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Chapter 1

**Explaining Events and
Developing Theories: History,
Political Science, and the
Analysis of International
Relations**

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Historians and social scientists generally agree that although they study the same social phenomena, they do so in different ways. There is less agreement, however, on precisely what those differences are. The dialogue between historians and sociologists, which has continued for a century, is reflected in a 1994 symposium in the *British Journal of Sociology*, and the contrasting views of diplomatic historians and international relations theorists are presented in a 1997 symposium in *International Security*.¹ In this essay I focus primarily on differences in how diplomatic historians and political scientists study international relations—and my references to “historians” and “political scientists” should be interpreted in this way—although many of my arguments apply to the discipline of political science as a whole or to the social sciences more generally.²

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1. See *British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (March 1994). This responds to John H. Goldthorpe, “The Uses of History in Sociology: Reflections on Some Recent Tendencies,” *British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 42, No. 2 (June 1991), pp. 211–230. See also *International Security*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (Summer 1997).

2. Although some have argued that international relations constitutes a distinct field of study, many now argue that any gap in theory and method between international relations and other empirically oriented fields in political science—particularly American politics and comparative politics—had diminished by the late 1990s, as scholars have increasingly incorporated theories of domestic politics into theories of international relations. See Helen V. Milner, “Rationalizing Politics: The Emerging Synthesis of International, American, and Comparative Politics,” *International Organization*, Vol. 52, No. 4 (Autumn 1998), pp. 759–786.

The two disciplines are said to differ in subject matter, approaches to explanation, method, and form of presentation.³ Historians focus primarily on the past; international relations scholars, and political scientists more generally, aim to make theoretically informed and policy-relevant predictions about the future. Historians seek to understand single unique events, the *milieu et moment*; political scientists aim to generalize about classes of events and to construct theories that are valid across time and space. Historians tend to favor complex interpretations; political scientists aim for elegant and parsimonious causal explanations. Historians construct narrative-based explanations; political scientists construct theory-based explanations. Political scientists are explicit about their theoretical assumptions and causal argument; historians are more implicit.

Although scholars often treat each of these differences as polar extremes, they are best interpreted as ends of a continuum, along which many scholars would classify themselves somewhere in the middle.⁴ Taken together, however, these differences between history and political science produce such sharp contrasts that it is relatively easy to identify the disciplinary affiliation of most historians and political scientists. These scholars go through very different graduate training programs, to the extent that history departments rarely hire scholars trained as political scientists and political science departments rarely hire those trained as historians.⁵ Historians and political scientists generally attend different professional conferences and publish in different journals. These dissimilarities have generated distinct reward structures in the two disciplines, which in turn reinforce other differences between the disciplines.

In my own contribution to the 1997 *International Security* symposium on "History and Theory," I argued that although each discipline encompasses an enormous range of scholarship, and although the focus and methodologies of each discipline have changed significantly over time,

3. This summary follows Colin Elman and Miriam Fendius Elman, "Diplomatic History and International Relations Theory: Respecting Difference and Crossing Boundaries," *International Security*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (Summer 1997), pp. 5-21.

4. See William R. Thompson's chapter in this volume.

5. An interesting anecdote about these differences in graduate training is provided by Lebow's account of his efforts in graduate school to combine history and political science. Lebow wanted to explain both what was similar and unique in different political systems, to combine the construction and testing of theoretical generalizations with a sensitivity to the influence of particular historical and cultural factors. His political science professor suggested that he would feel more at home in a history department, while his history professor suggested that he return to political science. Lebow eventually moved to a different university. Richard Ned Lebow, *Between Peace and War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), pp. ix-x.

the criterion that best defines the different "identities" of the two disciplines is a variation of the traditional distinction between idiographic and nomothetic orientations: the primary goal of historians is to describe, understand, and interpret individual events or a temporally and spatially bounded series of events, whereas the primary goal of political scientists is to generalize about the relationships between variables and, to the extent possible, construct law-like propositions about social behavior.⁶

In this chapter I develop this argument and show that the idiographic/nomothetic distinction underlies many of the other criteria that scholars have advanced to identify differences between the disciplines—including the value of parsimonious explanations, the importance of primary sources, the value of predictions and policy relevance, the feasibility of universal laws, the nature of the scope conditions that limit theoretical generalizations, the different types of scope conditions that define the domain of the theory, and the role of covering laws in social explanation. Because the idiographic/nomothetic distinction subsumes these other criteria, it is far more useful than any single criterion, and provides a comprehensive and powerful framework for analyzing the differences between the two disciplines. I also consider the distinction between narrative-based explanations and theory-based explanations, and conclude that there are too many exceptions to make this a useful criterion for distinguishing between history and political science.

In highlighting the importance of the idiographic/nomothetic distinction, I emphasize that idiographic does not imply atheoretical, that it is necessary to distinguish between what scholars try to explain and how they explain it, and that the two disciplines differ in *how* they use theory, not *whether* they use theory. To say that historians attempt to explain events does not imply that they are atheoretical, for historians sometimes use law-like propositions to explain those events. I also refine my earlier argument by acknowledging that historians often generalize. Most of these generalizations refer to particular countries or periods, whereas political scientists' generalizations refer to certain theoretically defined conditions. In other words, historians' generalizations are bounded by temporal and spatial scope conditions, whereas political scientists' generalizations are bounded by analytical scope conditions.

There is a smaller set of historians who claim to generalize beyond the spatial and temporal bounds of their historical analyses, but here too they differ from political scientists. The difference is based on the distinc-

6. Jack S. Levy, "Too Important to Leave to the Other: History and Political Science in the Study of International Relations," *International Security*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (Summer 1997), pp. 22-33.

tion between the logic of discovery and the logic of confirmation, between constructing generalizations and validating them against the empirical evidence. Political scientists not only generalize from their observed data to a more broadly defined class of phenomena; they give primacy to the question of how to test those generalizations empirically and to the task of constructing research designs for that purpose. Historians sometimes generalize but they rarely give explicit attention to the research designs and methodologies through which their generalizations might be empirically confirmed.

Before developing this argument about the differences between history and political science in their study of international relations, it is necessary to recognize that neither discipline is monolithic. There is substantial variation in the scholarship within each discipline at a given point of time, within each discipline across national boundaries, and within each discipline over time. This significantly complicates the task of identifying any single criterion that fully captures the fundamental differences between historians and political scientists in their study of international relations.

First, history and political science both incorporate an enormous range of scholarly research, to the extent that in many respects the variations in theoretical approaches and methodological orientations within each discipline may be as great as the variations between them. Diplomatic historians and international relations scholars have far more in common with each other—in terms of substance, epistemology, and methodology—than they do with many of their colleagues in other fields in their own disciplines. Diplomatic history has been less sensitive than other branches of history to changing theoretical orientations and methodological fads in the field, from the rise and fall of quantitative history to the rise of postmodernism.⁷ It has consistently insisted on the empirical validation of its interpretations and in the utility of narratives and primary sources for that purpose. These considerations lead Stephen Haber, David Kennedy, and Stephen Krasner to argue that diplomatic historians and international relations scholars are really “brothers under the skin.”⁸

It is important to emphasize, however, that this idea of a fraternity

7. The international relations field in political science has generally reflected various trends in theory and method in the discipline as a whole, from quantitative methods to rational choice and game theory to the growing influence of constructivism.

8. Stephen H. Haber, David M. Kennedy, and Stephen D. Krasner, “Brothers Under the Skin: Diplomatic History and International Relations,” *International Security*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (Summer 1997), pp. 33–43. International relations scholars who use quantitative and formal methods would be less inclined to use the “brothers” metaphor.

between historians and international relations scholars is more applicable to the United States than to European countries, where disciplinary identities and the relationships between them are often different. The study of international relations in the United Kingdom, for example, is less influenced by positivistic social science and more influenced by some elements of critical theory than it is in the United States, whereas the study of diplomatic history in the two countries is characterized by few fundamental differences.⁹

In addition, a succession of “great debates” and paradigmatic battles have helped structure the international relations field as a whole in the United States. The international relations field is less cohesive in the United Kingdom, France, and Germany, where local influences are greater. Finally, the growing influence of rational choice theory in the international relations field in the United States has reinforced the field’s links with other key fields within political science. European international relations scholars have been more resistant to rational choice, in part because of their disciplinary associations with sociology, anthropology, and philosophy, and perhaps also because the individualistic foundations often associated with rational choice are less appealing to Europeans.¹⁰

A third consideration that complicates the task of comparison across disciplines is the fact that each discipline evolves over time with the rise and fall of competing paradigms within it. Although there are some striking parallels in the evolution of history and the social sciences over the course of this century, there are important points at which they diverge, so that the differences between the disciplines as well as their distinct identities have changed over time.¹¹

History and political science were much closer in the 1960s—when leading schools of thought in each discipline were quite confident in the feasibility of “scientific” knowledge and in the utility of quantitative

9. While the study of international relations in the United Kingdom is more historical than it is in the United States, there is in many respects a greater separation between historians and international relations scholars in Britain than in the United States. See Christopher Hill, “History and International Relations,” in Steve Smith, ed., *International Relations: British and American Perspectives* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), pp. 126–145.

10. Milner, “Rationalizing Politics;” and Ole Wæver, “The Sociology of a Not So International Discipline: American and European Developments in International Relations,” *International Organization*, Vol. 52, No. 4 (Autumn 1998), pp. 687–727.

11. On parallels between history and the social sciences see Keong-il Kim, “Genealogy of the Idiographic vs. the Nomothetic Disciplines: The Case of History and Sociology in the United States,” *Review*, Vol. 20, Nos. 3–4 (Summer/Fall 1997), pp. 421–464.

methods for discovering that knowledge—than in 1980s, by which time the decline of quantitative history and the “revival of narrative” had moved history further away from political science. The two disciplines are even further apart today, after the growing influence of postmodernism and the “linguistic turn” in history, and after the further spread of quantitative methods and particularly game-theoretic models in political science.¹² Comparisons between the disciplines would have looked much different in the nineteenth century, when the Rankean focus on explaining unique events contrasted sharply with the attempts by Marx, de Tocqueville, Durkheim, Weber, and other sociologists to construct historically grounded generalizations about social structures and processes.¹³ Thus any comparisons between history and political science may be historically contingent.

These significant variations in the scholarship within each discipline—at any given point in time, over time, and across countries—complicate the task of identifying any essential differences between diplomatic history and international relations. Nevertheless, the central tendencies of the two disciplines differ, and most historians and political scientists agree that they differ.¹⁴ I argue that the one criterion that best captures the differences between most leading historians and most leading international relations scholars—at least in the United States—that best reflects the scholarship that is most valued within each discipline, that involves the fewest significant exceptions, and that underlies many of the other criteria, is the idea that historians attempt to explain individual events or series of events, whereas political scientists attempt to construct generalizations (universal or contingent) about classes of events and to test those generalizations empirically. This argument represents a slight modification of the traditional distinction between idiographic and nomothetic approaches to the study of social phenomena.

The reader should understand that my generalizations about histori-

12. Lawrence Stone, “The Revival of Narrative: Reflections on a New Old History,” in Lawrence Stone, *The Past and the Present Revisited* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987); and John E. Toews, “Intellectual History after the Linguistic Turn: The Autonomy of Meaning and the Irreducibility of Experience,” *American Historical Review*, Vol. 92, No. 4 (October 1987), pp. 879–907. On the growing gap see Kim, “Genealogy,” and the chapter by Robert Jervis in this volume.

13. Leopold von Ranke, “On the Character of Historical Science,” in Georg G. Iggers and Konrad von Moltke, eds., *The Theory and Practice of History* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1973).

14. In other words, the scholarship in the two disciplines can be represented by overlapping distributions, each with a different mean but with substantial variation around the mean.

ans and political scientists refer to the central tendencies of the most influential “mainstream” scholars within each discipline, and that the large variances around these central tendencies mean that there will be numerous individual exceptions to my arguments. I limit my argument to the United States because of significant differences across the Atlantic.

The Idiographic/Nomothetic Distinction

In the late nineteenth century, Wilhelm Windelband and Heinrich Rickert emphasized the contrast between the idiographic method of the historical and social sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*) and the nomothetic method of the natural sciences (*Naturwissenschaften*). The first aims to explain or understand unique sequences of events and the second seeks to develop explanatory laws. After social science diverged from history by adopting positivistic natural science as its disciplinary model, scholars began to apply the idiographic and nomothetic concepts to distinguish between history and the social sciences.¹⁵

Among contemporary political scientists, Joseph Nye asserts that “history is the study of events that have happened only once; political science is the effort to generalize about them.” Similarly, Bruce Bueno de Mesquita argues that “the social scientist is more likely to emphasize general explanations of social phenomena, while the historian is more likely to emphasize particularistic, unique features of individual episodes of social phenomena.” Stephen Van Evera argues that political scientists see the task of explaining individual cases as “the domain of historians.”¹⁶

Sociologists make similar distinctions. Seymour Martin Lipset argues that “the task of the sociologist is to formulate general hypotheses . . . and to test them. . . . History must be concerned with the analysis of the particular set of events or processes.” Edgar Kiser and Martin Hechter note that “historians’ methodology stresses the accuracy and descriptive

15. Georg G. Iggers, *The German Conception of History*, rev. ed. (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1968), chap. 6. On the debate in psychology see Robert R. Holt, “Individuality and Generalization in the Psychology of Personality,” *Journal of Personality*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (September 1962), pp. 377–404. See also the recent symposium on “Nomothetic vs. Idiographic Disciplines: A False Dilemma,” *Review*, Vol. 20, Nos. 3–4 (Summer/Fall 1997).

16. Joseph S. Nye, “Old Wars and Future Wars: Causation and Prevention,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (Spring 1988), p. 581; Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, “The Benefits of a Social Scientific Approach to Studying International Affairs,” in Ngaire Woods, ed., *Explaining International Relations Since 1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 52–54; and Stephen Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 75.

completeness of narratives about particular events . . . the events they seek to describe and explain are both unique and complex." Robert Bierstedt notes that "history, as idiographic, is interested in the unique, the particular, the individual; sociology, as nomothetic, in the recurrent, the general, the universal."¹⁷

Similar views can be found among philosophers. Schopenhauer argued that "the sciences . . . speak always of kinds; history always of individuals." Isaiah Berlin explains that "in history we more often than not attach greater credence to particular facts than to general propositions" and that "the purpose of historians . . . [is] to capture the unique pattern and peculiar characteristics of its particular subject." Michael Oakeshott insists on the "absolute impossibility of deriving from history any generalization of the kind which belong to a social science," noting that "where comparison begins, as a method of generalization, history ends."¹⁸

This idiographic conception of what most historians do is also shared by many historians. In 1848 H.H. Vaughan stated that the first quality of a good historian was the "principle of attraction to the facts," and Leopold von Ranke argued that the aim of historians was to discover the unique in every event. For Ranke, "if generalizations were forced upon history . . . all that which is interesting about history would disappear" and "history would lose all scientific footing."¹⁹

Among contemporary historians, Lawrence Stone, citing Pierre Chaunu's comment that "the discipline of history is above all a discipline of context," argues that history "deals with a *particular* set of actors at a *particular* time in a *particular* place." Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., contends that

17. Seymour Martin Lipset, "History and Sociology: Some Methodological Considerations," in Seymour Martin Lipset and Richard Hofstadter, eds., *Sociology and History: Methods* (New York: Basic Books, 1968), pp. 22–23; Edward Kiser and Martin Hechter, "The Role of General Theory in Comparative-historical Sociology," *American Journal of Sociology* Vol. 97, No. 1 (July 1991), p. 2; and Robert Bierstedt, "Toynbee and Sociology," *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (June 1959), pp. 96–97.

18. Schopenhauer is quoted in R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 167. See also Isaiah Berlin, "History and Theory: The Concept of Scientific History," *History and Theory*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1960), pp. 9, 19; and Michael Oakeshott, *Experience and Its Modes* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 166, quoted in Thomas W. Smith, "Histories and the 'Science' of International Relations," paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Studies Association/South, Atlanta, Georgia, October 20–22, 1995, p. 13.

19. H.H. Vaughan, in the inaugural lecture of the Regius Professor of History at the University of Oxford, cited in Stone, *The Past and the Present Revisited*, p. 5; and von Ranke, "On the Character of Historical Science," p. 38.

Many professional historians—perhaps most—reject the idea that generalization is the goal of history. We all respond, in Marc Bloch's phrase, to "the thrill of learning singular things." Indeed, it is the commitment to concrete reconstruction as against abstract generalization—to life as against laws—which distinguishes history from sociology.²⁰

Other historians recognize this as an accurate description of most historiography but argue that historians ought to be more nomothetic in orientation. In 1946, the Committee on Historiography of the Social Science Research Council concluded that for Americans "facts had become detached from any hypothesis or interpretation," and urged historians to generalize more by constructing testable hypotheses.²¹ Similarly, Gordon Craig contends that historians should "overcome our congenital distrust of theory and our insistence upon the uniqueness of the historical event . . . and treat unique cases as members of a class or type of phenomenon." John Lewis Gaddis faults many historians in the security field for their lack of comparative focus and for their tendency "to preoccupy themselves with the particular."²²

Some have interpreted the idiographic/nomothetic distinction and its application to history and social science to suggest that history, unlike the social sciences, tends to be atheoretical. This can be very misleading. We should not confuse the argument that (1) historians aim to explain particular sequences of events, whereas social scientists aim to generalize about classes of events with the assertion that (2) historians base their explanations on factors unique to an individual event or episode whereas political scientists base their explanations on theoretical models. These are two different statements. The first concerns the question of *what* we are trying to explain and the second concerns the question of *how* we explain it. I am *not* arguing that most historians are atheoretical. Rather, I am arguing that historians and political scientists tend to use theory in different ways.

20. Stone, *The Past and the Present Revisited*, p. 31; and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *The Bitter Heritage*, rev. ed. (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett, 1967), p. 90–91.

21. *Theory and Practice in Historical Study* (New York: Social Science Research Council, 1946), Bulletin 64, p. 31, cited in Kim, "Genealogy," p. 426. This SSRC report was followed by another, Louis Gottschalk, ed., *Generalization in the Writing of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963).

22. Gordon Craig, "The Historian and the Study of International Relations," *American Historical Review*, Vol. 88, No. 1 (February), pp. 1–11; and John Lewis Gaddis, "Expanding the Data Base: Historians, Political Scientists, and the Enrichment of Security Studies," *International Security*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Summer 1987), p. 13.

THE MULTIPLE ROLES OF THEORY

Theories can be used both to explain generalized patterns of social behavior and to guide an interpretation of a particular episode or sequence of events. Although some historians attempt to explain singular events in terms of factors unique to those events, other historians resort to more general theoretical propositions or "covering laws" to explain those events.²³ The use of theory to explain singular events or sequences of events fits Lijphart's conception of an "interpretive" case study, Eckstein's notion of a "disciplined-configurative" case study, and Van Evera's idea of a "case-explaining case study," as opposed to a hypothesis-generating case study or a hypothesis-testing case study.²⁴

The use of theory for explaining individual episodes or "cases" is also common in political science, though it is not as highly valued in the profession as theory construction and testing.²⁵ The highest professional rewards in political science go to scholars who develop pathbreaking theoretical frameworks or models. Some very influential books in the international relations field in the past half-century have relatively little empirical content other than illustrative material.²⁶ Studies that involve rigorous empirical tests of significant theories or hypotheses are also valued, and probably constitute the majority of articles published in the top journals in the field, at least in the United States. These often involve

23. On covering laws see Carl G. Hempel, "The Function of General Laws in History," *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 39 (1942), pp. 35-48.

24. Arend Lijphart, "Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 65, No. 3 (September 1971), pp. 682-693; Harry Eckstein, "Case Study and Theory in Political Science," in Fred I. Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsby, eds., *Handbook of Political Science*, vol. 7: *Strategies of Inquiry* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1975), pp. 79-137; and Van Evera, *Guide to Methods*, pp. 74-75. It is interesting to note that political scientists, but not historians, often speak in terms of "cases." Nomothetically oriented political scientists conceive of a case not in its own terms but rather as an *instance* of a broader class of phenomena, one to which they want to generalize. On the diverse meaning of "case" in social science see Charles C. Ragin and Howard S. Becker, eds., *What Is a Case?* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

25. Van Evera (*Guide to Methods*, p. 75), who believes that case-explaining case studies are an important but neglected activity in political science, states that "political scientists seldom do case-explaining case studies, partly because they define the task of case-explaining as the domain of historians." Van Evera understates the number of case-explaining analyses in political science but accurately reflects the relatively low value attached to them in the discipline.

26. The clearest examples are Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State, and War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), and Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1979).

historical case studies, but the cases are vehicles for theory development rather than ends in themselves. Significantly fewer rewards go to those who use theory to guide historical analyses for the primary purpose of illuminating the case (which is quite common), and even less to those who do "descriptive" (atheoretical) case studies (which has become less common).

For political scientists, the worst thing that can be said of a dissertation, job talk, or article is that it is primarily descriptive or that it makes little theoretical contribution, even if it adds to our body of empirical knowledge.²⁷ For historians, the worst thing that can be said is that a historical study or interpretation is incorrect, that it doesn't fit the facts, tie them together, and make them comprehensible. Political scientists are less concerned about "getting the facts right," and believe that theories can be useful even if they are descriptively inaccurate.²⁸ Historians are less concerned about explicitly specifying the assumptions and causal propositions underlying their historical interpretations.²⁹

Just as political scientists complain that historians are not theoretical enough, or at least not explicit enough about their underlying assumptions and causal propositions, historians complain about political scientists' use (or abuse) of history. They argue that political scientists allow their theories to take priority over the evidence, focus on those historical

27. The notable exception is in area studies in the field of comparative politics, where "thick description" of the politics and culture of a country long dominated the field. The influence of area specialists has declined since its peak thirty years ago, however, and there has been a strong shift toward a more nomothetic orientation in the study of comparative politics in the 1990s. Robert H. Bates, "Area Studies and the Discipline: A Useful Controversy?" *PS: Political Science and Politics*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (June 1997), pp. 166-178.

28. The priority given to theory over historical accuracy is suggested by the fact that international relations theorists continued to assign Graham Allison's original treatment of alternative explanations of the Cuban Missile Crisis (*Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* [Boston: Little Brown, 1971]) in their graduate and undergraduate courses until the late 1990s, long after the release of new information left Allison's historical analysis badly out of date, and, in numerous places, simply inaccurate. These empirical problems have been corrected in Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, 2nd ed. (New York: Longman, 1999).

29. Some political scientists even emphasize the "heuristic value" of theory over its explanatory power. A theory can be useful if it generates new research questions and stimulates new approaches, even if it is weak on other grounds. James Rosenau once argued (in a talk at the University of Wisconsin in the early 1970s) that "bad theory is better than no theory." Although political scientists might debate this point, they would probably see more merit in Rosenau's argument than historians would find in an argument that "a bad interpretation is better than no interpretation."

events that confirm their theories, and ignore the larger context in which events occur and in the absence of which those events cannot be fully understood. This is closely related to the charge by historians that the emphasis on constructing and testing theories in political science, reinforced by the reward structure in the discipline, leads political scientists to try so hard to confirm their theories that they are unreceptive to contrary evidence.

Historians contrast what they regard as the rigid use of "theory" in political science with their own preference for more flexible "hypotheses" (or theoretical "hunches") that guide historical research but that can be abandoned in the face of conflicting evidence.³⁰ Historians' conceptions of the rigid or dogmatic use of theory in political science are reflected in Isaiah Berlin's comment that an "addiction to theory—being doctrinaire—is a term of abuse when applied to historians; yet it is not an insult if applied to a natural scientist."³¹

One can undoubtedly find many cases in which political scientists cling rigidly to their theories in the face of substantial contrary evidence, or in which they focus only on those historical cases that fit their theories. But one can also find many examples of historians guilty of the same rigidities and biases in their case selection and interpretations.³² Good scholars in each discipline, however, are sensitive to disconfirming evidence and critical of their colleagues who are not, and the question of whether one discipline is more guilty than the other of ignoring inconsistent evidence is less important than questions relating to the different criteria for disconfirmation in the two disciplines given their different scholarly purposes, methodologies, and data.

THE ISSUE OF OBJECTIVITY

Interdisciplinary debates about the proper role of theory are often unproductive because scholars use "theory" to mean many different things, ranging from a logically connected set of propositions deduced from

30. I thank David Fogelson (private correspondence) for emphasizing this line of argument.

31. Berlin, "History and Theory," p. 9.

32. A.J.P. Taylor begins his study of the origins of modern wars since 1789 with an arbitrary exclusion of cases that do not fit his argument: "Two major wars—the American civil war of 1861 to 1865 and the Russo-Japanese war of 1904 to 1905, being fought entirely outside Europe, do not fall into the pattern of the others and I have therefore omitted them from my survey of how modern wars begin." A.J.P. Taylor, *How Wars Begin* (New York: Atheneum, 1979), p. 1. Noted in Thomas C. Walker, "Peace, Rivalry, and War: A Theoretical and Empirical Study of International Conflict" (Ph.D. dissertation, Rutgers University, chap. 8).

axiomatic assumptions to the implicit analytical assumptions that guide scholars' worldviews and interpretations. With regard to the latter, it is clear that it is now the conventional wisdom in both history and political science that all empirical observations are filtered through a priori mental frameworks, that all facts are "theory laden." This is accepted by both practitioners and philosophers of social science and history. As Goethe wrote, "every fact is already a theory."³³

Political scientists and historians agree in principle that one's theoretical preconceptions affect the question one asks, the data one selects to study, and the explanations that one constructs—of singular events as well as of more general patterns. J. David Singer, who constructed the most widely used data set in the study of international conflict, has repeatedly emphasized that data are "made" rather than simply collected. The historian E.H. Carr argues that facts are like "fish swimming about in a vast and sometimes inaccessible ocean; and what the fisherman catches will depend, partly on chance, but mainly on what part of the ocean he chooses to fish in and what tackle he chooses to use—these two factors being determined by the kind of fish that he wants to catch."³⁴ The disagreement between historians and social scientists is not so much over the influence of theoretical preconceptions, but rather in how explicit scholars should be about the analytic assumptions and causal propositions upon which their explanations of social phenomena are based. Political scientists are far more concerned than historians about making their assumptions and causal propositions explicit.

Historians have not always believed that empirical facts are interpreted through intervening mental frameworks. The leading school of historiography by the later part of the nineteenth century was the "scientific history" of Leopold von Ranke and his followers. Ranke insisted that the aim of the historian was to show history "as it really was," to recreate the past that exists independently of the preconceptions and prejudices of the historian, and to achieve value-free, scientific certainty. The aim was not just to get the facts right, but to understand how discrete facts were interconnected. For Ranke this involved the hermeneutic method, the critical analysis of texts with particular emphasis on primary sources, including diplomatic documents, memoirs, diaries, letters, and the like.³⁵

33. Goethe is cited in Kenneth N. Waltz, "Evaluating Theories," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 91, No. 4 (December 1997), p. 913.

34. J. David Singer, "Data-Making in International Relations," *Behavioral Science*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (January 1965), pp. 68–80; and E.H. Carr, *What Is History?* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1964), p. 23.

35. Ranke, "The Character of Historical Science"; Georg G. Iggers, "The Image of

This view of understanding history "as it really was" is implicit in John Goldthorpe's argument that the distinctive difference between history and sociology (and by implication the social sciences more generally) is that historians *discover* evidence while sociologists *invent* evidence.³⁶ We might call this the "Dragnet" conception of history: "Just the facts, ma'am, just the facts."³⁷

Historians soon reacted against the Rankean idea of an objective, value-free history.³⁸ Critics pointed out that Rankean history assumed the centrality of the state and focused narrowly on political history to the exclusion of social, economic, and cultural history. Its methodology utilized national archives as its main sources. The substance of Rankean historiography varied from country to country, primarily in a way that reflected their separate political cultures, mythical national pasts, and perceived threats to the state. In Germany, for example, the opposition to social history was clearly linked to the fear of democratization.³⁹

Historical "idealists" have long argued that the study of history reflects the preconceptions of the historian and the social context in which she writes rather than any objective reality.⁴⁰ Oakeshott, reflecting the

historical idealist perspective, argued that "history is a historian's experience. It is 'made' by nobody save the historian; to write history is the only way of making it." Similarly, Carl Becker wrote that "the facts of history do not exist for any historian till he creates them."⁴¹

Contemporary "constructivists" share this idealist perspective. So do postmodernists, but in a more extreme way. Postmodernists reject the possibility of objective knowledge because the very concepts the analyst uses to describe the world are fundamentally shaped by their cultural context, by power relationships, and by language. For postmodernists, language is a self-contained system that exists independently of its relation to the external world. The text does not reflect reality but instead constructs that reality. In Jacques Derrida's words, "there is nothing outside of the text." As Hayden White argues, "historical narratives are verbal fictions, the contents of which are as much *invented* as *found* and the forms of which have more in common with their counterparts in literature than they have with those in the sciences."⁴² Postmodernists reject the distinction between fact and fiction, between history and rhetoric, and thus reject empirical accuracy as a criterion for the evaluation of theories.⁴³

E.H. Carr offered a powerful but balanced statement of the theory-laden character of all empirical observation, rejecting the extremes of both Rankeans and historical idealists. Carr criticized the "fetishism of facts" in Rankean historiography and emphasized that all observation involves the "selective filtering of the facts." He also criticized the exclusive reliance on the documents, "the Ark of the Covenant in the temple of facts" in Rankean historiography. At the same time, however, Carr rejected the idealists' argument that empirical observations were entirely determined

Ranke in American and German Historical Thought," *History and Theory*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (1962), pp. 17–40; and Georg G. Iggers, *New Directions in European Historiography*, rev. ed. (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1984). See also Richard J. Evans, *In Defense of History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), chap. 8.

36. Goldthorpe, "The Uses of History in Sociology," p. 214.

37. The same charge—of underestimating the role of theoretical preconceptions underlying all observation and believing in the possibility of a value-free science—could be leveled against some strands of political science, particularly during the behavioral revolution in the 1960s. But just as Rankean epistemology has gone out of favor, so has the atheoretical "number-crunching" that characterized cruder forms of quantitative analysis.

38. The theoretical ideas subsumed in Ranke's *Aussenpolitik* are still quite influential, both among realist international theorists and their counterparts in diplomatic history.

39. Iggers, *New Directions*, chap. 1.

40. For example, "progressive historians" in the United States reflected the democratic values of the progressive era. See, for example, Charles A. Beard and Mary R. Beard, *America in Midpassage* (New York: Macmillan, 1939). Most contemporary cultural and postmodern historians study the past "from the bottom up," from the perspective of the powerless, the voiceless, the marginalized, and with a clear normative bias in favor of these groups. For an argument on why the study of the "voiceless" lends itself to a postmodern orientation, see Haber, Kennedy, and Krasner, "Brothers Under the Skin," pp. 38–40. But this link is far from perfect. Some postmodernists study elites, and though it is true that it is difficult to apply Rankean methods in the absence of "documents," one can certainly study the powerless from a more positivistic orientation.

41. Oakeshott, *Experience and Its Modes*, p. 99; Carl Becker, writing in *Atlantic Monthly* (October 1910), p. 528, cited in Carr, *What Is History?* (London: Macmillan, 1961) p. 21. See also Collingwood, *The Idea of History*.

42. Derrida and White are each cited in Georg C. Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge* (Hanover, N.H.: Wesleyan University Press, 1997), pp. 9, 118–119.

43. This distinguishes postmodernists from "softer" constructivists, who recognize limitations on the transhistorical and transcultural validity of theoretical concepts but who are more open to the empirical validation of particular historical interpretations. The possibility of generalizing across cases is contested territory among constructivists (or interpretivists). Ted Hopf argues that "interpretivists are most hesitant to ever generalize across cases, and see even within-case generalizations to be problematic," but then goes on to emphasize the limits of particularism as well as universalism. See Ted Hopf, "The Limits of Interpreting Evidence" (Ohio State University, unpublished manuscript, 2000).

by theoretical preconceptions. Carr argued that "the historian is neither the humble slave nor the tyrannical master of his facts," and that history is "a continuous process of interaction between the historian and his facts, an unending dialogue between the present and the past."⁴⁴

This middle ground between a Rankean positivist and historical idealist viewpoint is one with which many contemporary diplomatic historians and political scientists would feel quite comfortable. Haber, Kennedy, and Krasner argue that "the interplay of fact and theory has been the defining characteristic of the study of international politics. . . . Social behavior can be objectively observed even if it is based on inter-subjectively shared understanding." James Lee Ray and Bruce Russett argue that although "observations are inevitably theory-laden they are not theory-determined." Most political scientists would accept Carr's argument that the scholar engages in a "continuous process of molding his facts to his interpretation and his interpretation to his facts," that there is an unending dialogue between theory and evidence.⁴⁵

The idiographic/nomothetic distinction—defined in terms of what is to be explained rather than how to explain it—underlies the logic of several of the other criteria of demarcation between the disciplines, including the relative preferences for parsimony, the role of primary and secondary sources, the importance of prediction and policy relevance, beliefs in the feasibility of universal laws, the nature of scope conditions of generalizations, and the role of covering laws. By linking these other criteria within an overarching framework, the idiographic/nomothetic distinction gains considerable analytic power.

PREFERENCES FOR PARSIMONY

Few would disagree that political scientists are far more interested than are historians in "parsimonious" theories and explanations. By this I mean that political scientists attempt to explain as much as possible with as little theoretical apparatus as possible. They prefer one theory to another if the first explains as much empirical phenomena as the second but with fewer assumptions.⁴⁶ Historians prefer "total" explanations that

recognize the complexity in the world and attempt to explain much of that complexity in their interpretations in order to account for a set of events in their entirety.⁴⁷

The nature of total explanations varies by historical school. For idealists, it involves *verstehen*, an empathetic understanding of the beliefs, emotions, intentions, reasoning, and very personality of the actors themselves in an attempt to understand the meanings individuals attached to their own actions.⁴⁸ This is associated with the idea that the historian aims at understanding and interpretation rather than causal explanation.⁴⁹ The concepts of total explanation and "understanding" take us far from the more parsimonious theorizing of most political science.⁵⁰

Many political scientists also recognize complexity in the world, but attempt to abstract from that complexity to explain the most fundamental features of social phenomena. The preference for parsimony derives from the goal of theorizing about relationships between classes of events rather than explaining individual events, and the belief that theoretical generalization must be based on models that are considerably less complex than the world they aim to represent. The more complex and nuanced an explanation, the less likely that it will "travel well" across cases. No two cases are exactly alike, and the more one explains what is unique to a

Razor from the fourteenth century and to Karl Popper's argument that simpler theories are easier to falsify and consequently they contain more explanatory power. See Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (New York: Harper Torchbacks, 1965). In this view parsimony relates to theories that one constructs to explain the world, not to beliefs about the simplicity of the world itself, which is an alternative conceptualization of parsimony. This alternative view is adopted by Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inquiry in Qualitative Research* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), who refer to the first conception of parsimony as "maximizing leverage." See also the chapter by Jervis in this volume.

47. As Eric Hobsbawm argues, in *On History* (New York: The New Press, 1997), p. 109, "basically all history aspires to what the French call 'total history.'" By this he means that "history . . . cannot decide to leave out *any* aspect of human history *a priori* . . .," that ideally all aspects of an episode must be included in a historical explanation.

48. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*; Benedetto Croce, *History: Its Theory and Practice* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1960); and William Dilthey, *Meaning in History* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1961).

49. Historians themselves debate the utility of this distinction. See Roberts, *Historical Explanation*, chap. 11.

50. An important exception is constructivism, which shares an interest in the complex social contexts of human behavior and the meanings individuals attach to their actions. See Martin Hollis and Steve Smith, *Explaining and Understanding International Relations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990); and Hopf, "The Limits of Interpreting Evidence."

44. Carr, *What Is History?* pp. 20–21, 26–30.

45. Haber, Kennedy, and Krasner, "Brothers Under the Skin," pp. 36–37; and James Lee Ray and Bruce Russett, "The Future as Arbitrator of Theoretical Controversies: Predictions, Explanations, and the End of the Cold War," *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (October 1996), pp. 441–470. Carr, *What Is History?* p. 29.

46. This is the conventional use of parsimony in political science. A theory is not parsimonious in the abstract but only relative to other theories that purport to explain the same phenomenon. Preferences for parsimonious theories go back to Occam's

particular case, the less one can use the same conceptual apparatus to explain the essential features of another case.

This difference between historians and political scientists in their treatment of complexity has begun to narrow in some important respects. By the mid-1990s international relations theorists had begun to build more complexity into their models, with greater emphasis on interaction effects between variables at different levels of analysis; on uncertainty, unanticipated consequences, and nonlinear relationships; and on selection effects, reciprocal causation, and other forms of endogeneity, where the dependent variable has some impact on the independent variable.⁵¹

Although historians rarely refer explicitly to the concept of endogeneity, in some respects they have been more likely than political scientists to incorporate the role of endogeneity into their historical explanations. Historians have long argued that "everything is connected to everything else." They have repeatedly criticized the simplistic tendencies of political scientists to speak in terms of "independent" and "dependent variables," and to assume that historical "cases" are independent. Historians generally trace the historical roots of behavior further back in time, and they emphasize the non-independence of discrete events.⁵² On the other hand, political scientists have made important contributions by constructing models to deal with endogeneity effects in a more systematic way.⁵³

Given their interest in constructing parsimonious theories and explanations, political scientists often complain that the nonparsimonious explanations of historians, area specialists, and others tend to be overdeter-

mined—in that the analyst advances more causes for an outcome than are needed to explain it. To the political scientist, this represents a failure to differentiate primary from secondary causal factors and diminishes the analytical power of the argument and the ability to generalize to other cases. Historians, on the other hand, often complain that the so-called parsimonious explanations of political scientists are underdetermined—they fail to capture the nuances of individual events or periods, and they also fail to explain the variation across historical episodes.⁵⁴

It is important to note that overdetermined explanations are not equivalent to multicausal explanations.⁵⁵ In overdetermined explanations, there are several factors, or sets of factors, that are individually sufficient for an outcome. In multicausal explanations, a set of factors may be jointly sufficient for a particular outcome. The two are not the same. In the first situation, but not the second, the absence of one causal factor would leave the outcome unchanged. In fact, political scientists would be quite pleased with explanations that specify jointly sufficient conditions. They seek parsimony but not necessarily monocausal explanations, for they have gradually come to conclude that there are few causal variables that are individually necessary or sufficient for explaining outcomes.⁵⁶

I will return to the role of theory in historical explanation, but it is useful to note here that to the extent that historians are explicit in their use of theory in their explanations, they reject the idea that a single theory can provide a total explanation and prefer to draw on many different theories. As Melvyn Leffler argues in explaining how he uses theories from all levels of analysis in his study of the Cold War, "I applied no single theory. . . . if reality is too complex to be captured by a single

51. The quantitative international relations literature has begun to give more attention to context. See Gary Goertz, *Contexts of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). Both game-theoretic models and the statistical models used to test them have incorporated more complexity in order to deal with endogeneity. See Robert Powell, *In the Shadow of Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); and Curtis S. Signorino, "Strategic Interaction and the Statistical Analysis of International Conflict," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 93, No. 2 (June 1999), pp. 279–297. For a nonformal treatment see Robert Jervis, *System Effects: Complexity in Political and Social Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997). On increasing complexity in theories of war, see Jack S. Levy, "The Causes of War and the Conditions of Peace," *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 1 (1998), pp. 160–161.

52. This implies that the standard assumptions underlying the statistical methods that political scientists commonly use are frequently violated. Political scientists have begun to devote increasing attention to this problem. On the issue of independent and dependent variables, see John Lewis Gaddis's essay in this volume.

53. James D. Fearon, "Signaling versus the Balance of Power and Interests: An Empirical Test of a Crisis Bargaining Model," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (June 1994), pp. 236–269.

54. Criticisms of excessively or inadequately parsimonious explanations can be found within each discipline. Many political scientists have criticized neorealist theory for being too parsimonious and for generating underdetermined outcomes. See Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*; and Robert O. Keohane, ed., *Neorealism and Its Critics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

55. Compare this treatment with the one in Richard Ned Lebow's chapter in this volume.

56. An important exception here is the proposition that joint democracy is a sufficient condition for peace (defined as the absence of war), which "comes as close as anything we have to an empirical law in international relations." See Jack S. Levy, "Domestic Politics and War," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (Spring 1988), p. 662; and James Lee Ray, *Democracy and International Conflict* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995). The absence of variables that are either necessary or sufficient to explain variations in outcomes in a theoretical sense does not imply that there cannot be necessary or sufficient conditions for outcomes in particular cases, though strict proponents of covering-law explanations would probably dissent from this view.

theory, different theories may help the historian to make sense of different parts of the phenomenon or event or process under scrutiny.⁵⁷

Leffler implies that theory is like a toolbox, a set of instruments from which to draw, with the assumption that a different set of tools will be used in different cases depending on what needs to be explained. This view may be helpful in providing total explanations of individual phenomena. It does not facilitate the formulation or testing of theoretical generalizations, at least in the eyes of the political scientist.⁵⁸ This task requires a single, well-specified, and integrated theoretical structure, the derivation of a set of propositions, and their empirical validation through an appropriate research design. The use of multiple theories without integrating them into an overarching theoretical structure increases the likelihood of logical inconsistencies and contradictions among different theoretical propositions, and is an important line of criticism that deductively-oriented theorists make of both historians and inductively-oriented political scientists.⁵⁹

It is useful to contrast the "toolbox" conception of theory with the norm that has developed in political science for scholars to analytically distinguish their own theories (or explanations of individual cases) from competing theories or explanations and to explicitly test their theory against the leading alternatives. Many case studies in political science, for example, are organized around competing theories rather than a single narrative. To the extent that historians deal with competing theories in their narratives, this is much less explicit and rarely serves as an organizing device. The political scientist's preference for pitting theory against competing theory rather than integrating elements from different perspectives into a single, more complex theory is consistent with the goal

57. Melvyn P. Leffler, "New Approaches, Old Interpretations, and Prospective Reconfigurations," *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (Spring 1995), p. 179.

58. The "toolbox" metaphor comes from Edgar Kiser, "The Revival of Narrative in Historical Sociology: What Rational Choice Theory Can Contribute," *Politics and Society*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (September 1996), p. 258.

59. Isaiah Berlin makes a similar argument (in "History and Theory," p. 9) when he says that the "crucial difference" between history and the natural sciences is that "the generalizations of history, like those of ordinary thought, are largely unconnected." Waltz has something like this in mind when he describes the evidence that Paul Schroeder compiles against neorealist theory as "a melange of irrelevant diplomatic lore," though Schroeder's work has been quite influential in political science, and rightfully so. See Paul W. Schroeder, "Historical Reality vs. Neo-Realist Theory," *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (Summer 1994), pp. 108–148; and Waltz, "Evaluating Theories," p. 914.

of making theories as parsimonious as possible. One can debate, however, whether this increases our understandings of individual cases.

Political scientists agree with historians that no single theory can provide a complete explanation of a set of events. Unlike historians, however, political scientists have no interest in providing complete explanations. They only want to explain theoretically relevant aspects of the case, as determined by their own conceptual framework, and to generalize to the broader universe of all comparable cases.⁶⁰

This difference between attempting to maximize descriptive accuracy in a particular case and insisting upon a more parsimonious theory to facilitate generalization reflects the basic tradeoff between internal validity and external validity—between providing an exact and precise explanation of a particular "case" or set of events or data, and providing a reasonable basis for generalizing beyond the data to other similar instances of the same class of events. Historians give primacy to internal validity, while political scientists are willing to sacrifice some internal validity in order to increase external validity.⁶¹

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SOURCES

The different tradeoffs historians and political scientists make between internal and external validity, which derive from their respective idiographic and nomothetic aims, helps explain the emphasis each places on primary sources. Historians have traditionally insisted on the central importance of primary sources, while political scientists have been more willing to rely on secondary sources based on the work of historians.

One problem that political scientists must confront in their use of secondary sources is that the implicit (or explicit) theoretical questions that guided the historian's study may have been quite different from the questions the political scientist wants to answer, and this may limit the utility of particular secondary sources for the political scientist. This mismatch between theory and data, along with other considerations, leads Deborah Larson to call for political scientists to rely less on histo-

60. Area specialists constitute an important exception.

61. On different conceptions of validity, see Thomas D. Cook and Donald T. Campbell, *Quasi-Experimentation* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1979), chap. 2. This discussion of tradeoffs suggests the potential utility of multi-method approaches to social and political analysis, in which the combination of two or more methods can help to compensate for the limitations of any single method. The combination of case study and statistical or game-theoretic methods (or both) has become more common in political science, and its potential utility is demonstrated by research on the democratic peace.

rians' secondary sources and to do more archival work themselves in the construction and testing of their theories.⁶²

This may be good advice in principle, assuming that the types of data that one's theory calls for are available in the archives. But an important practical problem arises from the kinds of research designs that political scientists construct for the purposes of theoretical generalization, which require a test of the theory either against a large number of cases in a quantitative study, or against a more modest number of cases for the purposes of controlled comparison. Either way, it is simply not possible for a single scholar to engage in a thorough investigation of all available primary sources for each case. This is particularly true given diplomatic historians' recent emphasis on the use of multi-archival sources from different countries. As Theda Skocpol notes with respect to historical sociology, "a dogmatic insistence on redoing primary research for every investigation would be disastrous; it would rule out most comparative-historical research."⁶³

A second problem in the use of secondary sources is the potential for selection biases. Given the large number of secondary sources from which to choose, how does the analyst select which to use or to rely upon most heavily? The analyst may be drawn to precisely those sources that reflect her own theoretical preconceptions, which precludes a fair test of the author's theory against alternative explanations.⁶⁴ It may be possible, however, for the comparative researcher to minimize these selection biases by securing advice from several leading historians regarding the

major debates among historians, the best secondary sources, and the analytical biases of particular historians.

It is not clear that the problem of selection bias in the use of secondary sources is any more serious than the potential biases that affect the analyst who works alone in the archives. There is no perfect solution here. Insisting that the political scientist work the archives and in addition read all relevant secondary sources, and do this for enough cases to facilitate the ability to generalize, is impractical. Insisting that researchers using both primary and secondary sources be more sensitive to the potential biases in their sources and in their own minds, and more cognizant of the wide range of interpretations in various secondary sources, while helpful, does not fully eliminate the problem.

PREDICTION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The nomothetic/idiographic distinction also helps explain why political scientists are generally more interested than historians in prediction and possibly also in the utility of scholarship for statecraft.⁶⁵ Gaddis argues that with respect to prediction (or at least policy implications), "most historians shy from these priorities like vampires confronted with crosses. Many political scientists embrace them enthusiastically."⁶⁶ Edward Ingram argues that "political scientists are interested in the past only as it affects the present. The past interests historians for itself." He also maintains that "for political scientists, what matters is not what mattered at the time but what contributes to what will matter later on."⁶⁷

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., has a more ambivalent view of historians'

62. See Deborah Welch Larson's chapter in this volume. See also Gaddis, "Expanding the Data Base." Political scientists often use some primary sources in doing historical case studies. Quantitative studies based on content analysis also rely heavily on primary sources. One example of the latter is the Stanford 1914 Project, directed by Robert North in the 1960s and 1970s. For a review see Francis W. Hoole and Dina A. Zinnes, eds., *Quantitative International Politics: An Appraisal* (New York: Praeger, 1976), part V.

63. Theda Skocpol, "Emerging Agendas and Recurrent Strategies in Historical Sociology," in Theda Skocpol, ed., *Vision and Method in Historical Sociology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 382.

64. Ian S. Lustick, "History, Historiography, and Political Science: Multiple Historical Records and the Problem of Selection Bias," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 90, No. 3 (September 1996), pp. 605-618; and Paul W. Schroeder, "History and International Relations Theory: Not Use or Abuse, but Fit or Misfit," *International Security*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (Summer 1997), p. 71. The general problem, as Skocpol ("Emerging Agendas," p. 382) has noted, is that "comparative historical sociologists have not so far worked out clear, consensual rules and procedures or the valid use of secondary sources as evidence."

65. These differences over the importance of policy relevance may have deep historical roots. Once the natural sciences had become associated with technological progress, the social sciences, struggling to establish a disciplinary identity distinct from history, sought legitimation by emphasizing its pragmatic and policy-relevant side. See Kim, "Genealogy," pp. 423-428.

66. John Lewis Gaddis, "History, Theory, and Common Ground," *International Security*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (Summer 1997), p. 84. Gaddis argues, however, that while we cannot predict the future, we can prepare for it (pp. 84-85), and that an understanding of the past is one form of training that helps us prepare for the future. The implication is that we can better understand which events are more likely to occur than others. While Gaddis clearly rejects the idea of making "point predictions" about the future, his comment about preparing for the future is not dissimilar to political science predictions based on statistical probabilities.

67. Edward Ingram, "The Wonderland of the Political Scientist," *International Security*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (Summer 1997), pp. 54-55. In contrast to Ingram, however, it has also been said that "History is the use the present makes of the past for the sake of the future." Cited in *New York Times*, January 1, 2000, p. A1.

attitudes toward prediction. He states that historians "privately regard history as its own reward; they study it for the intellectual and aesthetic fulfillment . . . but for no more utilitarian reason. They understand better than outsiders that historical training confers no automatic wisdom in the realm of public affairs." Yet a page later he argues that generalizations, however defective, are possible, and that they "can strengthen the capacity of statesmen to deal with the future."⁶⁸

It is probably true that political scientists are more interested in prediction than are historians. Some people undoubtedly choose to become political scientists rather than historians precisely because they want to influence policy and because the generalizing aims of political science are more conducive to prediction than the particularizing tendencies of history. This does not necessarily imply, however, that political scientists are always more influenced by contemporary policy concerns than are historians. All historiography involves, to some extent, seeing the past through the eyes of the present. As Benedetto Croce argued, "all history is contemporary history." Similarly, Frederick Jackson Turner wrote that "each age writes the history of the past anew with reference to the conditions uppermost in its own time."⁶⁹

In fact, it is often more difficult to identify the social, political, and cultural biases in theoretical models in contemporary social science, which often prides itself on its "objectivity," than in the work of historians, which can be quite evaluative. As Ingram argues, historical narratives tell a story, and a morality play is often part of the story.⁷⁰ The influence of these analytic and normative biases on historical studies does not necessarily imply, however, that these studies are conducted or written in such a way that might generate specific future predictions or policy prescriptions that are well grounded in either theoretical logic or historical evidence.⁷¹

There is another reason why political scientists are interested in

68. Schlesinger, *Bitter Heritage*, pp. 90–91.

69. Croce cited in Carr, *What Is History?* pp. 20–21; and Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of History," in *The Early Writings of Frederick Jackson Turner* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1891/1938), p. 52.

70. See Edward Ingram's chapter in this volume; Robert Jervis and Paul W. Schroeder also make similar points in their chapters.

71. It is interesting that some of the historical studies with the greatest policy relevance have had greater impact on international relations scholars than on historians. One example might be Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York: Random House, 1987).

prediction.⁷² By using a theory to make predictions and then testing the accuracy of those predictions, one can ensure that a theory is tested against data that played no direct role in the generation of the theory.⁷³ The aim is to avoid the common error of using the data to generate a theory and then using that same data to test the theory. For this purpose prediction refers not only to forecasts about future events, but also to "predictions" of past events that are unknown to the analyst, or at least that played no direct role in the formulation of his theories. Such predictions are often referred to as postdictions or retrodictions.⁷⁴ The importance of postdictions springs from the scientific imperative to derive from a theory as many testable implications as possible, in as many varied temporal and spatial domains as possible, and to subject those predictions to multiple empirical tests.⁷⁵

The methodological mandate to avoid testing a theory with the same data that were used to construct the theory raises a particular problem for historical interpretation. Historical narratives are always written with a knowledge of the outcome of the story, but this raises the danger that the known outcome influences the interpretation of chronologically earlier events. As C.V. Wedgwood wrote, "History is lived forward, but it is written in retrospect. . . . We know the end before we consider the begin-

72. An important exception here is evolutionary theory, which emphasizes the difficulty of making predictions because of path dependence, uncertainty, and non-linear complexity. See the special issue of *International Studies Quarterly* on "Evolutionary Paradigms in the Social Sciences," Vol. 40, No. 3 (September 1996).

73. This is Milton Friedman's argument for the importance of prediction in "The Methodology of Positive Economics," in Milton Friedman, *Essays in Positive Economics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953). It is also the basis of Imre Lakatos's argument that the prediction and confirmation of "novel facts" is a central component of scientific progress. See Imre Lakatos, "Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes," in Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave, eds., *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 91–196. For a review of debates regarding exactly what constitutes a "novel fact" see Colin Elman and Miriam Fendius Elman, "Appraising Progress in International Relations Theory: How Not to Be Lakatos Intolerant," unpublished manuscript, 1999.

74. See Ray and Russett, "The Future as Arbiter," p. 447.

75. King, Keohane, and Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry*; and Van Evera, *Guide to Methods*. The need to make predictions in unfamiliar domains is emphasized by Nobel Prize-winning physicist Richard Feynman: "If you will never say that a law is true in a region you have not already looked you do not know anything. If the only laws that you find are those which you have just finished observing then you can never make any predictions." See Richard Feynman, *The Character of Physical Law* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1965), p. 76.

ning and we can never wholly recapture what it was to know the beginning only."⁷⁶

THE FEASIBILITY OF UNIVERSAL LAWS

Those who test theories over different historical periods necessarily assume that these periods are sufficiently comparable that cross-temporal theoretical generalizations are meaningful. This raises questions of the continuity of history and the feasibility of universal laws as opposed to contingent generalizations. Political scientists are more willing than historians to assume a continuity or commensurability in history and to seek transhistorically valid theoretical generalizations. Historians are more likely to argue that each historical era has its own culture and "character" and that any historical "laws" are consequently temporally bound. This is expressed in Ranke's dictum that "every epoch is immediate unto God." Terrence Ball argues that it is history's reliance on temporally bound rather than universal laws that makes a historical explanation historical. From a different perspective, John Gaddis emphasizes the nonreplicable nature of the phenomena that we try to explain.⁷⁷

We must be careful not to push this distinction too far. The historian Marc Bloch argued that "the only true history . . . is universal history," and some schools of historiography do aim for universal generalizations.⁷⁸ One example would be the "New Economic History" in the United States, which utilizes general deductive models of the economy to generate predictions, including counterfactual predictions of what would have occurred under a different set of circumstances.⁷⁹

Other scientific schools of historiography reject the possibility of universal laws but are willing to make generalizations about phenomena

in more restricted times and places. Many Marxists, for example, assert that social behavior is governed by laws, but these laws are limited to specific points of historical development and are "counteracted" by concrete historical circumstances.⁸⁰ Similarly, the French *Annales* school, which was quite influential in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, emphasized middle-range generalizations based on an emphasis on both broad structural patterns and the "total" character of each historical setting.⁸¹

Many political scientists are also much more comfortable with middle-range theory and contingent generalizations than with universal generalizations.⁸² Alexander George, for example, who works within a decision-making framework, has long argued for the value of contingent generalizations and for the role of "typological theory" to generate such generalizations.⁸³ Some structural theorists are willing to make broad generalizations about recurrent patterns within historical systems spanning many centuries (the Westphalian system since 1648, for example) but make no claim that such patterns characterize other historical systems. At some point, however, historical systems may be defined so broadly that generalizations about them take on a near-universal character.⁸⁴

80. As Iggers (*New Directions*, p. 40) argues, "a great deal of Marxist historical research has combined Marxist questions and social critique with rigorous empirical-analytical and text-critical methods" and has "struck a balance between quantitative analytical and qualitative hermeneutical methods."

81. The classic study of the *Annales* school is Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, trans. Sian Reynolds, 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Row, 1972). For a useful review see Iggers, *New Directions*, chap. 2.

82. The middle-range character of theoretical generalizations is determined not only by their contingent as opposed to universal scope, but also by how broadly the dependent variable is defined. One example might be the analysis of the conditions for international cooperation, as opposed to the narrower question of the conditions for the ratification of agreements.

83. Alexander L. George and Richard Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974). On typological theory see Andrew Bennett and Alexander L. George, *Case Studies and Theory Development* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, forthcoming).

84. George Modelski and William Thompson find recurrent patterns of concentration and deconcentration in the global distribution of power and wealth over the past ten centuries of "modern economic growth," and are willing to make other qualified generalizations back to 4000 B.C. See Modelski and Thompson, *Leading Sectors and World Politics: The Coevolution of Global Economics and Politics* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), and "Pulsations in the World System: Hinterland-to-Center IncurSIONS and Migrations, 4000 B.C. to 1500 A.D.," in Nicholas Kardulias, ed., *Leadership, Production, and Exchange: World Systems Theory and Anthropology* (Boulder, Colo.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998).

76. C.V. Wedgwood, *William the Silent* (New York: Norton, 1968), cited in *New York Times*, March 19, 1995. Political scientists' interpretations of historical cases are also frequently informed by a knowledge of the outcome, though the methodological emphasis on selecting cases based on values of the independent variable, not the outcome, reduces this tendency. See King, Keohane, and Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry*.

77. Von Ranke, "On Progress in History," in Iggers and von Moltke, eds., *The Theory and Practice of History*, p. 53; Terrence Ball, "On 'Historical' Explanation," *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (September 1972), pp. 183-184; and Gaddis, "History, Theory, and Common Ground," pp. 81-82.

78. Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft* (New York: Vintage, 1964), p. 47.

79. Key works include Robert William Fogel, *Railroads and American Economic Growth* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1964); and Robert William Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery* (Boston: Little Brown, 1974). This approach has declined from its strong influence in the 1960s.

SCOPE CONDITIONS

I have argued that to the extent that historians attempt to generalize, their generalizations are usually restricted to a well-defined period.⁸⁵ The conditional nature of the historian's generalizations does not differentiate her from the social scientist, because many social science generalizations are conditional rather than universal, so that the social scientist must specify the "scope conditions" under which her generalizations or theory is valid. The difference lies in how the limiting conditions on generalizations are specified. Historians use temporal and spatial criteria whereas social scientists use analytical criteria, as contained in the explicit assumptions underlying their theories. The social science emphasis on analytical scope conditions is expressed in the injunction that in their theoretical propositions scholars should replace the identity of countries, places, and dates with conceptual variables.⁸⁶

While most political scientists conceive of generalizations in terms of relationships between conceptual variables, many historians do not. They are willing to speak of "generalizations" about particular periods, particular countries, or even particular individuals, and treat these generalizations as fully valid and law-like within particular spatial and temporal bounds.⁸⁷ Such generalizations are based on knowledge of the period (or country or individual) rather than on universal or contingent covering laws.

This is the argument advanced by N. Rescher and O. Helmer for the role of explanatory laws in historical cases. They argue that statements like "heretics were persecuted in seventeenth-century Spain" are law-like generalizations.⁸⁸ An even more restricted form of generalization would be what Gilbert Ryle calls "dispositional explanations" of the behavior of

a particular individual, which he claims are law-like in nature. Ryle gives the example of the statement "Disraeli was ambitious."⁸⁹

While philosophers of history debate whether statements like this are restricted law-like generalizations,⁹⁰ political scientists would generally reject such arguments. They generalize not about particular countries or individuals, but rather about *kinds* of countries or individuals. They might generalize about countries *like* seventeenth-century Spain, defined in terms of certain political, social, or cultural characteristics. They might generalize about the motivations of individuals *like* Disraeli, and say that individuals with certain personalities, social backgrounds, or belief systems tend to behave in predictable ways. But political scientists prefer not to generalize about particular countries or individuals, and they would not claim that such statements were law-like generalizations.⁹¹ These different meanings that historians and political scientists attach to the notion of generalization helps to explain their strong differences regarding their respective answers to the question of how much historians generalize.

This difference in the specification of scope conditions in history and in political science is revealed in the titles of some of the more influential recent books in peace, war, and security in the two disciplines. The inclusion or noninclusion of spatial and temporal scope conditions in the title provides a strong indicator of the author's disciplinary affiliation.⁹²

There are some historians who seek to construct universal theoretical generalizations and who are exceptions to my distinction between history

85. This is reflected in some historians' response to questions about other countries or other periods: "It's not my period." Comparative history provides significant exceptions.

86. Adam Przeworski and Henry Tuene, *The Logic of Comparative Social Inquiry* (New York: Wiley, 1970). Kiser ("Revival of Narrative," pp. 256-259) differentiates between historical and abstract scope conditions.

87. This discussion builds on William Dray, "The Historical Explanation of Actions Reconsidered," in Patrick Gardner, ed. *The Philosophy of History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 66-89, especially pp. 80-83.

88. N. Rescher and O. Helmer, "On the Epistemology of the Inexact Sciences," *Management Science*, Vol. 5 (October 1959), pp. 25-40; see also N. Rescher and C. B. Joynt, "The Problem of Uniqueness in History," *History and Theory*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1961), pp. 150-162.

89. Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (London: Hutchinson, 1966), chap. 6.

90. Dray, "Historical Explanations of Actions Reconsidered," pp. 80-84.

91. An interesting exception is James N. Rosenau's argument that we can have "single-country" theories of foreign policy, in "Toward a Single-Country Theory: The USSR as an Adaptive System," paper presented at the Conference on Domestic Sources of Soviet Foreign and Defense Policies, University of California at Los Angeles, 1985.

92. Consider the following books by historians contributing to this volume: Carole Fink, *The Genoa Conference: European Diplomacy, 1921-1922* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984); Edward Ingram, *The Beginning of the Great Game in Asia, 1828-1834* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); John A. Lynn, *Giant of the Grand Siècle: The French Army, 1610-1715* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Stephen E. Pelz, *Race to Pearl Harbor: The Failure of the Second London Naval Conference and the Onset of World War II* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974); Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics, 1763-1848*; and Gerhard L. Weinberg, *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). Books by political scientists contributing to this volume include Miriam Fendius Elman, ed., *Paths to Peace: Is Democracy the Answer?* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997); Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*; Richard

and political science. The clearest example is Arnold Toynbee, who aimed to discover the laws driving the life-cycles of twenty-one civilizations in the past in his multivolume *A Study of History*.⁹³ But this is the exception that proves the rule. Historians and philosophers of science have responded quite critically to Toynbee and to "speculative history" more generally.⁹⁴ In terms of the distinction between history and social science, one scholar asserts that Toynbee's work "is not, in fact, a history of anything at all. It is . . . a search for sociological principles of a most general and universal kind." The question is "not whether *A Study of History* belongs to history or to sociology, but only whether it is good sociology or bad sociology."⁹⁵

THE ROLE OF COVERING LAWS

I have argued that some historians explain singular events or episodes in terms of unique contextual factors, and other historians explain those events in terms of more general theoretical propositions. There is a substantial consensus among most political scientists (with the important exception of many constructivists), but not among historians, that only the latter is a valid form of explanation. That is, as a discipline political science is far more likely than history to accept Hempel's covering law (or nomological) model of explanation, in which an explanation of a concrete event requires the subsumption of that event under general laws of behavior. Given general laws (deterministic or probabilistic) and initial

Ned Lebow, *Between Peace and War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981); Jack S. Levy, *War in the Modern Great Power System, 1495–1975* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1983); Richard Rosecrance, *The Rise of the Trading State: Commerce and Conquest in the Modern World* (New York: Basic Books, 1986); and William R. Thompson, *On Global War* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988). Book titles are less revealing for Cold War history, where the differences between the disciplines begin to blur. One non-Cold War title that does not fit this distinction is Randall L. Schweller, *Deadly Imbalances: Tripolarity and Hitler's Strategy of World Conquest* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

93. Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History*, 12 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1948–61).

94. See Pieter Geyl, *Debates with Historians* (London: Fontana, 1962). See also Clayton Roberts, *The Logic of Historical Explanation* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1996). It is also significant, as Roberts argues (p. 13), that "Historians today do not cite or quote from *A Study of History*."

95. Bierstedt, "Toynbee and Sociology," pp. 95–96. After reading an earlier version of this essay, Matthew Melko wrote (private correspondence, October 7, 1999) that in the early 1960s he asked Toynbee how he would categorize himself, Spengler, the sociologist Pitirim Sorokin, and the anthropologist A.L. Kroeber, who are all now regarded as founders of the civilizational paradigm. Toynbee replied, "We are all sociologists."

conditions, a particular event is certain or likely to occur. These general laws may be implicit in the historian's narrative, but without general laws explanation is not possible.⁹⁶ As Jeffrey Isaac argues, "deductive nomological explanation is "the dominant view of causality and scientific explanation in political science."⁹⁷

In contrast, most historians formally reject the covering law model.⁹⁸ Many implicitly accept some version of Oakeshott's view that "the relation between events is always other events."⁹⁹ This is inherent in the idea of "genetic" or "sequential" explanation based on a fine-tuned description or process tracing of how one event leads to another.¹⁰⁰ But (following Hume) how can we be certain that one observed event *causes* another? Hempel's response, implicitly accepted by most political scientists, is that each link in the causal chain must be based on empirically validated theoretical propositions.¹⁰¹ In the absence of deterministic laws we must settle for probabilistic laws and hence a causal chain with a series of probabilistic linkages.

96. Hempel, "The Function of General Laws in History;" Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*; and Arthur C. Danto, *Analytical Philosophy of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965). Hempel refers to explanations in which assumptions are not explicit as "incomplete explanations."

97. Jeffrey C. Isaac, "After Empiricism: The Realist Alternative," in Terrence Ball, ed., *Idioms of Inquiry* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), p. 189.

98. For critiques, see William H. Dray, *Laws and Explanation in History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957); Alan Ryan, *The Philosophy of the Social Sciences* (New York: Pantheon, 1970); and Maurice Mandelbaum, "The Problem of 'Covering Laws,'" in Patrick Gardiner, ed., *The Philosophy of History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 51–65. Dray argues that theory-driven explanation (in the form of covering laws) "sets up a kind of conceptual barrier to a humanistically oriented historiography." Dray, "The Historical Explanation of Actions Reconsidered," p. 89. This suggests that there may be a fundamental difference in the way that most historians and political scientists conceive of causation, but I save a more detailed discussion of this for another time. See Hidemi Suganami, *On the Causes of War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), chaps. 4–5.

99. Michael Oakeshott, *Experience and Its Modes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1933), p. 141, cited in Smith, "Histories," p. 13.

100. See Ernest Nagel, *The Structure of Science* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1979), pp. 564–568; W.B. Gallie, "The Historical Understanding," *History and Theory*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (1963), pp. 149–202; Louis O. Mink, *Historical Understanding*, eds. Brian Fay, Eugene O. Golob, and Richard T. Vann (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987).

101. Roberts, *Historical Explanation*. This requires both a theoretical explanation and demonstrated empirical regularity. The belief that much positivistic political science has emphasized the latter at the expense of the former has led some to adopt a "scientific realist" epistemology because of its emphasis on causal mechanisms. David Dessler, "Beyond Correlations: Toward a Causal Theory of War," *International Studies*

One important implication of this argument is that it is necessary to go beyond the set of events one wants to explain in order to explain them, because the validation of general laws (whether deterministic or probabilistic) requires the confirmation of observable regularities over a broader empirical domain. As Ray argues, "single events cannot be 'explained' in isolation" and that "comparison of an event to be understood and explained with other events is logically impossible to avoid."¹⁰² The widespread acceptance of this argument by political scientists and its rejection by many historians is reflected in the tendency of the former but not the latter to shun single case studies in favor of comparative case studies or large-*n* statistical studies.¹⁰³ Political scientists focus on the general rather than the particular because they believe that theory construction is both an end in itself and a necessary means to explain particular events by subsuming them under covering laws.

SYNOPTIC JUDGMENT

In his discussion of the essence of historical analysis, Paul Schroeder argues that Louis Mink's concept of "synoptic judgment" best captures the task of the historian. Mink claimed that historians attempt to "understand an event as unique rather than as typical." He argued that the "distinctive characteristic of historical understanding consists of comprehending a complex event by 'seeing things together' in a total and synoptic judgment which cannot be replaced by any analytic technique." Schroeder writes that "a synoptic judgment means a broad interpretation of a development based on examining it from different angles to determine how it came to be, what it means, and what understanding of it best integrates the available evidence." For Schroeder, the more synoptic judgments are guided by theory, the better.¹⁰⁴ Similarly, W.H. Walsh

Quarterly, Vol. 35, No. 3 (September 1991), pp. 337–355; Alexander E. Wendt, "The Agent-Structure Problem in International Relations Theory," *International Organization*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (Summer 1987), pp. 335–370; and Ruth Lane, "Positivism, Scientific Realism and Political Science," *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, Vol 8, No. 3 (July 1996), pp. 361–382.

102. Ray, *Democracy and International Conflict*, pp. 134, 148. Ray's discussion of the role of covering laws in case study explanations (chap. 4) is quite useful and fairly representative of the view of most political scientists.

103. An important exception in history is comparative history. In political science, single case studies can be justified in the context of larger research programs that are more comparative in orientation. Single case studies can also involve within-case comparisons over time.

104. Schroeder, "History and International Relations Theory," pp. 66–69; and Mink, *Historical Understanding*, pp. 81–87.

argues that "different historical events can be regarded as going together to constitute a single process, a whole of which they are all parts and in which they belong together in a special intimate way." The "first aim of the historian" is to see an event "as part of a process, to locate it in its context."¹⁰⁵

This conceptualization nicely captures what a lot of historians do. It is also perfectly consistent with my argument that most historiography aims to explain a series of discrete events rather than construct general propositions about relationships between variables. Mink's focus is still on events, not classes of events or theoretical categories; the same is true of Walsh. It is also significant that Schroeder illustrates the synoptic judgment concept with his own work on the single case of World War I, and by his use of the metaphor of the physician's diagnosis—which includes theoretical knowledge and "skill in seeing which interpretation of the evidence works best in a *particular* case."¹⁰⁶

Narrative-Based Explanation and Theory-Based Explanation

It is often said that a key difference between historians and political scientists is that historians tend to construct narrative-based explanations while political scientists (and social scientists more generally) tend to construct theory-based explanations.¹⁰⁷ This argument implies that narrative-based explanations and theory-based explanations are analytically distinct, that historians' narratives are not theory-based, and that political scientists' explanations do not involve narratives. Each of these points is problematic, depending on precisely how one defines both "narrative" and "theory." After elaborating what I mean by narrative, I consider the role of narrative in political science and the role of theory in history.

I follow the historian Lawrence Stone and define narrative as "the organization of material in a chronologically sequential order, and the focusing of the content into a single coherent story, albeit with subplots." In narrative history, as distinct from structural history, Stone argues, "the arrangement is descriptive rather than analytical," and "its central focus is on man not circumstances. It therefore deals with the particular and specific rather than the collective and statistical. Narrative is a mode of historical writing, but it is a mode which also affects and is affected by

105. W.H. Walsh, *Philosophy of History*, rev. ed. (New York: Harper Torchbacks, 1967), pp. 24–25.

106. Schroeder, "History and International Relations Theory," p. 69. My emphasis.

107. Elman and Elman, "Diplomatic History and International Relations Theory," p. 7; and Kiser and Hechter, "The Role of General Theory," p. 2.

the content and the method." Stone goes on to say that a narrative is guided by a "pregnant principle" and includes "a theme and an argument."¹⁰⁸

Stone's conception of narrative is generally useful, but I see no reason to separate narrative history from structural history and to focus narrowly on "man not circumstances." Historical narrative can easily combine both the evolution of international and domestic structures within which human agents act as well as agents' beliefs, goals, motivations, and personalities. Indeed, narrative explanation, just like any explanation, must do so. On theoretical grounds neither an agent-based nor a structure-based explanation is complete without the other, and both should be integrated into our explanations, whether they be theoretical models or historical narratives. We can ignore neither the preferences of actors nor the structural or informational environments in which they act.¹⁰⁹

Paul Schroeder makes an argument similar to Stone's when he suggests that historians, unlike political scientists, "explain historical change primarily or ultimately in terms of human conduct, that is, purposive acts of agency, not behavior." But Schroeder follows with a rather nuanced discussion, and a paragraph later refers to his own interpretation of World War I as "the result of systemic breakdown." Similarly, Schroeder's analysis of the Vienna settlement of 1815 and the Concert of Europe emphasizes both the autonomous beliefs of political leaders and structural factors such as the impact of the "shared hegemony" of Britain and Russia and certain "subhegemonies" on the continent.¹¹⁰ Schroeder's

108. Stone, *The Past and the Present Revisited*, p. 74. There is a substantial debate among historians regarding the meaning of narrative. See W.H. Dray, "On the Nature and Role of Narrative in Historiography," *History and Theory*, Vol. 10 (1971), pp. 153-171; and Louis Mink, "Narrative Form as a Cognitive Instrument," in Robert H. Canary and Henry Kozicki, eds., *The Writing of History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978). See also Molly Patterson and Kristen Renwick Monroe, "Narrative in Political Science," *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 1 (1998), pp. 313-331; and Suganami, *Causes of War*. Edward Ingram, in his chapter in this volume, argues that narrative does not necessarily have to follow a chronological sequence; it can also be a "collage."

109. James D. Morrow, "Social Choice and System Structure in World Politics," *World Politics*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (October 1988), pp. 45-97; and David A. Lake and Robert Powell, "International Relations: A Strategic Choice Approach," in David A. Lake and Robert Powell, eds., *Strategic Choice and International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), chap. 1.

110. Schroeder, "History and International Relations Theory," pp. 67-68. See also Paul W. Schroeder, "World War I as Galloping Gertie," *Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 44, No. 3 (September 1972), pp. 319-345; Paul W. Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics, 1763-1848* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); and Jack S. Levy,

interpretations are powerful precisely because they focus both on purposive acts of agency and the structures within which agents act.

THE ROLE OF THEORY IN HISTORY

The hypothesized dichotomy between narrative and theory implies that historians mainly write narratives and that these narratives are atheoretical. This is misleading, as many narratives are guided by a well-defined theoretical perspective, and several important schools of historiography do not utilize narratives.

Although political scientists are generally more explicit about their analytical assumptions than historians are, there are many important historical paradigms that are quite explicit in the assumptions and causal laws upon which their frameworks and interpretations are based. Some of the best examples can be found in Marxist economic history, the *Annales* school in France, or the "New Economic History" in the United States.¹¹¹ These approaches clearly reject the view of history as narrative containing its own explanation and seek to base historical explanations on theories and causal laws from the social sciences and to demonstrate their validity through methods that most social scientists would find acceptable. *Annales* historians, for example, are explicit in their conception of a causal hierarchy that consists of a fundamental level of geographic, climatic, biological, and economic factors; a second level of enduring social structures; and a ephemeral level of political events, religion, culture, and intellectual developments.¹¹² There are numerous other examples of historical studies that are more nomothetic than idiographic.¹¹³

Although these historical paradigms have for the most part focused on social and economic history, one can find a number of studies of diplomatic history that organize their historical data around analytic categories instead of (or perhaps in conjunction with) chronological narratives. Gaddis's analysis of the long peace since World War II focuses on several alternative theoretical explanations. In form it is indistinguishable

"The Theoretical Foundations of Paul W. Schroeder's International System," *International History Review*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (November 1994), pp. 715-744.

111. For a good review of these schools of thought see Iggers, *New Directions*. American cliometricians are defined more by their quantitative methodology than by any particular substantive theory of history, though they have been particularly influential in economic history.

112. Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World*.

113. Two that come to mind are William Hardy McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples* (New York: Anchor, 1989), and *Keeping Together in Time: Dance and Drill in Human History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

from the work of political scientists, and in substance it was the first good theoretical study of that topic in either discipline. James Joll begins his study of the origins of World War I with a brief discussion of alternative interpretations, follows with a narrative overview of events of the July crisis, and then organizes the bulk of the book around theoretical variables. Jeremy Black organizes his study of British foreign policy in the early eighteenth century around chapters on the Crown, the Foreign Ministry, trade, religion, the press, and other theoretical variables, and Michael Hogan and Thomas Patterson organize their volume of essays on U.S. foreign relations around analytic categories that are quite familiar to international relations scholars.¹¹⁴

Some diplomatic historians organize their material chronologically but are quite explicit about the theoretical themes underlying their studies. A.J.P. Taylor, for example, begins his study of European diplomacy from 1848 to 1918 with an analysis of the changing balance of power over this period. Some historians are conversant with international relations theory and incorporate some of its key concepts into their own frameworks, and some have made important contributions to international relations theory. Prime examples of the latter include Schroeder's analysis of balancing in neorealist theory and his analysis of alliances as instruments of management and control within an alliance. Other examples include Paul Kennedy's study of imperial overextension and the rise and fall of great powers, and Arno Mayer's work on the domestic sources of war.¹¹⁵

The role of theory is also quite explicit and quite influential in postmodernist history, but here theory takes on a different form. History after

the "linguistic turn" is theoretical,¹¹⁶ but it is a theory influenced by literary criticism and symbolic anthropology and not by theories of social science.¹¹⁷ Although postmodernism has had a substantial influence on the philosophy of history, it has had less influence on the actual writing of history. There are relatively few postmodern diplomatic histories, for postmodern historians have shifted the focus from political, diplomatic, and even economic history to questions of culture, *mentalité*, and subalternity.¹¹⁸ Many diplomatic historians argue, however, that the rise of postmodernism in history has contributed to the declining influence of diplomatic history within the discipline, at least in the United States.¹¹⁹

The influence of postmodernism on political science has been much more limited, though "softer" forms of constructivism that are open to an empirical research agenda are growing in influence. Unlike their colleagues in history, however, critical theorists, feminists, and constructivists in political science have given considerable attention to international relations. The early focus was on metatheoretical and methodological issues, but that has begun to change, and empirically oriented studies are now more common.¹²⁰

116. See Toews, "Intellectual History after the Linguistic Turn."

117. An interesting anecdote on the influence of "theory" on history is provided by Gordon Schochet. On meeting a good friend who had returned from a summer of research in London, Schochet said, "it must have been very difficult and crowded at the British Library. I hate doing research in London in the summer, what with all those Americans climbing all over one another." His friend, an intellectual historian, replied: "No, it wasn't bad at all; there was hardly anyone there. No one's using books any more. They're all doing theory." Gordon Schochet, "Where Have All the Historians Gone?" Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies, Austin, Texas, 1996.

118. This is slowly beginning to change. For recent constructivist or postmodern approaches to diplomatic history, see the symposium on "Culture, Gender, and Foreign Policy," *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (Winter 1994); and Frank Costigliola, "Unceasing Pressure for Penetration: Gender, Pathology, and Emotion in George Kennan's Formation of the Cold War," *Journal of American History*, Vol. 83, No. 4 (March 1997), pp. 1309-1339.

119. Haber, Kennedy, and Krasner, "Brothers Under the Skin." See also Ernest R. May, "The Decline of Diplomatic History," in George Athan Billias and Gerald N. Grob, eds., *American History: Retrospect and Prospect* (New York: Free Press, 1971), pp. 399-430; and John A. Lynn, "The Embattled Future of Academic Military History," *Journal of Military History*, Vol. 61 (October 1997), pp. 777-789. This trend is much less pronounced in Europe.

120. Important works include Nicholas Onuf, *World of Our Making* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989); Friedrich Kratochwil, *Rules, Norms, and Decisions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Suganami, *Causes of War*; Alexander E. Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University

114. John Lewis Gaddis, "The Long Peace: Elements of Stability in the Postwar International System," *International Security*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (Spring 1986), pp. 99-142; James Joll, *The Origins of the First World War* (London: Longman, 1984); Jeremy Black, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of Walpole* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1985); and Michael J. Hogan and Thomas G. Patterson, eds., *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). Other examples of historical studies in which narratives are organized around analytic categories include Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *The German Empire, 1871-1918* (Dover, N.H.: Berg, 1985); and P.M.H. Bell, *The Origins of the Second World War in Europe* (New York: Longman, 1986).

115. A.J.P. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1848-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954); Schroeder, "Historical Reality vs. Neo-Realist Theory;" Paul W. Schroeder, "Alliances, 1815-1945: Weapons of Power and Tools of Management," in Klaus Knorr, ed., *Historical Dimensions of National Security Problems* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1986), pp. 227-262; Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*; and Arno J. Mayer, "Internal Crisis and War Since 1870," in Charles L. Bertrand, ed., *Revolutionary Situations in Europe, 1917-1922* (Montreal: Interuniversity Centre for European Studies, 1977), pp. 201-233.

NARRATIVES IN POLITICAL SCIENCE

A significant percentage of books and even journal articles in political science incorporate historical case studies. These are usually preceded by a section on theory and method, which includes a discussion of the author's theory or hypotheses, usually one or two alternative theories against which they will be tested, criteria for case selection, the empirical indicators to tap one's general theoretical concepts, and other elements of the research design. The historical material is sometimes organized around explicitly analytical criteria and sometimes in an approximately chronological manner, though one that is often couched in a theoretically relevant language. Many of these narratives look quite comparable to historians' narratives, but political scientists usually do comparative studies of two or more cases and explicitly address the question of whether the historical evidence is consistent with the predictions of the theory and perhaps those of alternative theories.

Recent work on qualitative methodology has led to considerable improvements in comparative case studies in international relations. The goal is to increase the relevance of case studies for the construction and validation of theories, to help transform descriptive historical accounts into analytic accounts. Alexander George's methodology of structured focused comparison, in which each case is structured by a single set of questions and focused on those aspects of each case that the theory defines as relevant, has been particularly important in this regard. George emphasizes the role of process tracing, a within-case method that involves an attempt to explain outcomes by tracing the sequence of events that brings them about. This is quite similar to the form of explanation adopted by most historians and labeled "genetic explanation" (Ernest Nagel and W. B. Gallie), "sequential explanation" (Louis Mink), or "colligation" (Clayton Roberts).¹²¹

Press, 1999); David Dessler, "Constructivism within a Positivist Social Science," *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (January 1999), pp. 123-137; Emmanuël Adler, "Seizing the Middle Ground: Constructivism in World Politics," *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 3 (1997), pp. 319-363; V. Spike Peterson, *Gendered States: Feminist (Re)Visions of International Relations Theory* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1992); and Christine Sylvester, *Feminist Theory and International Relations in a Postmodern Era* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994). More empirically oriented studies include Jeffrey Legro, *Cooperation under Fire: Anglo-German Restraint during World War II* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995); Peter J. Katzenstein, ed., *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); and Elizabeth Kier, *Imagining War: French and British Military Doctrine between the Wars* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

121. Alexander L. George, "Case Studies and Theory Development," paper presented to the Second Annual Symposium on Information Processing in Organizations,

In both his earlier work and his more recent work with Andrew Bennett, George emphasizes the potential utility of the "congruence method," which is more correlational in structure and which plays a more ambiguous role in structured focused comparison.¹²² The congruence method builds on the comparative method formalized by John Stuart Mill, and parallels the logic underlying historical sociology and comparative history.¹²³ It is often difficult to differentiate between comparative history, historical sociology, and comparative work in political science. Although comparative historians are relatively few in number, they constitute an important exception to my argument that most historians are primarily interested in explaining particular historical episodes or periods.

I should emphasize that process tracing, like many methods, can be utilized with a variety of theoretical orientations. Although some advocates of process tracing in political science seek a sophisticated methodological alternative to the growing influence of rational choice approaches in the discipline, there is no inherent incompatibility between rational choice as a theoretical orientation and process tracing as a methodology. Many historians' narratives are consistent with a rational choice orienta-

Carnegie-Mellon University, Pittsburgh, October 15-16, 1982; Nagel, *The Structure of Science*, pp. 564-568; Gallie, "The Historical Understanding;" Louis O. Mink, *Historical Understanding*; and Roberts, *Historical Explanation*.

122. Bennett and George, *Case Studies and Theory Development*.

123. Mill's "method of agreement" attempts to control for extraneous variables and establish causation by focusing on cases that are similar on the dependent variable and different on all but one of the independent variables. Mill's "method of difference" focuses on cases that are different on the dependent variable and similar on all but one of the independent variables. Mill acknowledged the limitations of these methods for the social sciences. See John Stuart Mill, *A System of Logic*, 9th ed. (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1875). See also Neil J. Smelser, *Comparative Methods in the Social Sciences* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1976); and Charles Ragin, *The Comparative Method* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987). On historical sociology see Skocpol, ed., *Vision and Method in Historical Sociology*. On comparative history see Charles Tilly, *As Sociology Meets History* (New York: Academic Press, 1981); Tilly, *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons* (New York: Russell Sage, 1984); Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*; William H. Sewell, Jr., "Marc Bloch and the Logic of Comparative History," *History and Theory*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (1967), pp. 208-218; George M. Frederickson, "Comparative History," in Michael Kammen, ed., *The Past Before Us* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), pp. 457-473; and Michael Adas, "Imperialism and Colonialism in Comparative Perspective," *International History Review*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (June 1998), pp. 371-388. On the problems involved in applying Mill's methods to a relatively small number of cases, see Stanley Lieberman, "Small N's and Big Conclusions: An Examination of the Reasoning in Comparative Studies based on a Small Number of Cases," in Ragin and Becker, eds., *What Is a Case? chap. 4.*

tion, and one can find historical case studies by historians and political scientists that are self-consciously guided by a rational choice framework.¹²⁴

The compatibility of a narrative methodology with a rational choice theoretical orientation is developed more systematically by Kiser in response to "the revival of narrative" in historical sociology. He argues that "rational choice narrativism" can incorporate human agency, particular events, temporality, and path dependence (and, I might add, important informational considerations) in a way that overcomes some limitations in current applications of narratives in historical sociology.¹²⁵

A similar development is underway in political science. Some leading rational choice theorists have developed the methodology of "analytic narratives." The approach is analytic in that it involves explicit and formal lines of reasoning based on rational choice and game-theoretic models, but it organizes much of the material in a narrative manner, pays close attention to context, and involves the continuous interplay between theory and data. This approach, like George's structured focused comparison, constitutes a potential point of convergence with the narrative methodology of many historians.¹²⁶

It is clear, then, that the argument that historians use narrative-based explanations whereas political scientists adopt theory-based explanations is both analytically flawed and a significant distortion of the work done by influential scholars in both disciplines.

124. L.L. Farrar, Jr., "The Limits of Choice: July 1914 Reconsidered," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (March 1972), pp. 1–24; Jack S. Levy, "Preferences, Constraints, and Choices in July 1914," *International Security*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (Winter 1990/91), pp. 151–186; and Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and David Lalman, *War and Reason: Domestic and International Imperatives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), chap. 7.

125. Kiser, "The Revival of Narrative."

126. Robert H. Bates et al., *Analytic Narratives* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Bennett and George, *Case Studies and Theory Development*. There have also been calls for a greater dialogue between rational choice theory and constructivist or interpretist approaches, even critical theory approaches. See John Ferejohn, "Rationality and Interpretation: Parliamentary Elections in Early Stuart England," in Kristen Renwick Monroe, ed., *The Economic Approach to Politics: A Critical Assessment of the Theory of Rational Action* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), pp. 279–305; James Johnson, "Is Talk Really Cheap? Prompting Conversation Between Critical Theory and Rational Choice," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 87, No. 1 (March 1993), pp. 74–86; and John W. Schiemann, "Meeting Halfway Between Rochester and Frankfurt: Generative Salience, Focal Points and Strategic Interaction," *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (January 2000), pp. 1–16.

The Logic of Discovery and the Logic of Confirmation

I have argued that the nomothetic/idiographic distinction—defined in terms of what scholars aim to explain rather than how they explain it—provides the single best criterion for differentiating between history and political science in general and diplomatic history and international relations theory in particular: historians aim to explain sequences of events, while political scientists aim to construct generalizations about the relationships between theoretical variables. I have emphasized, however, that to say that historians are idiographic does not necessarily imply that they are atheoretical; they just use theory in different ways than political scientists. I have focused on the central tendencies of the most influential scholars within each discipline, with particular attention to the United States. There are substantial variations around these central tendencies, and the distributions of scholarship in the two disciplines are overlapping, so that there will be numerous exceptions to my argument.

I suspect that political scientists are more likely than historians to accept my argument. Historians will insist not only that their narratives are guided by theoretical assumptions and perhaps more fully developed causal hypotheses, but also that their analyses of particular historical events or periods is suggestive of more general theoretical relationships. Many follow Marc Bloch and argue that the idiographic method can be used for nomothetic purposes, that by focusing on the particular the historian can understand the general. Edward Ingram, for example, argues that "rarely do historians who write about politics and international relations deal with particular instances . . . even microhistorians claim to see the entire world in their grains of sand." He goes on to say that political and diplomatic historians examine political systems, including the international system, "as vehicles or signifiers, opportunities to explain something else."¹²⁷

It is true that historians often generalize, but those generalizations usually apply to a particular country or period, based on the common belief that each historical era has its own character. Occasionally, however, historians generalize beyond the data they observe. This brings us to a more fundamental difference between historians and political scientists, one that derives from differences between the logic of discovery and the logic of confirmation, between theory construction and theory testing.¹²⁸ Historians may generalize beyond their data, but they rarely share politi-

127. Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*; and Ingram, "The Wonderland of the Political Scientist," pp. 53–54.

128. Popper, *Logic of Scientific Discovery*.

cal scientists' concern with the process of *validating* those generalizations empirically, with developing methodologies that permit inferences from an observed sample to an analytically defined universe.¹²⁹

Most graduate training programs in political science require a course (or sequence of courses) on research design and statistics, and in the past decade courses on qualitative methods or qualitative research design have become more common. The fundamental problem for the case study researcher in political science is how to generalize from her data to a broader domain of behavior, how to rule out the causal influences of extraneous variables, and how to select cases in a way that facilitates the empirical test of theoretical propositions.¹³⁰ In contrast, graduate training programs in history are much less likely to offer courses devoted primarily to methodology. While political science conventions almost always include some panels devoted primarily to methodology, it is rare that history meetings and workshops include panels devoted primarily to methodology.¹³¹ Just as historians' theoretical assumptions and propositions are embedded in their historical narratives, their discussions of methodology are embedded in their discussions of concrete subject matter.¹³²

129. Two important exceptions come to mind. First, some applied game theorists place primary emphasis on theory construction and give very little attention to the systematic testing of those theories, though they may use historical examples to *illustrate* the theory. See Powell, *In the Shadow of Power*. Similarly, some social constructivists show little interest in demonstrating their theoretical arguments with detailed empirical research. See Wendt, "The Agent-Structure Debate." Note that although Powell and Wendt are among the most influential scholars in their respective research communities (and that neither would object to others doing the empirical work), most applied game theorists and social constructivists now emphasize the need to couple theoretical argument with empirical research. In fact, both the rising influence of decision-theoretic and game-theoretic modeling in the 1980s and 1990s, and the rising influence of constructivism in the 1990s, owe much to the development of empirical research agendas during these periods.

130. Political scientists are trained to base their case selection on theoretical and methodological criteria, and they criticize what they see as historians' tendencies to pick their subject of inquiry because of its intrinsic historical interest and because that episode has yet to be adequately explained. This relates to Jervis's notion (in his chapter in this volume) that historians focus on empirical puzzles while political scientists focus on theoretical puzzles.

131. On the second point see Robert Jervis's chapter in this volume. Although political scientists often deviate from this methodological norm, in doing so they open themselves up to considerable criticism.

132. One of the most obvious exceptions is John Lewis Gaddis, whose essays on methodology have contributed significantly to methodological debates in the international relations field. See Gaddis, "Expanding the Data Base;" "History, Theory, and

Because they believe that theoretical considerations must inform all aspects of empirical inquiry, political scientists are troubled by the failure of historians to be explicit about their theoretical assumptions and propositions. Political scientists argue that this undercuts the ability of other researchers to validate the historian's interpretations, causal inferences, and claims of generalizability to other historical periods.

Consider the case of Thucydides, who believed that the events of the Peloponnesian War would repeat themselves and who was convinced that he was writing "for all time." Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* may have been driven by a clear set of theoretical assumptions, but he was not explicit about what they were.¹³³ Scholarly debate continues, for example, about whether or not Thucydides was a realist and about numerous other aspects of his historical interpretation. Thucydides may have been correct that the patterns of the Peloponnesian War would repeat themselves, that his interpretation of the war between Athens and Sparta could be generalized to other times and other places. Before accepting this, however, most political scientists would insist on an explicit specification of Thucydides' hypotheses and the construction of a research design that permitted a systematic empirical test of those hypotheses over a wider range of historical systems and theoretical conditions.

Conclusions

I have argued that the primary distinction between history and political science—or at least between the most influential scholarship in each discipline—is that historians attempt to understand and explain sequences of events within a given period while political scientists attempt to explain relationships among variables. This does not imply that historians are necessarily atheoretical. All historical interpretations are guided by underlying analytic assumptions and causal propositions, implicit or otherwise. Some historians are more explicit than others about those assumptions, some take time to organize their research explicitly around theoretical categories, and some give explicit attention to the causal

Common Ground;" and "History, Science, and the Study of International Relations," in Ngaire Woods, ed., *Explaining International Relations Since 1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 32–48.

133. Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, in Robert B. Strassler, ed., *The Landmark Thucydides* (New York: Free Press, 1996), p. 16. As Stanley Hoffmann notes in *Janus and Minerva: Essays in the Theory and Practice of International Politics* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1987), p. 3, Thucydides' *History* contained neither explicit generalizations of an "if . . . then" nature or analytic categories.

mechanisms driving the behavior they observe. A smaller number of historians attempt to generalize beyond their observed data to other times and other places. But very few historians give much attention to the methodologies through which their theoretical generalizations might be empirically validated. Political scientists, on the other hand, are consumed by the question of how to generalize beyond their data to the larger universe from which their data were selected. It is this concern for the empirical validation of theoretical generalizations that in the end best distinguishes political science from history.

This is not to say that international relations theorists have been particularly successful in their task of empirically validating their theoretical generalizations. We have relatively few law-like generalizations in the field, the closest being the proposition that democracies rarely if ever fight each other. But even this proposition is contested, and even its supporters concede that this is an empirical "law" for which a convincing theoretical explanation has yet to be found.¹³⁴ This seems to support the argument of most historians that the context-dependent nature of international behavior makes it extraordinarily difficult if not impossible to identify transhistorically valid, law-like patterns of international relations. But it is equally true that few historical interpretations of particular events or particular eras are uncontested. Debates about the validity of historical interpretations are as commonplace and animated as debates about the validity of international relations theories.

Implicit in this discussion is the argument that although historians and political scientists generally have different objectives, they can better achieve those objectives if they make a greater effort to learn from each other and build on each other's accomplishments. Research on international relations can be cumulative across disciplines as well as between disciplines. Greater attention to the analytic assumptions and causal propositions underlying their interpretations would help historians to sharpen the theoretical coherence of those interpretations and eliminate logical contradictions in their arguments. Similarly, greater attention to historical context would help political scientists construct more valid indicators for their theoretical concepts, recognize the spatial and temporal domains over which their generalizations are valid (which would help them better specify the analytical scope conditions for their theories), and facilitate the task of developing contingent generalizations. Just as a

complete description of the connections between events is not sufficient for good history in the absence of a specification of underlying causal mechanisms, a rigorous formulation of a logically coherent theoretical structure is insufficient for good theory in the absence of the empirical validation of the testable implications of the theory over a wide range of conditions. As I concluded in my earlier essay on this issue, history is too important to leave to the historians, and theory is too important to leave to the theorists.¹³⁵

135. Levy, "Too Important to Leave to the Other," p. 33.

134. Ray, *Democracy and International Conflict*; Michael E. Brown, Sean M. Lynn-Jones, and Steven E. Miller, eds., *Debating the Democratic Peace* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996).