

Interpretation and Method

Empirical Research Methods and the Interpretive Turn
Second Edition

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 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

2017

First published 2014 by M.E. Sharpe

Published 2015 by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Interpretation and method : empirical research methods and the interpretive turn / Edited by Dvora Yanow and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea. — 2nd ed.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-7656-3539-6 (hardcover : alk. paper) — ISBN 978-0-7656-3540-2 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Political science—Methodology. 2. Political science—Research—Methodology. I. Yanow, Dvora. II. Schwartz-Shea, Peregrine. 1955—

JA71.I575 2013

320.072—dc23

2012031557

ISBN 13: 9780765635402 (pbk)

ISBN 13: 9780765635396 (hbk)

Political Science as History

A Reflexive Approach

Ido Oren

My dissertation, which I defended in 1992, was a mathematical and statistical study of arms races that fell well within the substantive and epistemological bounds of mainstream political science. A decade later, though, I published a book—Our Enemies and US: America's Rivalries and the Making of Political Science—that questioned the very presuppositions of the science of politics into which I had been socialized. How did this intellectual shift come about?

After the end of the Cold War, scholarly interest in the previously popular subject of the arms race waned. With the collapse of communism and the apparent spread of democracy, many scholars were intrigued by the prospect of a “democratic peace.” By the mid-1990s, the proposition that democracies do not fight one another was gaining widespread acceptance. I was skeptical of the idea that peace between states was enhanced by the shared democratic character of their regimes, but had to admit that the statistical studies of the relationship seemed technically sound. To be effective, a critique of these studies would have to rest on a foundation other than their own scientific grounding.

In this context, a question crossed my mind: How did Woodrow Wilson perceive Imperial Germany—not in 1917, when he declared war “to make the world safe for democracy,” but twenty to thirty years earlier? Wilson’s legacy was embraced by proponents of the democratic peace thesis, and I thought that the thesis might be undermined if it turned out that Wilson’s characterization of Germany as “autocratic” followed, rather than preceded, the German-American conflict. I vaguely knew that Wilson was a political scientist before he entered politics, but I knew little else about the history of political science. At that point, I was fortunate to have a colleague who offered me indispensable tutoring in disciplinary history and who suggested that my investigation might be profitably expanded to include John Burgess, founder of the first graduate school of political science in the United States.

In my research on arms races, I had come to appreciate the power of mathematical models to generate insights that might not have been apparent otherwise. As I immersed myself in the academic writings of Wilson and Burgess, I realized that historical investigation, different though it was from mathematical deduction, gave me a similarly exciting sense of discovery. To my fascination, I discovered that some of the concepts and categories habitually used by Wilson and Burgess had since become virtual taboos (e.g., “Aryan” and other racial categories) and that the present meaning of concepts such as “democracy” differs from the connotations they had a century ago.

Steeped as I was in the present-minded culture of political science, this conceptual elasticity was a revelation that offered a fresh vantage point from which to develop the critique of the

*democratic peace recapitulated in this chapter. That critique whetted my appetite for exploring the connection between US political science and US foreign relations in greater depth. It was in the course of that exploration—which resulted in *Our Enemies and US*—that I realized that my earlier work was reflexive in orientation and that it constituted a radical challenge to political science epistemology as much as a substantive critique of the democratic peace proposition.*

* * *

America's identity has historically evolved in ways that made political enemies appear subjectively further and friends subjectively closer to it. . . . Current American social science is not insulated from this process. Polities have numerous objective dimensions by which they can be measured. The dimensions captured by the current empirical measures of democracy came to be selected through a subtle historical process whereby objective dimensions on which America resembled its enemies were eliminated, whereas those on which America differed the most from its enemies became privileged. Thus, the coding rules defining democracy are better understood as a time-bound product of America's historical international circumstances than as the timeless exogenous force that they are presumed to be.

—*Ido Oren* (1995, 268–69)

When American political science emerged as an academic discipline in the nineteenth century, it was institutionally and intellectually bound with the study of history. Francis Lieber, the Prussian-born political scientist who was picked by Columbia College in 1857 to inaugurate the chair in "History and Political Science," the first of its kind in the United States, took his title seriously. As Dorothy Ross observed, he "increasingly saw his task in political science as a historical one," and his "historico-politics defined a broad field on which scholars interested in history and politics could converge" (Ross 1991, 41; see also Farr 1993). The founders of the discipline's two leading graduate programs in the late nineteenth century—John W. Burgess, who succeeded Lieber at Columbia, and Herbert Baxter Adams at Johns Hopkins University—remained firmly committed to a "practical union of History and Politics" (Adams, quoted in Ross 1991, 69). When the American Historical Association was founded in 1884, its ranks included Burgess, Adams, and other self-declared political scientists. Only in 1903 did the political scientists form their own professional association.

The historico-political scientists of the nineteenth century had two major analytical uses for history. First, they regarded history as a vast repository of facts and events that could be analyzed systematically to discover/verify political principles and generalizations. Lieber sought "to discern the laws of human society" in the historical record (Ross 1991, 40). In a *Memorial for Statistics* he submitted to Congress, he called for "careful collection of detailed [historical] facts, and the endeavor to arrive at general results [generalizations, in current parlance] by a comprehensive view of and judicious combination of them" (quoted in Farr 1993, 71). History, Lieber declared, was "continuous Statistik; Statistik, History arrested at a given period" (1993 [1858], 23).

Second, nineteenth-century political scientists commonly theorized history as a process of continuous change culminating in modern political institutions. In his inaugural address at Columbia, Lieber argued that:

Political science treats of man in his most important earthly phase; the state is the institution which has to protect or to check all his endeavors, and, in turn, reflects them. It is natural, therefore, that a thorough course of this branch should become, in a great measure,

a delineation of the history of civilization, with all the undulations of humanity, from that loose condition of men in which Barth found many of our fellow beings in Central Africa, to our own accumulated civilization, which is like a rich tapestry, the main threads of which are Grecian intellectuality, Christian morality and trans-mundane thought, Roman law and institutionality, and Teutonic individual independence, especially developed in Anglican liberty and self-government. (1993 [1858], 32)

Similar historical accounts of the origins of American self-government were integral to the political theories of Burgess, Adams, Woodrow Wilson, and many of their peers.

Inasmuch as they theorized modern political institutions as part of a changing history, the students of historico-politics have assimilated the new “historicist” consciousness that crystallized in the West in the early nineteenth century, namely, the understanding of history as a “realm of human construction, propelled ever forward in time by the cumulative effects of human action, and taking new qualitative forms” (Ross 1991, 3). But, as Ross noted, the students of historico-politics “failed to reach a *reflexive* historicism” (1991, 262; emphasis added). In other words, they stopped short of reflecting on how the discourse of their own emerging discipline may have been embedded in the changing history they were theorizing. Although they were sensitive to the need to interpret political institutions and ideas in contextual historical terms, they failed to contextualize and historicize their own theoretical concepts.

After the establishment of the American Political Science Association in 1903, political scientists and historians gradually grew apart from each other. Departments of “History and Political Science” became rarer over time; political scientists increasingly published in separate journals and attended separate professional conferences. The estrangement was hastened by the growing acceptance within political science, from the 1920s onward, of the idea that the study of politics should be modeled after the natural sciences. The increased reliance on quantitative methods of political research, brought about by the “behavioral revolution” of the 1950s, further deepened the division between political science and history.

But the estrangement of political science from history should not be overstated. For even as political science was severing its institutional ties to the historical profession, and even as the discipline was becoming increasingly quantitative in orientation, political scientists often continued to find history analytically useful in the same two ways that their nineteenth-century predecessors had. First, political scientists never ceased viewing history as a vast repository of events that could be analyzed to verify generalizations. In fact, the advent of statistical methods and computer technology had only made the realization of Lieber’s plan—“careful collection of [historical] facts, and the endeavor to arrive at general results”—more feasible than it had been during his lifetime. In the subfields of comparative politics and international relations (IR) in particular, massive efforts have been made to convert history into precisely the “continuous statistik” envisioned by Lieber. Scholars of comparative politics have developed systematic data sets of regime type, most notably the Polity data set, which stretches back to the turn of the nineteenth century.¹ These data sets have in turn been employed in numerous quantitative analyses of the causes and consequences of democracy. Similarly, IR scholars have published scores of statistical analyses employing the data gathered by the Correlates of War (COW) project; the COW data were created by gleaning from historical sources a multitude of facts related to international conflicts since 1815 and systematically quantifying these facts.²

Contemporary political science also contains significant traces of the second, historicist way in which nineteenth-century political scientists used history—explaining modern institutions as products of a continuous process of qualitative historical change. Historicist research programs

have (re)emerged in the past half century in all the discipline's major subfields. In comparative politics, the predominant theory of the 1950s and 1960s, modernization theory, envisioned a trajectory of "development" from backwardness to modernity analogous in form, if not in substance, to nineteenth-century accounts of the origins of modern American institutions. In political theory, republican theorists have challenged the view that the US Constitution reflected liberal-individualist values, arguing instead that "an important republican or communitarian tradition descended from the Greeks and Machiavelli through seventeenth-century England to the American Founders" (R. Putnam 1993, 87, describing the work of Pocock 1975, among others). Partly inspired by this republican-communitarian theory, Robert Putnam, in his famous *Making Democracy Work*, explained the thriving associational life of contemporary Northern Italy by tracing its origins to "a momentous time of transition on the Italian peninsula, nearly a thousand years ago, as Italians were emerging from the obscure era justly termed the Dark Ages" (R. Putnam 1993, 121). In IR, historically minded scholars produced rich accounts of the origins and evolution of the modern sovereign state (Barkin and Cronin 1994; Bartelson 1995; Kratochwil 1986; Reus-Smith 1999; Spruyt 1994). And in the field of American politics, institutional analysis has made a grand comeback in recent decades; although some proponents of the "new institutionalism" approached the subject from the ahistorical perspective of game theory, other scholars turned to history either in search of "master programs of order and regularity" in institutional development or in search of more "contingent temporal alignments and simultaneous movements of relatively independent institutional orderings" (Orren and Skowronek 1995, 306–7). The new historical institutionalism does not display the strong teleological character of the old historico-politics, but it does share with it the historicist understanding of history as a continuous process of qualitative change shaped largely by human actions.

Alas, Ross's criticism of historico-politics at the turn of the twentieth century—that it failed to reach a *reflexive* historicism—is equally applicable to political science at the turn of the twenty-first. Even though in the twentieth century a number of prominent social theorists developed reflexive modes of thinking (e.g., Adorno 2000, especially 145–49; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Gouldner 1970; Horkheimer 1995), their theories had little resonance in the mainstream of American political science. Political scientists today are hardly more open than the founders of the profession to contextualizing and historicizing the concepts that constitute their disciplinary discourse. They scarcely reflect upon the possibility that the history of the study of politics may be intertwined with the history of the politics being studied.

A reflexive political science is a science that takes into account the historical position of its own scholarship. It is a science that theorizes historical political processes in ways that illuminate the relationship of these processes to the theoretical discourse of the discipline itself. The form that such a political science would take is difficult to imagine because, as I noted earlier, it has scarcely been tried. Still, we do have a few examples of reflexive analysis in the extant political science literature that may be used to give the reader an idea of how to approach such research and why it may be valuable (see Doty 1996, especially Chapter 7; Grunberg 1990; Long and Schmidt 2004; Oren 1995).

In what follows, I draw on one of these examples—my critique of the "democratic peace" proposition (Oren 1995; see also Oren 2003)—to sketch the contours of a reflexive historical approach to political research. I begin with an exposition of the democratic peace literature, focusing on the ways in which proponents of that thesis have analyzed history. I then contrast their analysis with my more reflexive mode of historical research. I will try to explain how I reoriented the research question, what historical sources I investigated to answer the question, what I looked for in these sources, and how my findings shed new light on the subject.

Before proceeding, I should confess that my graduate training in political science was rather conventional, and it did not introduce me to the idea of reflexivity. In fact, my critique of the democratic peace was not consciously conceived as an exercise in reflexive analysis; only after its publication did I discover the concept of reflexivity and come to see that my critique was reflexive in orientation. Thus, the reader should not regard my step-by-step presentation of the reflexive research process as a description of how my own research actually unfolded so much as a stylized, post hoc reconstruction of it. Nor should the reader regard my presentation as a recipe that could readily be applied across cases, issue areas, or time. A commitment to reflexive historical analysis is more akin to an orientation of mind than a rigid program of research. It behooves the analyst to design, within the broad parameters of this orientation, a research strategy appropriate to the particularities of the question and the case(s) she seeks to investigate.

THE USES OF HISTORY IN DEMOCRATIC PEACE RESEARCH

In the past two decades, IR scholars have come to claim with growing frequency that democratic states rarely if ever go to war against each other. This claim—known as the “democratic peace proposition”—has become so widely accepted in the discipline (as well as in policy-making circles) that IR scholars have repeatedly quoted, approvingly in most cases, a colleague who stated that “the absence of war among democracies comes as close as anything we have to an empirical law in international relations” (Levy 1989, 88). Dozens of quantitative studies have been devoted to analyzing this “empirical law” (prominent examples include Ray 1995; Russett 1993; Russett and Oneal 2001; Ward and Gleditsch 1998).

Quantitative analyses of the democratic peace generally involve three stylized steps. First, the analyst defines and operationalizes the dependent and independent variables stipulated by the proposition—peace (or war) and democracy (regime type), respectively. Second, based on such operational definitions, the analyst develops a quantitative database describing the incidence of conflict between states, their regime type, and other factors that putatively affect the likelihood of conflict between them (their relative military capabilities, for example). Each “dyad” of states receives numerical scores for each calendar year and, thus, this data-making procedure produces a very large ‘n.’ Third, analysts employ advanced statistical techniques to compare the incidence of conflict between democratic countries and its incidence between non-democracies, or between democracies and non-democracies. Overwhelmingly, they find that the data support the democratic peace proposition; that is, they find that—after controlling for the effects of putative confounding factors such as relative military capabilities—the likelihood of war between democracies is close to zero and that it is substantially smaller than its likelihood in non-democratic and mixed dyads.

Because systematic data collection requires an “immense effort” (Russett and Oneal 2001, 11), quantitative democratic peace researchers were fortunate to benefit from earlier efforts to convert historical facts into “continuous statistik,” especially the COW and Polity projects. Bruce Russett and John Oneal, for example, acknowledged that “much of the data on militarized disputes, alliances, national capabilities, and international organizations originated with the Correlates of War project, founded by J. David Singer; we, like so many social scientists of international relations, owe a great debt to those who have labored in that project. We owe a similar debt to the Polity III project of Ted Robert Gurr and Keith Jagers for information on types of national political systems” (2001, 11).

In the quantitative democratic peace literature, then, history functions primarily as a repository of raw facts that, having been laboriously harvested and processed into neatly packaged “data sets,” serve to “test” the proposition. Regrettably, democratic peace researchers pay almost no

attention to the possibility that the data against which the proposition is tested do not constitute neutral facts so much as artifacts shaped by the analytical concepts and “coding rules” that governed their collection and classification. Nor is any attention paid to the possibility that these analytical concepts and coding rules are themselves historical subjects more than objective instruments without a history.

Although most empirical analyses of the democratic peace employed quantitative techniques, several scholars sought to assess the proposition qualitatively, through an in-depth study of a small number of historical cases (Elman 1997; Owen 1994, 1997; Weart 1998). These scholars point out that quantitative analyses, though they effectively demonstrate a “correlation” between democracy and peace, “can neither explain the causal process that drives this correlation nor assess whether decision makers speak, write, and otherwise behave in a manner consistent with the theory’s predictions” (Elman 1997, 474). Qualitative analysts thus set out to construct a “causal story linking the alleged cause, liberalism, to the effect, liberal peace” (Owen 1997, 11) and to “put the general theory to the test of detailed historical analysis: have leaders tended to act and think in ways consistent with the theory?” (Elman 1997, 33).

The case studies of the democratic peace are richer and more self-consciously historical than their quantitative counterparts. They approach history without the mediation of prepackaged data sets, and they attempt to reconstruct the world as it was seen through the eyes of past actors. Nevertheless, the logic of inference employed by case study scholars and the use they make of history are not radically different from those of the quantitative analysts. All qualitative scholars use the “controlled comparison” method, which, according to its chief proponent in IR, “resembles the statistical method in all respects,” save for the small number of cases that do not “permit systematic control by way of partial correlations” (A. George 1979, 49). Indeed, virtually all case study scholarship of the democratic peace involves the formulation of hypotheses and their “testing” against the historical evidence (Elman 1997, 1; Owen 1997, 57). Ultimately, then, history remains a storehouse of facts usable for the purpose of verifying generalizations. Qualitative analysts are hardly more reflective than quantitative researchers about the historical embeddedness of their own disciplinary discourse. They admirably attempt to historicize the analytical categories and perceptions held by foreign-policy decision makers but stop short of historicizing the categories and perceptions held by political scientists.

Contemporary political science, as I observed earlier, not only carries on Francis Lieber’s “endeavor to arrive at general results” based on “careful collection of detailed facts” (quoted in Farr 1993, 71); it also exhibits traces of Lieber’s twin endeavor to explain modern institutions as products of a process of historical change. The democratic peace literature illustrates the latter endeavor as much as the first. Implicit in this literature is a narrative of historical progress culminating in the realization of a modern zone of liberal peace. Michael Doyle originated this narrative in an influential article, published in 1983, in which he argued that Immanuel Kant’s 1795 treatise *Perpetual Peace* provided the “best guidance” for grasping the liberal peace (Doyle 1996 [1983], 21). According to Doyle:

Kant argued that the natural evolution of world politics and economics would drive mankind inexorably toward peace by means of a widening of the pacific union of liberal republican states. In 1795 this was a startling prediction. In 1981, almost two hundred years later, we can see that he appears to have been correct. The pacific union of liberal states has progressively widened. Liberal states have yet to become involved in a war with one another. International peace is not a utopian ideal to be reached, if at all, in the far future: it is a condition that liberal states have already experienced with each other. (1996 [1983], 55)

Doyle proceeded to cautiously predict, by extrapolating from past rates of liberal-democratic expansion, that “global peace should be anticipated, at the earliest, in 2113” (1996 [1983], 57). His evolutionary narrative has become so widely accepted in the literature that IR scholars now commonly refer to “Kantian peace” (Oneal and Russett 1999), a “Kantian system” (T. Mitchell 2002), or “Kantian process” (Modelsky 1990, 1), interchangeably with liberal/democratic peace.

Some scholars delved even deeper into history than Doyle in search of the origins of the modern democratic peace. Russett (1993) attempted to discover its seeds in ancient Greece and in premodern societies, while Weart (1998) traced the evolution of the democratic peace from ancient Greece through medieval Italy and early modern Switzerland to the present international system.

Alas, none of these historical narratives reached reflexive historicism. Although they endowed the democratic peace with a history, they—much like the quantitative and qualitative analyses of history qua data—stopped short of historicizing *the science of the democratic peace*.

A REFLEXIVE CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE DEMOCRATIC PEACE

The term “reflexivity” derives from the Latin word *reflexus*—“bent backward”—and in social theory it generally refers to the turning of science back upon itself. For some of its proponents, the practice of reflexive social science pivots on the individual scholar. Alvin Gouldner (1970, 489), for example, argues that the social scientist must consciously seek “knowledge of himself and his position in the social world.”

I, however, adhere to the view of Pierre Bourdieu—whose commitment to reflexivity stands out in the landscape of contemporary social theory—that the “primary target [of reflexive analysis] is not the individual analyst but the *social and intellectual unconscious* embedded in analytic tools and categories” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 36; emphasis in original). For Bourdieu, “reflexivity means, not intellectual introspection, but ongoing analysis and control of the categories used in the practice of social science” (Swartz 1997, 273). He urges social scientists to subject to systematic critique the “presuppositions . . . built into concepts, instruments of analysis (genealogy, questionnaires, statistical techniques etc.), and practical operations of research (such as coding routines, ‘data cleaning’ procedures, or rules of thumb in fieldwork).” This critique, Bourdieu insists, must include a historical dimension: “the history of sociology, understood as an exploration of the *scientific unconscious of the sociologist* through the explication of the genesis of the problem, categories of thought, and instruments of analysis, constitutes an absolute prerequisite for scientific practice” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 40, 213; emphasis in original).

Bourdieu’s call for a critical, historical exploration of social scientific concepts and categories should not be confused with the agenda of political methodologists such as David Collier, who had repeatedly reminded political scientists that “discussions of research design . . . must pay central attention to conceptual issues” (Collier and Adcock 1999, 538). Collier thoughtfully analyzed methodological issues of concept formation, conceptual validity, conceptual “stretching,” and the like (1993, 1997, 1999). But his analyses—critical and illuminating though they might be—do not involve the turning of social science back upon itself, as advocated by Bourdieu. The focus of Collier’s work is on how to develop or choose the most appropriate analytical constructs for grasping political processes, not on analyzing how these constructs themselves may be products of political processes. In other words, Collier’s work stops short of investigating how past politics may have left their marks upon the ostensibly neutral concepts employed by political researchers. These marks constitute, in Bourdieu’s language, an “intellectual unconscious embedded in [the] analytical categories and tools” of political science, and exposing them is the task of a reflexive political science.

A reflexive critique of the democratic peace, then, would aim to uncover the “intellectual unconscious” embedded in the operational definitions of democracy and/or peace and in the coding rules employed by the collectors of the Polity and COW data. Rather than pose the conventional research questions—does the historical record support the democratic peace proposition, and does history contain the “seeds” of the modern democratic peace?—the first step in a reflexive inquiry is to reorient the question toward the history of “democracy,” or “peace.” How have past generations of political scientists understood and defined these analytical concepts, how have their definitions of these concepts changed in time, and what was the politics of their change? To what extent has historical change in the academic meaning of these political concepts been shaped by historical change in international politics?

My critique (Oren 1995) focused on the concept of democracy. In the democratic peace literature, democracy is typically defined in terms of electoral process. For example, Russett and Oneal define it as “a country where (1) most citizens can vote, (2) the government comes to power in a free and fair election contested by two or more parties, and (3) the executive is either popularly elected . . . or is held responsible to an elected legislature” (2001, 44). This definition is consistent with, and builds upon, the analytic categories and coding rules employed by data-gathering projects such as Polity. In the Polity data set, polities are coded on a scale that takes competitiveness and fairness of electoral processes, as well as constraints on the freedom of executive action, as the defining empirical features of democracy. A reflexive approach directs us to inquire whether the understanding of democracy implicit in these coding rules is consistent with the ways in which past generations of political scientists grasped this concept. And it directs us to wonder whether these coding rules, and hence the data they order and classify, may have been shaped by the very same history of international conflict that constitutes the empirical testing ground for the democratic peace proposition.

If the first step in a reflexive political analysis involves redirecting the investigation toward disciplinary history, the second step is to select a set of past political scientists and texts to analyze. There is no general formula for making the selection—it rather depends on the research question. Some substantive questions may call for a focus on nineteenth-century texts, whereas other questions may be more effectively explored in the writings of more recent authors; some questions may call for selecting past scholars who specialized in American institutions, while for other questions it may be more appropriate to select past “area studies” specialists. For example, if we seek to expose the “scientific unconscious” of contemporary research in African politics, we should probably unearth the writings of past specialists in African colonial administration and/or in issues of race. As a rule of thumb, it is often appropriate to select authors who, though they may be forgotten today, enjoyed high professional standing in their lifetime, as attested by indicators such as the honors their peers conferred upon them (presidency of the American Political Science Association, for example), the professional institutions they directed, or favorable reviews of their books in professional journals. But even this rule of thumb is just that, not an iron rule, for some questions may be tackled more effectively by recovering voices from the margins of the profession. For example, a critical reflexive analysis of current theorizing of gender may be enriched by exploring the careers of the handful of women who earned doctorates in political science during the Progressive era and who “were steered to social work and reform activities or to the women’s colleges, precincts the men were defining as outside the scientific and academic mainstream” (D. Ross 1991, 158). In sum, there is no universal procedure for deciding which texts to analyze; ultimately, it is incumbent upon the analyst to justify her selection in terms of its relevance to the substantive problem at hand and its potential for producing fresh insights into the problem.

In my critique of the democratic peace, I chose to focus on pre–World War I political science.

That war looms large in the literature in two ways. First, current proponents of the democratic peace consciously draw inspiration from Woodrow Wilson's vision of a world made "safe for democracy," which he articulated when he declared war on "autocratic" Germany. For example, the motto of Russett's important book *Grasping the Democratic Peace* (1993, 3) is excerpted from Wilson's 1917 war message to Congress, in which Wilson contrasted American "self-government" to Germany's undemocratic system. Second, the "coding" of the case of World War I had generated controversy in the literature. Some early critics of the democratic peace thesis suggested that the regime of Imperial Germany exhibited democratic features and that the case of World War I may therefore constitute an important refutation of the claim that democracies do not fight each other. But proponents of the democratic peace, though they concede that Imperial Germany was a "difficult case" (Doyle 1996 [1983], 13), insist—much like Wilson did in 1917—that the German polity fell critically short of satisfying the criteria for liberal democracy. I wanted to compare this current understanding of Imperial Germany—which counterposes its regime to Anglo-American "democracy"—with the perceptions of Imperial Germany harbored by its contemporaries, for I thought that if I could show that the view of Germany as "autocratic" followed, rather than preceded, the onset of German-American rivalry, it would suggest that patterns of international conflict shape perceptions of "democracy" as much as the other way around. Because the German Imperial regime collapsed as a result of its defeat in the war, exploring how it was viewed by contemporaneous scholars required that I turn to texts written in the prewar years, especially in the years before the turn of the twentieth century, when a war between the United States and Germany was still unthinkable.

Of the political scientists who gained prominence in the profession in the late-nineteenth century, I chose to explore the careers of two important scholars: Woodrow Wilson and John W. Burgess. The rationale for studying Wilson had as much to do with his place in the democratic peace literature as with his stature as a political scientist. Because his legacy is firmly embraced by democratic peace scholars, it would have seriously undermined the credibility of their thesis if I were able to demonstrate that Wilson's portrayal of Imperial Germany in, say, 1890, was substantially more positive than the view he articulated when he declared war on it in 1917. Examining the political theory of John Burgess in addition to that of Wilson made the selection more representative of early American political science. Wilson and Burgess represent two distinct, if immediately successive, professional generations. Burgess was the most prominent member of the German-trained generation that founded professional political science in America whereas Wilson belonged to the first PhD cohort "minted in America." Burgess taught at Columbia University whereas Wilson was trained at Johns Hopkins University, then Columbia's rival for the discipline's leadership. I made the case that Burgess and Wilson epitomized different shades of the theoretical concerns, political views, and professional experiences of mainstream American political scientists in the late nineteenth century.

The third step in a reflexive historical investigation constitutes its "meat and potatoes": a close, careful reading of past texts, primarily the books and journal articles produced by the selected authors. These materials can be found in any major research library and thus they are easily accessible. To the extent that the selected authors' private papers are available for inspection, and to the extent that traveling to the archive in which they are deposited is logistically and financially feasible, I would recommend exploring these papers in addition to the published materials. In my experience, consulting a scholar's private letters, lecture notes, or unpublished drafts is often helpful in clarifying his views and in interpreting his published texts.³

Wandering through the thousands of printed pages produced by prolific scholars such as Burgess and Wilson can be a tedious exercise unless it is disciplined and guided by our research questions.

What specific questions we might pose to the texts would depend, of course, on our substantive research agenda. In my research into the “democratic” peace, I read the major theoretical texts written by Wilson and Burgess (and, in the case of Wilson, his personal papers) with the following questions in mind: (1) What were the criteria and norms relative to which Burgess and Wilson classified and compared political systems? (2) To the extent that they compared political systems relative to the norm of “democracy,” how did they understand it, and how does their understanding differ from that which is implicit in the coding rules and definitions employed by democratic peace researchers? (3) How did Imperial Germany compare with England, France, and the United States based on the criteria employed by Burgess and Wilson? Did Germany appear to be more similar to the other polities relative to these contemporaneous criteria than it appears to have been relative to the norms implicit in the Polity data set?

The endeavor to answer research questions based on a close reading of texts is essentially an exercise in hermeneutic interpretation. According to Charles Taylor, interpretation is “an attempt to make clear, to make sense of an object of study. This object must, therefore, be a text, or a text-analogue, which in some way is confused, incomplete, cloudy . . . —in some way or another, unclear” (1977, 101). The texts written by Wilson and Burgess are “cloudy” in the sense that neither one of these scholars produced a concise essay that provides clear, exact answers to all my questions—after all, they had their own research questions to address, rooted in the historical and political context of their time. My job, thus, was tantamount to collating such an essay for them from the materials they *did* produce, that is, finding in these materials clues relevant to the questions at hand and piecing them together into a clear, coherent picture of the authors’ views of Germany in a comparative perspective, their understanding of democracy, and so on.

In the preface to *The Order of Things*, Michel Foucault explained that the book arose out of a passage in Borges, in which the Argentinean author quoted from a Chinese encyclopedia that divided animals into the following categories: “(a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs . . . (n) that from a long way off look like flies.” It is when we come across such strange categories of thought, Foucault argued, that we apprehend “the limitation of our own, the stark impossibility of thinking *that*” (1994, xv). Indeed, the most rewarding, even exciting, moments in analyzing old texts involve precisely such encounters with ideas and categories that prompt the analyst to wonder: “Did they really think *that*?” To me, realizing the centrality of racial categories of analysis in the political theories of Wilson and Burgess constituted such a revelatory moment. Did Burgess really believe that the “the United States also must be regarded as a Teutonic national state” or that “Teutonic political genius stamps the Teutonic nations as political nations *par excellence*, and authorizes them . . . to assume the leadership in the establishment and administration of states” (Burgess 1994, 39–40)?⁴ Did Wilson really think that to understand the origins of modern government, one need not study the “savage” traditions of “defeated” primitive groups but rather the contributions of the “survived fittest,” primarily the groups making up the Aryan race? Did he really admire the municipal “self-government” of Berlin, declaring that the German capital was not a foreign example but “a Pan-Teutonic example of processes that seemed to inhere in the ancient policy of the people to which we belong” (see Oren 1995, 286, 293)? It is precisely upon encountering such presently “impossible” thinking that one begins to see the limitations, the ahistoricity, of current democratic peace research. For if a century ago categories of political thought and classification were different than “democracy,” as it is defined in the current democratic peace literature, in what way can a presumably timeless “empirical law” of a democratic peace apply to that era? By the same token, will this empirical law remain valid, and will anybody care or know about it, if, a hundred years into the future, Americans will have adopted new categories of thought that are hardly imaginable today?

As I indicated above, John Burgess classified nations based on their racial makeup as much as their regime type. He commonly portrayed the United States as a republic more than a democracy, and to the extent that he used the latter term, it denoted a constitutional republican polity, not an electoral process. Wilson, too, though he was more favorably disposed toward “democracy” than Burgess, did not conceptualize the term in a way that corresponds to the definition presently used in democratic peace research. Wilson was a Burkean conservative who, long before he pledged to make the world safe for democracy, strove to make democracy safe for the world by entrusting it to a professional managerial class. In his eyes, the civil service examination was an “eminently democratic” method of leadership selection. He defined democracy more in terms of its outcome—rule by “the men of the schools, the trained, instructed, fitted men”—than in terms of the procedure yielding that outcome (see Oren 2003, 174). Relative to Wilson’s conception of “democracy” circa 1890, let alone relative to Burgess’s ideal polity—a Teutonic, “democratic [read: constitutional] state with an aristocratic government” (Burgess 1994, 75)—Germany appeared then to be far more similar to the United States than it appears to have been in hindsight when measured against the norms implicit in the Polity coding rules. Whereas in the Polity data set Imperial Germany is ranked significantly behind the United States, Britain, and France on the democracy scale, in the 1890s Wilson clearly regarded the German political system as superior to France’s immature democracy, while for Burgess, “there [was] no state, large or small, in which the plane of civilization [was] so high” as in “the United States of Germany” (1915, 94).

The fourth and final step in a reflexive-historical research program, perhaps the most challenging one, is to develop an argument embedding the history of the analytical concepts we investigated in the politics they commonly serve to analyze. In other words, we need to explain how past political processes have shaped—in ways that present-day political scientists are “intellectual[ly] unconscious” of (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 36)—the ostensibly objective concepts, categories, and coding rules current political researchers use to analyze these processes. Applied to democratic peace research, the challenge is to elaborate an argument explaining how the concept of “democracy” employed by the researchers is the product of the very same history of international conflict that serves as the empirical testing ground for the proposition.

My argument was that “democracy” should be interpreted as meaning “America,” and that political scientists’ claim of a democratic peace should hence be understood as a special case of a more general claim about peace among nations that are “America-like.” The definition of democracy (that is, of the United States) manifest in the data sets employed by IR scholars is the product of a subtle historical process in which those aspects of the concept that made America resemble its enemies have been discarded, while those dimensions that magnified the distance between America and its enemies have become privileged. Thus, Burgess’s vision of democracy qua constitutionalism became a casualty of World War I because, measured against its standards, constitutionless England appeared less democratic than Germany. Wilson’s elitist, managerial vision of democracy survived the Great War and folded into technocratic visions of “democratic social control” elaborated by leading political scientists in the interwar years, only to be dealt a massive blow by the struggle against Nazism, which provided a vivid lesson in the perils of managerial efficiency. Visions of “industrial democracy” and “democratic planning” that enjoyed substantial resonance in the discipline during the Great Depression gave way during the cold war to the procedural view of democracy, not least because these visions affirmed ideals to which “people’s democracies” laid claim, too. The conception of democracy implicit in the Polity coding rules and, by extension, in democratic peace research reflects the procedural vision of democracy that triumphed during the cold war.

When the “regime type” data created by these coding rules are unreflexively projected upon

the international history that gave rise to them, it should not be surprising that the proposition that “America-like countries do not fight each other” assumes the appearance of an “empirical law.” After all, the concept of a democratic peace was shaped by the very same historical patterns of war and peace that, transformed into “data” or “cases,” are being used to validate the concept. My argument consequently reveals that the democratic peace proposition has a tautological quality. Political scientists’ classification of countries as “democracies” is as much a product of the (past) peacefulness of these countries in relation to one another as the peacefulness of these countries is a product of their shared democratic character.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

My analysis of the “democratic” peace proposition illustrates how a reflexive approach can yield insights that are counterintuitive and nonconventional from the standpoint of the discipline’s mainstream approach. More fundamentally, it illustrates how a reflexive approach to theories and concepts in social science can expose the limits—indeed, demonstrate the futility—of aspirations to uncover objective truth claims that are valid across time and space. In the case of the democratic peace, a proposition that the discipline’s mainstream views as a timeless “empirical law” is shown by my reflexive analysis to be but a timebound thesis rooted in particular historical and political circumstances peculiar to the late twentieth-century United States. It is not implausible to expect that by the late twenty-first century, political science, if it still exists as an academic discipline, may be different than it is today—its geographical center of gravity may shift away from the United States, its practitioners may develop new understandings of “democracy,” or they may discard the concept altogether. To them, the notion of a “democratic peace” may appear as strange as Wilson’s claim that “not universal suffrage constitutes democracy” or Burgess’s portrayal of the United States as a “Teutonic national state” appear to us today.

But what if the reader of our reflexive analysis—say, a person committed to the idea of political or social science *qua* science—does not “buy” our argument? What if the reader “does not ‘see’ the adequacy of our interpretation” (Taylor 1977, 103)? As Taylor pointed out, “we can only convince an interlocutor if at some point he shares our understanding of the language concerned.” If he remains firmly committed to the positivist, empiricist conception of social science, if he does not come to share our reflexive orientation, then “there is no further step to take in rational argument; we can try to awaken these intuitions in him, or we can simply give up” (Taylor 1977, 103–4). Ultimately, there is no neutral, value-free way of adjudicating between textual readings or judgments.

To the empirical mainstream of political and social science, of course, such subjectivity is intolerable. Mainstream political and other social scientists firmly believe that they can get beyond subjectivity by turning historical events and facts into “brute data”—the Polity data, for example—and using these data to verify “empirical laws,” such as the democratic peace. Alas, my reflexive analysis suggests that the attempt to escape from subjectivity is bound to fail, for the data, rather than being the brute units of information devoid of judgment that their users presuppose them to be, in fact bear the marks of value judgments and interpretations rooted in the politics of days past. A reflexive examination of empiricist political science reveals it to be as subjective and value-laden as the interpretive approaches it rejects, if not as honest about its character.

NOTES

1. The Polity data collection project was founded in the late 1960s by Ted Robert Gurr, who sought to “provide coded information on political institutions for all independent states from 1800 to the present” (Gurr biographical sketch, at www.cidcm.umd.edu/bio.asp?id=10 [accessed October 21, 2005]). The project is

currently in its fourth phase (Polity IV). It is housed at the University of Maryland's Center for International Development and Conflict Management, where researchers continue to update the data series. Information on the procedures Polity researchers use to code political regime characteristics, as well as the resulting data, can be accessed at the Polity IV website, www.cidcm.umd.edu/inscr/polity/ (accessed October 21, 2005). The Polity project is not related to the journal bearing the same name.

2. The COW project was founded in the 1960s by J. David Singer of the University of Michigan, who directed it for many years. It is now housed at Pennsylvania State University. The COW data, coding procedures, information about the project's history, and a bibliography of the numerous quantitative studies that employed the COW data can be accessed at www.correlatesofwar.org.

3. Fortunately for me, the fact that Woodrow Wilson's papers have been edited and published in a multivolume series lessened my need to travel to Princeton University, where the papers are archived. Due to financial constraints, I was unable to consult Burgess's personal papers, archived at Columbia University Libraries.

4. Burgess's major theoretical book, *Political Science and Comparative Constitutional Law*, was published in 1890. This quotation is taken from an abridged version of that book, published posthumously in 1933 and reissued in 1994. Burgess prepared the abridged version before World War I, but a contract to publish it was rescinded during the war because of the author's pro-German sympathies.

Value-Critical Policy Analysis

The Case of Language Policy in the United States

Ronald Schmidt, Sr.

My political science career began with an emphasis in political theory as an undergraduate and beginning graduate student during theory's "golden years" at UC Berkeley in the 1960s. There I took political theory courses under such luminaries as Sheldon Wolin, John Schaar, Norman Jacobson, Hanna Pitkin, Michael Rogin, Peter Euben (then a teaching assistant), and Joseph Tussman (from the philosophy department). Smitten by political theory's engagement with "deep" issues of political significance and meaning, and its epic-scale political questions, I could not get enough.

With my MA degree in hand I set out for a career in community college teaching, but after a year in a temporary position, I found that getting a tenure-track job in a community college was no easy matter. As a result, I spent fifteen months in a new and unanticipated career: as a local administrator in Lyndon Johnson's "War on Poverty," trying to piece together and implement an adult basic education program for migrant farm workers in California's San Joaquin Valley. This was a life-changing event for me, as I came to see the importance, immense complexity, and difficulty of trying to bring people together to make good things happen in the "real world" outside academia.

Returning to graduate school at UC Riverside, I decided to make public policy my emphasis, with political theory as a secondary field. It seemed to me then (and still does today) that the field of public policy offered the perfect opportunity to combine my interests in good ideas for making the world a better place with the difficult questions involved in actually making good things happen. And I had the good fortune at UCR to study under a mentor, Michael Reagan, who had an eclectic appreciation of multiple approaches to political knowledge, as well as a commitment to working toward the public good through political science. I was also fortunate to be part of a cohort of graduate students who shared my interest in approaching public policy both normatively and empirically, embracing the literature of political theory as well as political science to engage issues of public policy.

I was also very lucky to land a job at California State University, Long Beach, where I've taught since 1972. During my years at CSULB, I've been allowed by an unusually congenial group of colleagues to pursue my wide-ranging interests, and this has enabled me to teach in several fields: public policy and administration, racial and ethnic politics, and political theory. It was within this supportive setting that I initiated a course on "Public Values and Public Policy" that has enabled me to hone my ideas on value-critical policy analysis by testing them on my students. Their responses to my efforts have been humbling, encouraging, and exhilarating, and always richly rewarding.

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