theorizable processes and history as untheorizable events. So too did many of his eighteenth and nineteenth century successors who made this distinction central to their own constructions of what they variously called the 'theoretical', 'natural' and 'conjectural' history of development — *histoire raisonné* (1969: 157). Yet Aristotle and his successors did nonetheless set a trap into which twentieth century theories of development would fall — a trap which, Nisbet argues, is ultimately generated by the conceptual requirements of the metaphorical idea of development itself. How is this so?

In order for a concept of development to rise from mere description to a method of historical explanation, more must be posited of it than the bare idea of directional change over time which we earlier sought to substantiate.

First, the source of this change must be derived from causal properties intrinsic to the 'nature' of the phenomenon itself. (Thus Marx derived 'organic tendencies' of capitalist development from the unique structure of competitive social relations which defined capitalism itself; from, that is, its sociological 'nature'.) 'Actually', says Nisbet, 'immanence is the core attribute of the whole theory of social evolution' (1969: 170).

Second, in order for the movement of the change to be explained by the idea of a developmental process, each of the steps which compose it must be shown both to arise from its predecessor and to create the causal conditions for its successor. This is the doctrine of continuity, formulated in Leibniz's dictum, *natura non facit saltum* — nature does not make leaps.

And finally, in order to move beyond philosophical abstraction, development must be posited of some particular physical, mental, biological or social thing. That is, it must specify a 'persisting entity' which undergoes the 'succession of differences in time' (1969: 31) which composes the process of developmental change arising from its nature.

Immanence, continuity, persistence: funnily enough, it is with the last, and apparently simplest, of these requirements that the explanatory pretensions of a

developmental social theory begin almost immediately to unravel. What, after all, is the empirical subject of the process of social development?

On the one hand, if it is a concrete individual society, then in no case, says Nisbet, can the empirical shape of its overall historical existence be derived from inner determinations alone. 'To suppose that' the history of any society 'is literally contained within the single area or people of our interest . . . is of course absurd' (1969: 240). Indeed, in what may be an overstatement of his case, but one which nonetheless makes its nature clear, Nisbet argues that 'significant change is overwhelmingly the result of non-developmental factors; that is to say, factors inseparable from external events and intrusions' (1969: 280). And these intruding externalities actually falsify the theory of development, rather than simply qualifying its outcomes in harmless (because contingent and ungeneralizable) ways. For if their form and impact are indeed contingent and ungeneralizable, the fact itself of their existence is not.

What is essential to the understanding of change is no single type of event. It is the event as such: the intrusion, the impact, the impingement upon a given mode of social behaviour of some force that cannot, by its nature, be deduced from that mode of behaviour. (1969: 281)

'Externality' is, in other words, essential to the causal texture of that historical process which such theories claim to have captured in their own inner logical structure. The claim is false.

Yet all this might seem but grist to our own argument. It confirms, after all, the theoretical significance of the international as a dimension of the historical process. But now the ambush is sprung.

For, on the other hand, what happens if (as we have indeed been attempting) we try to get around this problem by switching focus to the 'super-entity' of human social development as a whole, thereby rendering all events 'internal' by definition? The answer, says Nisbet, is that the problem is only multiplied by the vast number of social structures to which distinct (self-contained) developmental trajectories must now be imputed. Indeed, not only is the basic problem (the production of theoretical externalities) still not addressed; it is now placed definitively beyond solution by the exponential increase in the layers of interactive overdetermination beneath which any residual deployment of 'development' is necessarily submerged. For this reason, Nisbet argues, when development is posited of humanity as a whole, the concept simply cannot keep its feet on the ground — it must lose its empirical basis in any concrete 'persisting entity'. It retreats instead behind a speculative assembly of classificatory 'stages' drawn from multiple, unrelated times and places. And it ends with an hypostatized 'humanity' presiding as the impossible subject of an 'historical process' which corresponds to no actual course of events in any given society.¹⁵

Thus when confronted with the challenge of concrete historical explanation, the classical concept of development is torn apart between those three intellectual requirements — immanence, continuity and persistence — requirements which cannot now be met within a single explanatory rubric. And the reason is simple:

History in any substantive sense is plural. It is diverse, multiple, and particular. . . . Not only are there many histories; there are many chronologies, many *times* . . .

This is an ontological quality of human history which the classical concept of development represses, and which, together with all the interactive determinations which flow from it, returns again and again to defeat the latter's pretensions to historical explanation.

Many histories, many areas, many times! The mind boggles at the task of encapsulating such diversity within any empirically drawn formula or synthesis. It cannot be done . . . (1969: 240–1)

Nisbet's ambush is brilliantly executed. But if he believes that he has snared Trotsky's '[f]aintly comic . . . ponderous *Law of Combined Development*' (1969: 296) among its many prisoners, he is mistaken.¹⁶ Consider where his argument leaves us.

'[W]e turn', he rightly says, 'to history and only to history if what we are seeking are the actual causes, sources, and conditions of overt change of patterns and structures in society . . .' (1969: 302). But this reflex, as he surely knows, is no escape from theoretical concepts, but rather the means of disciplining and refining the ones we unavoidably have. The answer to a defective historical sociological method cannot be an abandonment of historical sociology per se.

Thus if, as Nisbet claims, it is multilinearity and interactivity which defeat the existing concept of development, we must ask how these qualities can instead be imputed to it. And contrary to Nisbet's own assumption, the practical impossibility of reassembling human history in its entirety is no bar at all to the theoretical revision which its ontological texture everywhere requires.

In short, there *is* a way of reconciling all three requirements of the concept of development. And that is by recognizing — positing theoretically — that the inner causal structure of development itself as a historical phenomenon is intrinsically both uneven and combined (whether or not we use those actual words).

For, as we earlier saw, the premise of unevenness recognizes that the 'super-entity' of humanity as the overall subject of the historical process — a subject which does after all have both ontological and empirical substance — is internally differentiated (across the dimensions of space, time, number

and social form, etc.). And the corollary of combined development then further posits just that interactive, synthetic texture which — from the point of view of any one of its parts — appears (for any unilinear concept of development) in the form of disruptive ‘externalities’.

Indeed it follows *within* this revised concept of development that Leibniz’s dictum — nature does not make leaps — does not, and cannot hold at the level of the parts. And sure enough, Trotsky himself, perhaps unconsciously, invokes the same metaphor in order to contradict it — societies subject to the process of combined development, he says repeatedly, do in fact ‘make leaps’ in the course of their development.¹⁷ Yet no one, not even a Trotsky, believed in ‘uncaused events’, which are what Leibniz rightly wanted to rule out. Rather, what Trotsky saw was that in order for the substance of Leibniz’s rule to be preserved, a multilinear and interactive conception of historical causality itself had to be interpolated within it.

It was, after all, only relative to the prior course of local development that these were leaps — in the sense of manifesting underivable discontinuities. Revisualized within their wider context of uneven and combined development, however, the chains of causality could be re-established.

Thus, as Trotsky would later write, in a formulation which helps to pinpoint the significance of all this:

That the historical life of every society is founded on production; that production gives rise to classes and groupings of classes; that the state is an organ of class oppression — these notions were not a mystery either for me or for my opponents in 1905. Within these limits the history of Russia obeys the same laws as the history of France, England, or any other country. (1971: 347)

How these ‘laws’ would operate, however; what the particular configuration of Russian society was; and hence what the developmental outcome would be — these most basic questions for any social analysis could not be answered without locating Russian society in the international process of uneven and combined development (and holding it there analytically: for what applied to its historical formation applied equally to the vectors of its ongoing development).

Trotsky’s opponents in 1905 thought — as others have done since (e.g. Romagnolo, 1975) — that this revision contradicted the method of historical materialism. There is a stronger case for saying that it completed it. And not only historical materialism. For the international, whose unacknowledged causal role in history made it, as Nisbet showed, the recurrent nemesis of any sociological concept of development, had in fact become, in Trotsky’s version, the solution to some of that concept’s greatest methodological problems.

6. Conclusion

This article began by asking what could be done about the problem of historical sociology in International Relations. Along the way, the answer has outgrown the question. So much so, that we must now, in conclusion, allow it to speak in its own voice — the voice of social theory.

‘Society does not consist of individuals, but expresses the sum of interrelations, the relations within which these individuals stand’ (Marx, 1973: 265). This assertion of a fundamentally relational ontology is the first principle of any strictly sociological method: explanation not just *of* society, but *by* society.

But it is not the only such principle. ‘[E]verything exists in time, and existence itself is an uninterrupted process of transformation; time is consequently a fundamental element of existence . . .’ (Trotsky, 1964: 356). Operationalized, *inter alia*, in Weber’s ‘developmental constructs’ and Marx’s processual analysis of capitalist accumulation, this second, temporal principle was well worked out within the tradition of Classical Social Theory. And it needed to be. As Philip Abrams noted (1982), the very fact that the being of any society extends (and changes) across time entails that all sociology must be historical sociology in a basic methodological sense. But what principle, if any, follows from the fact that all societies also exist in a constitutive interrelation with others? What follows is that the developmental ideal-types of historical sociology must embrace a conception of causality which includes a problematic of difference, multiplicity and interaction. This is the deep, neglected methodological implication of ‘the international’ for social theory.

If ‘sociology’ meant only ‘the study of society’ or of social phenomena in general; if ‘historical’ added no more than the temporal extension of this remit into the past; and if ‘international’ denoted only an equivalent enlargement to cover phenomena operative between societies — then the title of this article would do needless injustice to the many valuable works of ‘international historical sociology’ thus defined. And yet once those three words are seen to contain the methodological implications just distilled, any subsequent recombination of them into the same phrase — international historical sociology — suddenly adds up to a composite theoretical challenge which is so demanding that it is hard to think of any existing social theory which could confidently be said to have satisfied its requirements. For it requires, in short, a conceptual framework which, proceeding from the relational structure of societies as *explanans* (sociology), systematically incorporates the causal significance of their asynchronous interaction (international) into an explanation of their individual and collective development and change over time (historical).

It sounds almost impossible — but only if we think either that we are chasing some general theory of everything or that we are hereby expected to assemble every empirical fact of world history. Actually, all that these three requirements call for is a better general abstraction of the historical process, one which — unlike the singular abstraction of society or the Realist abstraction of anarchy — does not fundamentally violate what we know of its ontological texture. And this is what the concept of uneven and combined development provides.

Compared to this implication, the claim that this same concept might also assist with the methodology of historical sociology in International Relations might seem small beer. But that judgment would be mistaken. For if the reasoning by which we have arrived at this outcome shows anything, it is that the intellectual requirements of social theory and international theory are — and always have been — one and the same.

Notes

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2. See the bibliographies to Hobden (1998), and Hobden and Hobson (2002).
3. Jarvis (1989); Hobden (1998); Hall (1999); and Smith (2002).
4. In this article, the terms ‘international’ and ‘inter-societal’ are used interchangeably — not because I discount the problem of anachronism, but because, as will become apparent, I am pursuing that sociological generalization which, albeit at different removes of abstraction, underlies them both. For the same reason — pursuit of generality — I largely avoid references to present-day examples in what follows, deferring the question of how capitalist modernity transforms the nature of inter-societal relations to a separate article, forthcoming in *International Politics*.
5. Existing treatments include Deutscher (1954); Horowitz (1969); Novack (1972); Knei-Paz (1978); Löwy (1981); and Rosenberg (1996). ‘Uneven and combined development’ is often confused with the apparently similar ‘combined and uneven development’. For an attempted clarification, see Rosenberg (2005): note 28, pp. 68–9.
6. See, for example, Trotsky (1980) (Vol. III, Appendix II), where he suggests that Marx had fallen into the domestic analogy fallacy: he says of a comment by Marx that it took ‘its departure methodologically not from world economy as a whole but from the single capitalist country as a type’ (p. 378). Elsewhere he tried — inconsistently — to tone down the criticism: ‘Marx “erred”. Yet his error has a factual and not a methodological character’ (Trotsky, 1962: 7).
7. Mann himself accepted something of the charge (1995: 555).
8. Who are these ‘major classical social theorists’? My own list would include the following writers: Montesquieu, Rousseau, Smith, Condorcet, Malthus, Saint-

Simon, Comte, Tocqueville, Marx, Mill, Spencer, Tönnies, Weber, Durkheim, Pareto and Simmel. All lists are selective, and doubtless other writers could be added. From the point of view of the present argument, however, such additions would be significant only if they undermined its central claim: that no classical theory of social development explicitly incorporated the fact of inter-societal coexistence into its theoretical foundations.

9. Why 'proto-Realist'? The term is intended not polemically, but rather to pinpoint a shared intellectual challenge. Without a sociological definition of the international, even anti-Realist accounts will ultimately be limited to illuminating the changing historical *forms* of the international — leaving the analytically prior *existence* of the phenomenon itself untheorized. And since the general consequences of the latter must find their way back into any historical explanation, their (untheorized) reappearance cannot help but re-open the space for a separate, supra-sociological logic of geopolitics. This — and only this — is what I mean by describing existing critical approaches, my own earlier work included, as 'proto-Realist'. And it is also why (dangers of essentialism and ahistoricism notwithstanding) I attach *strategic* significance to the pursuit of a sociological definition of the international per se.
10. For a world map of the geographical distribution of these forms of existence around 1450, see Moore (1999: 72–3).
11. Anderson (1974b: 547) thus describes the contrast between China and the Islamic world.
12. Few, if any, classical theorists were unaware of the empirical fact of universal unevenness. Nonetheless, its concrete simultaneity did not become the starting point of their abstractions.
13. This account is drawn principally from Anderson (1974a); Bozeman (1994); Hoetsch (1966); and Shanin (1985).
14. Waltz was quoting another writer.
15. See, for example, Nisbet's discussion of 'the development of transport' and 'the development of warfare' (1969: 197).
16. Nisbet's reference to Trotsky's thought is fleeting, and gives no evidence of direct acquaintance.
17. See, for examples: 1962: 116–17, 1980: 5 and 1972: 89.

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