

# Peaceful Change as the First Great Debate: Interwar IR and Historical Revisionism Revisited

Peter Marcus Kristensen and Ole Wæver  
*University of Copenhagen*

## Abstract

This article contributes to the historiographical literature that has questioned the existence of a First Great Debate between realists and idealists in interwar IR. Firstly, we call for attention to other discursive framings than realism-vs-idealism, in this case 'peaceful change'. Secondly, we argue for attention to genre changes in academic writing and for broadening historical sources from published texts to oral transcripts. This is an argument for linking the history of IR more closely to its sociology; only when understanding its sociological structure at a given time is it possible to use historical sources in a methodologically valid way. Thirdly, we argue for a broader understanding of 'debateness' than the notion of two or more distinct camps confronting each other, specifically introducing 'fractal debates'. Empirically, we revisit the 1937 International Studies Conference on Peaceful Change and show that it is difficult to find realist-vs-idealist missives in the submitted texts, but that oral interventions were structured by a realism-idealism constellation. 'Peaceful change' was a central challenge that articulated both realist and idealist elements. By returning it to center place, we offer new insights into the first debate and the history of IR--at a time when peaceful change is once again becoming a central concern.

## The Debate on Great Debates

The International Relations discipline (IR) defines its history and progress through a series of great debates.<sup>1</sup> The "foundational myth" is that IR was born from a First Great Debate between *idealists* who believed reason and legal supranational institutions could bring progress and lasting peace versus *realists* who faced the realities of state agency and power politics where war is a constant peril (Kahler 1997:21; see also Carr 1939; Bull 1969). The last two decades, however, revisionist historians have challenged this conventional story through systematic investigations into the actual research produced by interwar scholars. They initially argued that interwar 'idealists' were not as naïve, simplistic and uniform as their misrepresentation by realists, particularly E.H. Carr (Long and Wilson 1995; Kahler 1997), and further suggested that the first debate was less debate than a post-hoc construct by Carr and other realists (Wæver 1997:9). The result after two decades of historiographical inquiries are two major revisions of disciplinary history: interwar IR was never dominated by idealism and, more radically, the first debate between idealists and realists never actually occurred.

First, the myth that idealism dominated interwar IR has been deconstructed in several ways. Wilson (1998) argued that interwar scholars never formed a homogenous idealist school nor were 'idealists' exclusively idealist. Osiander (1998), by contrast, reconstructed the 'real idealist'

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paradigm of interwar IR in which power politics and anarchy was a basic condition but one to overcome. Schmidt (1998a) debunked the myth of idealist hegemony by showing that there were interwar realists too. Idealism, as in conceiving abstract ideals about international politics that are completely detached from empirical reality, does not provide an accurate description of interwar IR (Schmidt 2002:10). Ashworth (2002) claimed there were no ‘idealists’, only ideas later branded ‘idealist’ or ‘utopian’. He later reread a sample of typical ‘idealists’ and showed that they rarely conformed to the idealist stereotype (Ashworth 2006). Thies (2002) read a more random sample of interwar IR, also concluding that interwar IR contained many discourses, not idealist hegemony. The revision of the hegemonic narrative about ‘idealists’—whose ideas were previously read through realist lenses—represents an invaluable step towards a more reflexive history of IR.

Second, revisionists argued that there was never really a proper ‘debate’ between two distinct schools of people, much less a ‘great’ one (Kahler 1997; Schmidt 1998a; Wilson 1998). Further research supported the revisionist claim that the ‘First Great Debate’ was a product of presentist historiography: a myth constructed by realists in the post-war period allowing themselves to emerge victorious, rather than an accurate description of interwar IR (Ashworth 2002, 2006; Schmidt 2002; Thies 2002; Quirk and Vigneswaran 2005). Quirk and Vigneswaran (2005:91) ingeniously observed that the myth, which was actually more of a caricatured “half-truth”, was an even more recent construct: the ‘greatness’ of the debate was a retroactive performativity linked to the invention of the ‘Second Great Debate’. The new debate in the 1960s drew legitimacy from a condensed concept of ‘debate’ that transformed the dominant image of the ‘first debate’. The revisionist argument that there was no idealist hegemony and even no First Great Debate are now mentioned as caveats when several textbooks and handbooks tell the story of the ‘so-called First Great Debate’—now usually in scare quotes.

This article questions not so much *whether* there was ever a realist-idealist debate or if it was pure myth, but instead *how* there was a debate. It calls for greater attention to ‘debateness’, the question of what constitutes a debate and where to find it, by providing three methodological propositions. First, in terms of discourse, the debate was not necessarily framed as a theoretical debate between ‘realists’ and ‘idealists’ but could take place on different discursive terrains. For example, as the case below exemplifies, as a debate about the possibility, means and procedures for peaceful change—with scholars positioning themselves vis-à-vis each other using a realism-idealism continuum. Second, in terms of sources and genre, debates did not necessarily take place in written and published texts. Here we link the history of the discipline to its sociology: Interwar academic texts did not have the same form and social function as today’s research article and it is important to be wary about methodological presentism when looking for Great Debates only in ‘academic texts’. Instead, there is something to gain by studying oral transcripts when they are available. Third, we argue for a broader understanding of ‘debateness’ than the typical notion of two groups of easily labeled scholars confronting each other.

Our presentist agenda links to the broader role of *debateness* as a key variable in the sociology of the discipline—currently the focal point in discussion about what is changing in the structure of the discipline (‘End of IR Theory?’ and all that). In our previous work, we have relied on the great debate variable as something more than a myth to be debunked (although certainly that too): as a social organizing principle that gives IR a history, structure and identity (Wæver 1998, 2013) and thus functions as a powerful rhetorical ploy in present discussions on where IR is, has been and should go (Kristensen 2015). An over-arching idea of what the discipline knows and what its main disagreement is has been part of its intellectual and, by implication, social structure, which has shaped its mechanisms of rule and regulation. On the classical sociology of science spectrum of fragmentation/integration, IR has continuously been more integrated than most social sciences, and usually through a map of its master disagreement.

## Methodology

The revisionist claim that there was no realist-idealist debate in the interwar period is based on studies of the twenty years 1919-1939 and sometimes even longer. But to argue that a ‘great debate’ organized the discipline (even to assume that a ‘discipline’ existed) for twenty years is certainly an exaggeration and putting the threshold too high. It is possible to find a wide range of discourses over the course of two decades, which again explains why some revisionists end up falsifying the existence of an idealist school (Ashworth 2006) while others formulate a new, more accurate idealist school that better captures the entire period (de Wilde 1991; Osiander 1998). Realists have been criticized for turning the tape recorder on and off to construct a coherent idealist paradigm (Thies 2002:154) but revisionist historians also face problems of selection bias. To counter this, we focus here on a debate at a specific time and place: the 1937 International Studies Conference on Peaceful Change in Paris. This is not to argue that the First Great Debate took place *only* at a 1937 conference—this would be putting the threshold too low—but that if it took place in the late interwar period, there is a good chance one would find it here because of the wealth of written memoranda, high quality oral transcripts and high level of attendance by prominent scholars (e.g. Carr who is usually credited as the master mythmaker of the first great debate).

The problem of selection bias, addressed by some revisionists by studying the most prominent or most neglected interwar scholars, has a practical solution here: Scholars that made an oral or written contribution to the conference are included (insofar their input is recorded in the proceedings). Those that did not are excluded no matter how prominent or neglected they were later perceived to be. The analysis has no ambition of being representative of the entire body of interwar IR. It focuses on a distinct point in time to see what discourses and fault lines it can find. 120 memoranda on peaceful change were submitted to the conference and the Institute for International Intellectual Cooperation (IIIC) published an official conference report. The main methodological problem here is rather availability bias. Not all national memoranda are available and we have also chosen to limit the analysis to English-language sources. This methodological choice is reasonable since interwar IR and the First Great Debate is widely believed to be dominated by Anglo-American scholars (Olson 1972:12) and since even the English-language set includes memoranda from Denmark, Hungary, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, Poland and Sweden.

The interwar debate on peaceful change is worth recovering for reasons other than only the historiographical controversy over the first debate. The problem of peaceful change is an IR question *par excellence*. IR was born as an academic discipline to solve this question: how to handle power shifts, and corollary demands for order revision, in a peaceful manner so as to avoid another outbreak of war. Peaceful change was “debated extensively and even passionately” in the late 1930s (Antola 1984:229). The debate on peaceful change took place under the auspices of the International Studies Conference (ISC), a series of conferences initiated in 1928 by the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation of the League of Nations (IIIC 1937:12–15). During the 1930s, ISC brought together experts from various disciplines to discuss ‘The State and Economic Life’ (1931-1933), ‘Collective Security’ (1933-1935), ‘Peaceful Change’ (1935-1937) and ‘Economic Policies in Relations to World Peace’ (1937-1939), of which the Peaceful Change conference attracted the greatest number of participants. What Charles Manning (1937a:v) described as “a newly developing debate” did indeed reflect the pacifist views that emerged after World War I, but was also a product of the increasing turmoil of the 1930s and the challenges posed to the order established in the 1919 peace settlement. When the delegates met to discuss peaceful change, Japan had already invaded Manchuria, Italy had occupied Abyssinia, and Germany had remilitarized the Rhineland and reclaimed former colonies surrendered at Versailles. The themes discussed at the

conference reflected late interwar concerns when peaceful change was *the* question to experts on world politics. Yet, the role of peaceful change as a foundational puzzle stands as little more than a footnote in disciplinary history today. This negligence stems from the myth that interwar IR was dominated by idealist thinking about peace and progress—Peaceful Change embodying both—which also explains why historiographers looking for realist-idealist debate directed their attention elsewhere. This leads to our first methodological argument.

### *Alternative Discursive Framings: Realism By Any Other Name*

In terms of content, the First Great Debate might have been conducted on a different discursive terrain than realism-versus-idealism. Here, admittedly, peaceful change does not sound as the most intuitive other place to look for a realist-idealist debate, given its pacifist and progressivist undertones. Rather, for revisionists trying to find the realist-idealist debate, it seems more intuitive that positions would be for or against peaceful change—with realists in opposition and thus entirely outside the conference discourse—and not that the realist-idealist debate could have taken place at a conference dedicated to peaceful change. Nevertheless, the oral debates at the conference look surprisingly similar to a realist-idealist debate. As our analysis demonstrates, the First Great Debate was not entirely a post-hoc invention of Carr, Morgenthau and allies—a stroke of genius that staged realism as victorious—but it was conducted on different discursive terms than usually thought.

‘Peaceful change’ was a ‘realist’ problematique with a potentially ‘idealist’ answer: the question was posed on the realist premises that power shifts are unavoidable, undermine any given order and are usually accommodated in non-peaceful ways. On this realist basis, peaceful change emerged as an idealist challenge: can change be achieved peacefully instead? This was a widely shared problematic and therefore a valuable place to look for possible structuring lines of disagreement in the discipline. The peaceful change discourse is also useful place to investigate the discipline’s past because it constitutes a rich, unexplored historical archive: An entire international conference and one of the first, and most attended, international studies conferences ever was dedicated to Peaceful Change in 1937. Apart from the staggering 120 memoranda, monographs and edited volumes submitted to the conference, the IIC published an official report that contained “an almost complete record of the discussions in both plenary and round-table sessions.” (IIC 1938:12). The peaceful change discourse is thus a useful place to triangulate different historical sources, which leads to our second methodological argument.

### *Sources of Historical Reality: Speech, Text and Memory*

In terms of historical sources, is it so obvious that the realist-idealist debate can be reconstructed by studying published texts? It is necessary to reflect on the sources of debate and what different sources might capture rather than *a priori* privileging research articles or books as the only ‘real’ historical sources as most revisionist accounts have done: if we cannot find the First Great Debate in the textual artifacts from the interwar period, but only as a post-hoc construct, it never existed. There are several methodological limitations to this approach. It reconstructs ‘conversations’ and ‘discourse’ from books and articles, while it seems relevant also to look at oral conversations and transcripts as some recent research on postwar IR has done (Guilhot 2008, 2011). If the revisionists who have debunked our flawed memories of the first debate aim to reconstruct the ‘conversations’ of our interwar predecessors, it is surprising that no one have revisited the transcripts from interwar conferences. A conference transcript is not truer or more accurate than single-authored books or articles, but it is to a greater extent shaped by the rich heteroglossia of dialogic discourse. We argue that interwar scholars may have had an analytical map of the main debates and positions in the

discipline that was perhaps never written down in books and journals, but just shared orally at conferences, in classrooms or department hallways. This is not to say that revisionist rereadings of interwar texts are wrong in rejecting that a great debate organized the ‘published discipline’, but that such a debate could in principle be reconstructed if we had access to transcripts from conferences, classrooms or hallways. That interwar debates are not to be found in books and journals is not only possible but plausible considering how interwar IR was organized socially and institutionally. At the time, oral exchanges were more susceptible to reductionist reconstructions of the intellectual map, more revealing of its lines of opposition and prone to name-calling of opponents than publications were.

There is a broader point here about the importance of relating the history of ‘the discipline’ to its sociology. When studying the academic text for purposes of disciplinary historiography, it is crucial to be sensitive to the genre, its social function and evolution over time. Academic texts in the interwar period did not take the form of the modern research article that reviews existing literature, identifies and fills out gaps in it, up front declares its theoretical and methodological standpoints and sends explicit citations to opponents. The interwar academic texts analyzed below read far less dialogically, their authors rarely relate explicitly to opponents, they use few citations and often present descriptive and ‘factual’ content. A sociological explanation is that academic texts did not have the social function they have today. The IR research article was not the normal currency of academic communication or careers it is today, in large part because there was only a burgeoning sense of IR as a separate communication space, as a discipline. Also, universities and social sciences more generally have changed as to the function of particular institutions (teaching, publications, policy, conferences, etc.) in the social structure of disciplines. So whereas an academic discipline throughout different periods has achieved regulation, selection, coordination and so on, this was performed through other mechanisms in 1937 than in 1970 or in 2015. Guiding principles for contemporary sociology or historiography of the discipline, like “Journals are the most direct measure of the discipline itself” (Wæver 1998:697), should not be anachronistically projected unto a period like the interwar years. Where to look for a phenomenon like ‘debate’ at a given point in time demands an understanding of the changing sociology of the discipline. Associations also matter in this respect. Even though the ISC can be seen as an institutional precursor to ISA and an important, but neglected milestone in the evolution of the discipline (Long 2006), it was an interdisciplinary space united primarily by the political questions discussed. The scholars assembling at the ISC conference in 1937 were not ‘IR’—understood as PhDs in IR employed in a department of IR—but historians, lawyers, economists, geographers or political scientists united primarily by the pressing political issue of peaceful change. Even the so-called discursive internalist historiography of IR that looks primarily at internal discourse and academic texts, as opposed to macro-social and political context (Schmidt 1998b), must reflect more on the (changing) function of the academic text in various historical-sociological contexts to avoid methodological presentism. Variations in the sociological makeup of ‘the discipline’ at different points in time has been given insufficient attention in research on the first great debate (Wilson 2012:139).

### *Types of Debateness: Introducing Fractal Debates*

Our third methodological point is a call for reflexivity as to the relevance of different framings of the research question on the ‘first great debate’ in and for the discipline today. The subtext to debates on the first great debate is obviously always the state of the discipline today and the possibility and utility of a ‘debates’ diagnosis of the present. Not least with the emerging consensus that the discipline is now in a state of ‘no great debate’—maybe having had its last debate—it is

important to be conscious about what sense of debate we are referring to (see contributions to the 2013 special issue “End of IR theory?” in EJIR; Wæver 2013; Kristensen 2015). Roughly, three possible meanings can be discerned. First, that two or three mutually exclusive positions constitute a comprehensive typology of IR scholars. That is, there will be easily identifiable individuals, representatives of the ‘isms’ in the case of IR, in a great debate. Second, that a vocal and acrimonious struggle characterizes (and splits) the discipline. Third, that a particular line of disagreement constitutes the dominant map for self-reflection in the discipline, structures position-taking in it and thus confers a relative coherence (higher than if totally fragmented, lower than if agreeing on one paradigm). Focusing attention on either of these three senses of ‘debate’ in the past serves different purposes in the present. In the context of understanding to what extent IR has for a century been socially structured (in contrast to other social sciences) by a recurring pattern of great debates (with intermissions), and whether this is about to change, it is the third sense of debate that is most important. Our look back therefore centers not so much on identifying representatives of the isms or the amount of shouting in the discipline of the 1930s, but whether it was structured along a particular axis that the participants were conscious about and acted with reference to (Wæver 2011).

Here, we find that the realism-idealism axis was indeed present in the inter-war period, not as a full-scale clash between two clearly delineated camps, but as a useful position-taking device in the peaceful change debate. The distinction operated more as what Andrew Abbott (2001) calls ‘fractal’, i.e. it can be employed at any point along the axis as a posture vis-à-vis those who are more ‘realist’ or ‘idealist’ than oneself. As a fractal distinction, realist-idealism works both synchronically among contemporary schools of thought (e.g. Manning being ‘more realist’ than others at the conference) or diachronically across time and generations (e.g. post-war realists like Morgenthau being ‘more realist’ than Carr) but they are always *relative* to context: If an interwar scholar like Manning stated that he is a realist, it tells us only that he is relatively ‘more realist’ than those he usually interacts with. Relative to us, he may be an idealist (cf. Abbott 2001:12). Moreover, fractal positions contain scaled down versions of the distinction within themselves; that is, if we were to put the most idealist scholars into a separate room, they will also divide over who is relatively more idealist or realist. The interesting question is therefore not whether we can identify idealist and realist camps, but whether and how scholars deploy this fractal distinction for position-taking at different points along the axis.

With these methodological propositions in mind, the paper proceeds in two main steps to emphasize the difference between the written and oral discourse on peaceful change: the first part analyses the general terms of debate as it appears in the written memoranda submitted to the conference and finds little use of the realism-idealism distinction. The second part turns to the recorded oral conversations to illustrate the dialogical deployment of the realism-idealism fractal at the conference.

## **Written Discourse on Peaceful Change**

The written memoranda deploy the concept ‘peaceful change’ in various ways. Some could in hindsight be classified as realist or idealist but these idea emblems were rarely employed in the memoranda. The following is thus not organized around ‘realism’ and ‘idealism’ but around three themes that divide the texts: definitions (peaceful change based on power or justice, force or consent, to avoid war or produce lasting peace), the debate about “Haves” and “Have-nots” (can appeasement be a remedy or not), and solutions (what procedures might alleviate the problem of peaceful change).

### *Defining Peaceful Change*

The interwar puzzle of peaceful change was how to meet the claims of challengers to the status quo distribution of rights and duties whilst preserving peace (Angus 1937b:3). It was about finding “ways and means of satisfying urgent present needs without recourse to war” (Condliffe 1938:5). Peaceful change was the procedures that guaranteed continual revision of the world order to changing circumstances: “the task of procedures of peaceful change is to facilitate the working out of compromises, and particularly to provide the means for the frequent revision of going arrangements as circumstances change.” (Staley 1937:8).

Several memoranda define peaceful change negatively, as the alternative to change through war. To Frederick Dunn “the term ‘peaceful change’, then, refers simply to the alteration of the status quo by peaceful international procedures rather than by force.” (Dunn 1937:2). Several contributions stressed that threats of war actually facilitate peaceful change. “The contingent threat of war”, argued Charles Cruttwell (1937:1), has “been one of the main considerations which have been decisive in securing a change without war.” The reason is, Dunn held, that “the only demands for changes in the status quo which receive the serious consideration of the international community are those which involve a threat of disturbance of peace if not satisfied.” (Dunn 1937:127–8). It was widely believed that the relative power of states in a controversy was decisive for its chances of receiving attention. To Henry Angus, this meant that “For a long time to come peaceful change, like violent change, is likely to benefit the strong at the expense of the weak and to appear to the weak and unsheltered as merely a new formula for justifying spoliation.” (Angus 1937a:11). In an argumentation similar to Carr’s in *The Twenty Years’ Crisis*, Angus further contended that satisfied states would rarely give up possessions. Satisfied states mistakenly believe the current distribution of privileges is just and are unable to recognize the parochialism of their perspective: “It must be remembered that every ‘satisfied’ nation considers that it is calm and contented because of its honesty and self-reliance, its patience and its courage. It has, in short, the bourgeois temper.” (Angus 1937a:10–11). The same assumption underpins Charles Manning’s argument that proposals for peaceful change aren’t ever good or bad *per se*. Proposals for change are never disinterested and based solely on reason or justice, but in the interest of those with an interest in peace (satisfied powers): “No one, it seems, has yet come out for peaceful change simply in the interests of change—as some take the car for a run with no specific destination in mind.” (Manning 1937b:173). Manning was highly critical of those who studied the morality, justice or reason of certain peaceful changes. Without mentioning specific names, he argued that “To imply, in the manner of some, that peaceful change is necessarily change for the better, change in the interests of justice, and change accepted freely, is, I submit, to obscure rather than to clarify the question.” (Manning 1937b:174). Dunn was also critical that ideals may cloak power politics. Changes justified by reason or morality are often “in the immediate interest of the state having the power advantage. The resulting peace is only a temporary truce while the nation which was forced to acquiesce is gaining strength to challenge the settlement.” (Dunn 1937:127). Defined negatively, peaceful change is change without war, but often preceded by the threat of great power war.

Not all memoranda subscribed to this negative and power politics-based definition of peaceful change, however. Arnold Toynbee, a stereotypical utopianist in *The Twenty Years’ Crisis*, proposed that by peaceful change “we mean something more than merely change which takes place without war. We probably mean peaceful *and* voluntary change” (Toynbee 1937:28; see also Angus 1937b:6–7). By including consent, Toynbee disregarded cases where the threat of force results in a *fait accompli*, such as the re-occupation of the Rhineland, as peaceful changes. Charles Webster also suggested a broader typology of peaceful change (1) to avoid war, (2) to produce or remedy justice, (3) to produce a world order better adapted to the material and mental processes (Webster 1937:5) modeled on the domestic analogy where peaceful changes, e.g. redistribution of wealth, can

be means to (1) appease the poor, (2) remedy injustice or (3) create a better planned community. Another positive definition of peaceful change that emphasizes justice is found in Hersch Lauterpacht's memoranda. Lauterpacht, an international lawyer, argued that pragmatic political solutions to particular problems—German colonies, Manchuria, Abyssinia—do not fall under the topic of peaceful change, only fundamental considerations about the legal system do (Lauterpacht 1937a:1–3, 1937b:135–136, 140). He opposed the “pragmatic method of leaving the fundamental issues alone and of trying to solve each difficulty as it arises. Such pragmatism would be deceptive. For we may find that in the absence of legally effective institutions of peaceful change we are not solving these particular problems but are compelled to accept solutions under the impact of force or—what is the same—of the desire to avert war.” (Lauterpacht 1937b:140). Lauterpacht was critical of peaceful change as a procedure to avoid war and instead treated it as an institution of international law. He defined peaceful change as “the acceptance by States of a legal duty to acquiesce in changes in the law decreed by a competent international organ.” (Lauterpacht 1937b:141). The ability to produce peaceful changes is paramount to legal systems, a system without it “bears in itself the germs of its own destruction. It is in itself an incentive to violence.” (Lauterpacht 1937a:4). Without a legal mechanism for peaceful change, international law risks perpetuating an “obnoxious status quo” that may eventually lead to the conclusion that a just war is better than an unjust peace (Lauterpacht 1937a:6). Other memoranda define peaceful change as a “legal system” that protects the national right of self-determination by establishing “nationality laws” true to Wilson's fourteen points (Supan 1937:1; Von Verdross 1937:1). Memoranda subscribing to such positive definitions of peaceful change were generally opposed to appeasing dissatisfied ‘Have-nots’, for example by redistributing territory.

### *The Effectiveness of Appeasing “Have-nots”*

A common subject in the memoranda is the conflict between “Haves” and “Have-nots”. That is, countries “satisfied” with the status quo distribution of territory, raw materials, markets, privileges and prestige (Great Britain, France, United States, Russia) and those that are “dissatisfied” and seek to change it (Italy, Germany, Japan). Most national memoranda assess the factual validity of “Have-nots” need for territory, raw materials and markets or the actual colonial gains of “Haves” by presenting statistical data on colonial trade, raw material resources and population growth. But there were also more theoretical considerations on appeasement of “Have-nots”, with most memoranda being anti-appeasement (Dunn 1937:4–8; Manning 1937b:184; Robbins 1937:58–59; Staley 1937:36, 61; Webster 1937:8–10).

One argument stressed the *injustice* of appeasement. Webster opposed appeasers who argue that “the ‘haves’ should allow the ‘have nots’ just sufficient to persuade the latter that they can obtain more by peace than by war” (Webster 1937). Appeasement was no sustainable solution to the grievances of “Have-nots” in the long run because concessions only foster further claims and because there were few countries left to sacrifice (Webster 1937:8–10). In opposition to appeasers, Webster argued, were the “many” who believed that “such expedients seem dishonourable even if they help to preserve peace” and instead maintained that peace cannot be an end in itself, justice and injustice in the present distribution of territory must be taken into account (Webster 1937:9–10). Even “the most backward tribe”, Emanuel Moresco argued, cannot be exchanged like “cattle”, especially not to a dictatorial Germany with its National-Socialist race doctrine (Moresco 1937:11).

Another argument concerns the *ineffectiveness* of appeasement. Several memoranda on raw materials and colonies argued that the economic benefits of colonial possessions were exaggerated and that Germany would access few resources in its former colonies, thus questioning whether “Have-nots” claim to colonies had political rather than economic motives and, consequently,

whether appeasement could be effective (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1936:5–14; Dunn 1937:8–31; Moresco 1937:10; Staley 1937:7–9; Condliffe 1938:22). Eugene Staley doubted a reshuffling of the territorial and colonial status quo would even be “a political remedy for a political disease” because “it is difficult to decide whether territorial concessions to states that threaten violence would really be a remedy or would simply whet their appetite for more, and perhaps encourage other states to try the same tactics.” (Staley 1937:187–188). The problem is that in a war economy where countries prepare for war, all assets are counted as constituent elements of national power and thus measured in relative terms (in a peace economy the measure is standard of living). The problem of raw materials and territory then becomes an armaments problem and states become willing to fight for them (Staley 1937:234; see also Dennery 1938:90). Appeasement and redistributive change will therefore not only be ineffective, but outright dangerous: “To attempt peaceful adjustment by a more “equitable” distribution of raw materials in order to equalise fighting power would be worse than pursuing a will-o’-the-wisp. So long as raw materials have a wartime significance—which means, so long as war is a present danger—they will be treated in accordance with the dictates of war economy rather than peace economy, and the policies resulting from this treatment will tend to justify themselves by helping to produce the wars that they are designed to prepare for.” (Staley 1937:29–30).

Dunn was also skeptical that conflict could be averted if the “Haves” appeased the territorial demands of “Have-nots” (Dunn 1937:5). Since states can only rely on themselves to defend their rights and possessions, he argued, they cannot feel secure until in a superior position: “so long as the notion of self-help persists, the aim of maintaining the power position of the nation is paramount to all other considerations.” (Dunn 1937:13). To yield territory to states seeking superiority would start an endless spiral. Besides, the “Haves” would never cede territory because “all proposals for changes in the status quo, regardless of the grounds on which they are based, are bound to be assessed first and foremost in terms of their effect upon the power relationships of the nations concerned. Any proposed change which would noticeably alter the existing power ratio to the disadvantage of any state is fairly certain to be resisted tenaciously” (Dunn 1937:12). Therefore, “the proposal to placate the dissatisfied Powers or bribe them into keeping the peace by yielding to their demands, one by one, appears to be fully discredited.” (Dunn 1937:129). As several other memoranda, Dunn saw prestige as the primary motivation for “Have-nots” and emphasized the symbolic “signs of defeat and dishonor” and the “position of inferiority” imposed on Germany at Versailles when it was deemed unworthy of having a colonial empire (Dunn 1937:20–21, 139; prestige is also mentioned as a source of revisionism in Carr-Saunders 1937:323; Staley 1937:187; Mair 1937:82–84; Mannheim 1937; Schrieke 1937:4, 15–16; Royal Institute of International Affairs 1936:5–7, 1937:66; Moresco 1937:2). The removal of these symbols of defeat combined with a preservation of the balance of power—not appeasement—would be important steps towards peace. To summarize, the theoretical considerations were less about whether to appease “Have-nots” but about different reasons why not to appease (injustice or ineffectiveness).

### *Solutions to the Problem of Peaceful Change*

The reality of power politics was not neglected in memoranda. Quite the contrary, it was under this condition scholars tried to solve the problem of peaceful change. Change was seen as inevitable and, in a self-help system dominated by power politics, as potentially violent. A system that both facilitates change *and* restrains the use of power might remedy this situation, Staley argued, because if there are conflicts of interest and no international restraint on power, “peace can be preserved only by ‘giving the lion’s share to the lion.’” Like “police and court systems and legislative assemblies have lessened the power of the strong arm in private disputes”, he believed similar legal

procedures should be developed by the international community “if peaceful change is to be substituted for violence.” (Staley 1937:8–9). A solution to the problem of peaceful change demands a removal of the “assumption of violence” (Staley 1937:36). It requires a psychological change, rather than a redistribution of territory: “It must be frankly admitted that the possibility of substituting ‘peaceful change’ for conflict in the field of the international exploitation of resources depends on how rapidly a sense of world-wide social cohesion, world citizenship, and world loyalty can be developed, and that present trends are not too encouraging.” (Staley 1937:210).

Dunn concurred that a mechanism for change was necessary for the preservation of peace because “no peace system can be expected to work for any length of time unless it contains adequate provision for bringing about changes in the status quo as required by changing conditions.” (Dunn 1937:2). Despite his pessimistic view that peaceful change was only possible under the threat of war, he deemed it possible to appeal to other motives than the desire to avoid war: “Eventually it may be possible to build up a general community interest in the welfare of individual members, a realisation that community welfare depends on the satisfaction of the needs of individual members.” (Dunn 1937:129). But he was critical of instrumentalist approaches to peaceful change: “The widespread notion that by the mere calling of conferences, the establishment of international commissions of inquiry or the devising of new techniques of negotiation it will be possible to find acceptable solutions for all demands for change is largely the product of wishful thinking” (Dunn 1937:125). The solution, rather, was “unofficial and informal” procedures among states conducted without the publicity of League discussions (Dunn 1937:149). John Condliffe also believed states should be the primary movers in solving the problem of peaceful change: “It follows that international machinery is regarded not as the starting point of a possible future unitary organisation for the world as a whole, but as a means of facilitating cooperation between independent nation-states.” (Condliffe 1938:8).

Conversely, Webster, Lauterpacht and Toynbee held that reason and “artificial channels” of peaceful change could and should substitute old-fashioned state-centric modes of international organization (Toynbee 1937:37). As Toynbee concluded, “we must take thought and create institutions, create collective security which—permanently in operation—will effect peacefully those changes which, if they do not take place peacefully, will presently take place through a new series of explosions.” (Toynbee 1937:37–38). To Lauterpacht the only solution would be an “international legislature”, a “super-state” with the “constitutional means of effecting peaceful change without the consent of the State” (Lauterpacht 1937b:141–142, 1937a:11). In advancing his argument, Lauterpacht does not explicitly mention opponent positions, except “those who, placing themselves on the basis of what they believe to be hard facts of reality, are tempted to gain the argumentative advantage of contrasting that ultimate result in all its rigid completeness with the degenerate state of the world as it exists today. It is doubtful whether that apparently realistic and logical approach can justly claim to be scientific.” (Lauterpacht 1937a:47). Instead, he believed that “the science of international law and relations, instead of joining the superficially realistic condemnation of ‘schemes of dreamers’, may legitimately contribute its share towards working out a proper system of [international legislation].” (Lauterpacht 1937a:48). The argument was, Lauterpacht acknowledged, “profoundly radical” and “seemingly revolutionary” (Lauterpacht 1937a:45, 48).

Lauterpacht’s argument, as one of few, was actually challenged later in the same volume, which was based on a symposium at the Royal Institute of International Affairs. In a rare oppositional move, Manning’s concluding chapter explicitly criticized Lauterpacht who went “all out for the World State; and, upon my words, for one moment I really began to think he was going to get it!” (Manning 1937b:177). Manning opposed this “all or nothing” definition of peaceful change as an overriding international legislature and the “domestic analogy” that international

institutions could be endowed with the power to deprive states of rights against their will (Manning 1937b:177–180). He was highly skeptical of the technocratic impetus behind the rationalist idea that if only scientists found the correct procedure of peaceful change, a solution would automatically follow: “You put in your penny, you turn the handle, and out comes your settlement!” (Manning 1937b:175). Manning instead praised Condliffe’s statism, stating that “It is an aid to clear thinking, and a check to undue optimism, that, in viewing any problem in the field of international policy, we remember how, for anything to be accomplished in the matter, it must be done by the Governments of the existing sovereign States.” (Manning 1937b:172). He describes the ‘ideal’ international society in which, contrary to “the philosophy fashionable with the ‘sated’ powers, the case for change is understood in terms not of abstract justice—or vested rights—but of realism, compromise, and common sense.” (Manning 1937b:190). Manning explicitly contrasts “realism” to “abstract justice”, the cloak for change used by satisfied powers. The parallel to Carr’s use of the term is striking.

Another line of opposition that contained indications of realist-idealist debate concerned reason and information: whether reason might help “Haves” realize their privileged position and perhaps soften the demands of “Have-nots”. Pragmatic politicians had failed to solve the conflict between “Haves” and “Have-nots”, Webster argued, and expressed hope that scholars may “endeavour to contribute something to the solution” (Webster 1937:5, 9). The memorandum summarizing discussions at the Institute for Pacific Relations discussed whether research can help, not only design better legal institutions for peaceful change, but also educate public opinion (Angus 1937b:179–184). It noted that “informed discussion will facilitate the peaceful adjustment of apparently conflicting interests” (Angus 1937b:10) and quoted its chairman that “If we have any function at all it is to see that when national attitudes crystallise into national policy it is on the basis of knowledge rather than of ignorance.” (Angus 1937b:180; also Hayden 1937:27). There are traces of an idealist-realist fault line in the argument that the popularization of expert knowledge might introduce the mass to the outlook of well-informed circles, “remote as this possibility may appear to the hard-boiled realist” (Angus 1937b:193). However, other members of the institute are quoted for the opposite argument: the dissemination of information and facts may also produce dislike and defensive nationalism (Angus 1937b:180–181). Several other memoranda criticize the “the naïve belief in the compelling power of Reason” to solve the problem of peaceful change (Manning 1937b:169; also Schrieke 1937:16; Moresco 1937:1).

The faith in reason, information, justice, international organization, progress through revolution, world society and analogies to domestic change are aspects of what Carr later branded ‘utopianism’. Indeed, ‘idealist/utopianist/liberal’ tenets are identifiable in the contributions of Toynbee, Webster, Lauterpacht and others, but so are ‘realist’ notions of sovereignty, anarchy, self-help, power politics and the conflict between “Haves” and “Have-nots” in those of Dunn and Manning and others. Realism and idealism can be reconstructed post hoc, and separately, but there is insufficient evidence to conclude that there was a proper dialogical realist-idealist *debate* about peaceful change. The authors of memoranda rarely engage explicitly with other scholars. Manning is the idiosyncratic exception that proves the rule (and actually in a text based on symposium presentations). Most texts, however, were written before the conference and were monographic. But even with this in mind, stylistic features also add to the impression that the scholarly style was far less dialogical than today’s typical research article. The memoranda use few citations and tend to present neutral, descriptive and factual content rather than to cultivate disagreement, opposition and difference. The absence of intense exchanges in a direct sense is one observation point, another is the lack of an academic map. Arguments are not made with reference to a general depiction of the intellectual landscape, the state of the art and major general questions, as in literature reviews in

contemporary articles. This tells us something about interwar writing style, but neither confirms nor falsifies that there was a realist-idealist debate. The conference discourse does, however.

### **Conference Discourse on Peaceful Change**

150 delegates attended the “General Study Conference on Peaceful Change” in Paris from June 28 to July 3, 1937 (IIC 1938:620–633). They represented France, Canada, Great Britain, Switzerland, United States, Denmark, Sweden, Spain, Belgium, Netherlands, Norway, Austria, Poland, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, China, Australia, Brazil, as well as the Axis Powers Germany, Italy and Japan. The list of participants and contributors reads like a who is who of (Anglo-American) interwar IR, including Alfred Zimmern, Arnold Toynbee, Charles Manning, Gilbert Murray, James Shotwell, Charles Webster, David Mitrany, E.H. Carr, Quincy Wright, Frederick Dunn (IIC 1938:620–633). The conference consisted of four general plenary study meetings and eight round tables on raw materials and markets, demographic questions and colonial questions. The emphasis here is on the plenary sessions that discussed the general problem of peaceful change. The oral interventions are cited in chronological order to demonstrate the dialogical evolution of the debate.

#### *A Call for Realism*

The introductory report of the general rapporteur, Maurice Bourquin, is treated as part of the oral discourse because it set the terms of debate. It shows that the original motive for focusing on migration, resources, territory and colonies was a call for ‘realism’, i.e. concreteness as opposed to abstractness: “Its aim, in drawing our attention to certain concrete forms which the problem assumes, was to guard us against losing ourselves in abstractions and letting ourselves be seduced by an ideology not in touch with social realities.” (Bourquin 1938:22). He sketched two competing “tendencies” among participants that “do not, indeed, confront one another sharply in the memoranda which we have received; but our debates at Madrid [preparatory conference] bear the trace of their opposition.” (Bourquin 1938:23): Those inclined to neglect particular cases and think only in generalizations versus those who concentrate on specifics.

Bourquin favored the latter. To end war, it was not “enough to proscribe it nor to set up in face of it a system of constraint” (Bourquin 1938:17). Nor should the aim be to evaluate the morality of revisionist claims. What was needed was systematic inquiry into the causes of war, peaceful methods for resolving conflicts and satisfying dissatisfied countries (Bourquin 1938:31). Bourquin was skeptical that reason could solve the problem alone and maintained that claims for change are not only about ‘real’ economic and social needs of dissatisfied nations, but also about the symbolic and political need to assert great power status. In such political questions, “reason loses much of its power” and what is required is “more prudence, more tact, more precautions.” (Bourquin 1938:36–37). After a brief introduction by John Foster Dulles, Bourquin restated the need to concentrate on practical, rather than ideal, solutions to present challenges: “It would probably be easy – but it would not be very fruitful – to construct attractive systems, which would perhaps correspond to a true ideal, but which would be out of contact with the possibilities of the times in which we live. Realism must be the law of the idealists.” (IIC 1938:260). The realist-idealist fractal was thus deployed in order to swing the pendulum further towards realism, but not to reject idealism. The realism-idealism dichotomy was subsequently used by other participants to organize the academic scene and position themselves on it. The following interventions illustrate this dialogical use of the realism-idealism fractal in the oral debate.

## *Anti-Realist Interventions – Collective Security and Justice*

The realist move was first met by counter-moves. Lord Lytton, the next speaker, acknowledged the need for realism, as in avoiding abstractions, but held that a corrective was necessary: systematic procedures, rather than particular instances of territorial change, were necessary to produce peaceful change. Systematic procedures of peaceful change, Lytton explicated, would only be possible under a collective security system: “If we think all the time of a divided world, from which all international co-operation is absent and where the States might at any moment fall upon each other, we shall make very little progress. That is why I say that this Conference is closely linked to the last [on Collective Security] and that you cannot have peaceful change without collective security, and equally you cannot have collective security without some organised system of peaceful change.” (IIC 1938:261). Next, Austrian participant Von Verdross followed up on collective security institutions. He sketched three stages of international law: anarchy (pre-WWI), a collective security system without means for peaceful change (interwar period), and a coming stage of collective security *with* procedures for peaceful change. The solution would be to convince public opinion and governments that procedures of peaceful change are possible: “The first thing to do is to change international psychology, and when we return to our respective countries, we must be apostles for peaceful change[...] We cannot, indeed, achieve our ends unless, on the one hand, governments and, on the other hand, public opinion, are convinced that the way to guarantee peace is to introduce in an orderly fashion those changes which are necessary in the *status quo*.” (IIC 1938:264).

Van Kan from the Institute of Pacific Relations then made another corrective move against Bourquin’s realist-pragmatist introduction, stressing justice and ideals: “The problem of change of the *status quo* is, of course, above all, a practical problem. The procedures which it renders necessary are bound up with the possibilities of the moment. Its principle springs from realities which exist or are likely to exist. But behind all these practical preoccupations stand the great ideas on which humanity lives. We must not forget this, and Professor Bourquin has not forgotten it. I wish to explain my satisfaction at finding in his introductory report, among so many practical considerations, the motive of justice, the eternal magnet which attracts and directs human activity in spite of itself and prevents it from losing its way in material aspirations and purely selfish calculations.” (IIC 1938:265).

Returning to collective security, French representative Henri Hauser elaborated that good faith, communal defense and condemnation of the “law of the jungle” are general conditions for peaceful change: “It is to the international community that each should entrust the defence of his interests” (IIC 1938:266). Immediately afterwards, Henry Richardson emphasized the connection between collective security and justice: “First, the establishment by association between States of forces adequate to maintain peace, and, second, the willingness of the States controlling these forces to make changes based on principles of justice.” (IIC 1938:267). Like other speakers, he paid tribute to Bourquin’s realism but nevertheless made a move against it: “It will be agreed that a discussion on justice in the abstract would not be fruitful in this Conference; yet in considering in detail the subjects on the agenda we must inevitably endeavour to suggest changes which would remove injustice.” (IIC 1938:267–268). Unlike Bourquin who disregarded the morality value of revisionist claims for “systematic inquiry” into methods for settling conflicts and satisfying “Have-nots”, Richardson put justice and morality in center focus. Peaceful change was not only about *maintaining* peace but producing a *just* peace: “We must recognise the danger that changes will be made only to the advantage of strong States. Yet there are weak States suffering from injustice but not threatening to disturb the peace of the world. In a world of separate States, dominated by power politics, the strong would never need to make concessions to the weak, and would only make concessions to other strong States because of the threat of force. Our object must not be merely to

preserve peace – peace at any price; peace must not be sought by a renunciation of justice.” (IIC 1938:268). Only just changes would produce a lasting peace.

### *Return to Realism, Pragmatism and the State*

At this point, a realist-idealist axis/map is emerging, but not debate proper. Rather, a solitary call for realism by the rapporteur emphasizing pragmatism, realities, power politics and relative security was met by counter-moves about first remembering systematic procedures and collective security institutions and then justice and morality by those positioning themselves furthest towards the idealist end of the spectrum. The following two interventions, however, reintroduced notions of practical realizability, states as central (but potentially irrational) actors and the limits of reason. Rudolf Blühdorn, Austrian delegate, acknowledged that the conference was academic, without political representatives, but argued that “it must be recognised that governments do exist in the real world. If we are to work in a practical manner, we must not, therefore, lose sight of that fact: governments will not accept our suggestions unless they are capable of realisation and take legitimate interests into account. To achieve this practical goal, we must study all these aspects, we cannot treat the question on our agenda from a rational point of view only. It may be the most interesting aspect but it is also in practice also the most deceptive. We must see men and States as they are, with their virtues and with their faults.” (IIC 1938:268).

Next, Charles Manning, approved the need to focus on power politics among states. His intervention deploys the realism-idealism fractal several times: “This year I feel there has been achieved a generally higher standard of realism than in previous years and we have it from the Rapporteur that realism what we have to be aiming at.” (IIC 1938:269). To Manning, Realism is to study *what is* rather than what *could be* or, even worse, what *ought to be*. Realism is to recognize that states seldom do what academics wish they would and that “we may have to be content to look for the practicable without too strict a regard for its ideal desirability.” (IIC 1938:270–271). Manning’s intervention is interesting because it, much more than any memoranda, makes implicit and explicit moves against other scholars using ‘realism’:

“It has been suggested that we should become “apostles of peaceful change.”[Von Verdross] That, in respect to precision, is doubtless an improvement on being merely apostles of peace. The purpose of this Conference is not, however, to produce apostles, but to get down towards the bottom of the subject. What we want is not peaceful change in the abstract, but a deepened understanding of what is amounts to in the concrete – though, in saying this, I am not wholly agreeing with Lord Lytton’s remarks about concrete solutions and the seeking of means to apply them.[...]Realism, in recognising the essential facts – for example, the fact, lamented by Professor Hauser, that goodwill, and good faith, are not always present. Realism, in perceiving how, whatever we may wish, States in point of fact are often unwilling not to be judges in their own cause. That, after all, is one of the given facts, which do not dispose of simply by laying it down, as a general proposition that they *ought* to be so willing.” (IIC 1938:270 emphasis in original).

To Manning, realism was to realize the limits of scientific reason: “if it be true that realism must be “the law of the idealist”, we have also another maxim to remember, namely: that diplomatic reticence is the death of scientific research. No one would claim to be capable of complete scientific sincerity on a subject such as ours; the most to be hoped for is that we may all aim at it, and get as near to it as we can.” (IIC 1938:269). Realism was the recognition that diplomacy works in secretive ways and, therefore, that a science of politics cannot be exact. Law, moral and reason are all subject to politics. Manning doubted that academic reasoning could solve the problem of peaceful change and even that a solution could be found at all, unless the fundamental structure of international relations was changed. Even were the structure of international relations changed and

emulated on domestic legal systems, Manning argued, in contrast to his colleagues, this was no guarantee for justice: “Now, I am by no means hostile, personally, to justice, and to the search for justice, in international affairs; I would merely wish my colleagues to recognise that in demanding that changes be just, we shall be aiming, for international purposes, at something higher than we have yet attained to, within the domestic sphere.” (IIC 1938:271).

‘Realism’ was invoked to contrast one’s position from others, as relatively more realist. Specifically, to argue against the practical value of ideal, just and reasoned legal schemes. This use of the term during the first plenary debate does not prove that there was a first great debate between a group of realists and a group of idealists or that two separate schools existed at all (few identified with idealism/utopianism). Rather, the realist-idealist fractal was deployed to distinguish between those who argued that peaceful changes should be implemented in a(n improved) collective security system that would produce just changes and lasting peace vis-à-vis those who argued that peaceful changes should be implemented in the existing self-help system where each state provides its own security and changes are dictated by the powerful. What the first plenary debate does tell us is that the realist-idealist dichotomy was a useful rhetorical device for position-taking.

### *Realism-Idealism as Fractal Distinction*

The realist-idealist dichotomy was not a post-hoc invention, it organized the academic space at the time, guiding position-taking at the conference, its roundtables and debates. Some scholars, like Manning, positioned themselves as relatively ‘more realist’ than others, but most speakers associated with realism while attributing the derogatory term idealism/utopianism to opponents: Either conceived as persons, as when Polish delegate Hipolite Gliwic mentioned “the United States of Europe (Pan-Europa) which, unfortunately, exists only in the dreams of a few idealists” (IIC 1938:280) or an abstract school of thought when arguing that a universalist solution to peaceful change governed by a single world policy is “doomed to remain for some time to come in the sphere of unrealisable and Utopian ideas” (IIC 1938:280; or Oualid who uses idealism to describe that which is “not likely to succeed for some time to come”, 1938:398). Others deploy idealism to describe “abstract formulae” (the Versailles Treaty and Wilson’s Fourteen Points) as opposed to specific self-interests (IIC 1938:464–465). In all varieties, the realist-idealist dichotomy was used as fractal distinction rather than a fixed line in the sand separating two schools; a powerful device allowing speakers to argue that now was the time to “set aside these dreams and turn our attention to reality and to the possible projects to be put into practice” (IIC 1938:280). In the fractal sense of debateness, there was a realist-idealist debate.

The third and fourth plenaries provide further insights into the rhetorical uses of the realist-idealist/utopianist fractal. Bourquin’s introduction notes that procedures for peaceful change must be able to disregard opposition from interested states and, consequently, must be authoritative and peremptory. He asks the audience: “Does not the political reality of to-day give a purely Utopian character to such a conception? [...] Are we expected to set up a logical system, a system that will fully meet all the requirements of the problem of peaceful change considered absolutely, or, on the basis of what already exists, is it a matter of finding what improvements, what progress might be made in the field of peaceful change? The two ideas found their supporters in the course of the preliminary discussion. I must, however, add – in order to give a faithful record of the state of our debate – that the large majority of those who took part in this conversation seem to have declared themselves in favour of a flexible and realist attitude.” (IIC 1938:527). Bourquin summarized the conference as a debate between two “ideas” with each their supporters, but a realist majority, even victory. However, Dulles later noted that Bourquin had underplayed the disagreement: “we have been discussing a topic of very considerable difficulty and very considerable differences of opinion

– perhaps greater than would appear from Professor Bourquin’s report – emerged.” (IIC 1938:613). Remember how Lytton, Von Verdross, Van Kan, Hauser and Richardson provided opposition and correctives to Bourquin’s realism.

Dulles then called upon Quincy Wright who reminded participants that peaceful change in its purest and most impractical form was that of the Wilson-drafted League Covenant. Wilson’s vision of imperative procedures of peaceful change was “extremely radical”, argued Wright, because imperative measures for peaceful change were not possible without collective security: “It is clear that the States of the world are not prepared to consider imperative procedures for peaceful change so long as their security agenda depends on their relative military power. So long as the security of a State depends on their military ability to defend itself, it will naturally consider any readjustment of frontiers not with reference to abstract conceptions of justice but with reference to the relative power position which such a readjustment will create between itself and a potential enemy.” (IIC 1938:532). Wright’s position was that peaceful change and collective security were mutually dependent and that both must be strived for. He suggested establishing less-than-majority decisions in the League Assembly, an advisory commission and court of justice limiting its powers. To illustrate how the debate mobilized numerous prominent scholars, it is noteworthy that David Mitrany then argued that such procedures must be political and elastic, not legal and rigid, and that Alfred Zimmern later critically questioned both Wright and Mitrany whether they wanted to endow the League with power to sanction recalcitrant states, which would be necessary but not “practicable” in Zimmern’s view (IIC 1938:534–535, 539).

The recurrent question was how to balance the ideal against the real and practicable. In the fourth plenary, Rumanian delegate Michel Antonesco asked “whether the purpose of the Conference was to work out an abstract, strictly theoretical, I had almost said philosophical scientific formula, relating to an ideal organisation, or whether it was to seek a concrete, immediately applicable formula, resting on present social realities. I hoped that this preliminary question of technique might be placed on the agenda of our plenary sessions: ideal peaceful change, or realist peaceful change; peaceful change as something to be wished for, or peaceful change to be made a reality?” (IIC 1938:548). Positioning himself on the middle ground, he conceived peaceful change as a hybrid path between “the world as it is, and the world as it is to be made.” (IIC 1938:549). Next, Polish participant Bohdan Winiarski took an even more realist position encouraging his colleagues to “guard against illusions” such as authoritative procedures of peaceful change enforced by a super-State as envisioned by Wilson, before Manning, again in his idiosyncratically oppositional style, asked to “make one or two points in implied disapproval of some of the earlier speeches”. Manning suggested a change in discourse: “Whatever pleasure may be had from such discussion as might be pertinent if we were back in the rare position of being able to impose on the world a Covenant drawn after our own desires, such a method essentially lacks realism. Even were you, formally, in a position to impose your own ideally perfect procedures on the world, you could not be certain that the world would be willing to work them.” (IIC 1938:556). Realism, he elaborated, is to recognize that internationally there is often “no possibility of obtaining a judgment or a piece of legislation, but simply a *construction politique*.” (IIC 1938:557).

The realist-idealist fractal resurfaced when Swiss delegate, Jean de la Harpe, responded to Antonesco’s middle ground by proposing a hybrid familiar from *The Twenty Years’ Crisis*: “He [Antonesco] contrasted the ideal world and the world of reality. If we were keeping strictly to the world of reality, we should not be here, because everything existing would be final; there would be nothing to change. If we were keeping strictly to the ideal world, we should not be here either; the ideal would make its way unaided. We are in an intermediate state between the ideal and reality, and this is exactly what causes the difficulty.” (IIC 1938:569). Next speaker, Paul Mantoux, opposed the “pessimistic” conclusions of Antonesco, Winiarski and Manning by pointing to

progress in domestic affairs where “what was then Utopian has become reality” and argued that information and persuasion could bring similar progress to international affairs (IIC 1938:572). This argument was quickly countered by Malcolm MacPherson: “My second remark is in connection with the arguments for and against realism in the discussions, and here I must – for the reasons advanced by Professor Manning – launch myself on the side of the realists rather than on the side of those who wish to keep the discussion purely academic.” (IIC 1938:574).

At this point, there was in fact a sense of two groups, the ‘realists’ and their opponents. As MacPherson’s move exemplifies, it was a debate for or against greater realism in the balancing act between the ideal and the real. Tellingly, the pendulum returned when next speaker, Georges Scelle, launched yet another corrective to realist pessimism: “I should like to react against a kind of pessimism which seems to me to have seized the Conference, and which is, perhaps, the result of the fall of the barometer outside.” (IIC 1938:574). The solutions had been unreasonably dichotomized, he argued, “We are told: either the super-State, to bring about peaceful change by authority, or nothing. There is neither progress nor salvation except through the super-State.” (IIC 1938:575). These pendulum positions-takings using the realist-idealist fractal, where one can always be more realist or idealist than others, demonstrates its usefulness as rhetorical device. The Peaceful Change conference was certainly not dominated by an idealist-utopianist consensus, but contained multiple realist and idealist positions. It thus provides new historiographical insights into the first great debate and debateness broadly speaking.

## Conclusion

By recovering the 1937 International Studies Conference on peaceful change—an overlooked part of the intellectual pre-history of IR—this (post-revisionist?) article contributes to the revisionist literature on the First Great Debate. Its investigation of both texts and conference transcripts illustrates that a realist-idealist debate can be found in the oral history of the discipline, even though it cannot be reconstructed through the published discipline.

By revisiting textual sources submitted to the conference, the paper reconstructs the discourse on peaceful change as a central puzzle for scholars of various allegiances. The peaceful change discourse contained a hitherto unappreciated diversity of ideas and was not as ‘utopian-idealist’ as branded by posterity. Some participants like Dunn and Manning were even claimed by realists later on. The texts were not framed around ‘realism’ versus ‘idealism’, however, but presented different perspectives on peaceful change: is peaceful change simply change without war or a more radical change of the international legal system, do changes occur through might or right, by force or consent, is appeasement a solution to the problem of dissatisfied powers, should peaceful change be obtained by formal institutional, political, legal, economic or other means? In hindsight, it is possible to categorize arguments as idealist or realist, but it would be presentist to argue that there was a realist-idealist debate as authors rarely used these labels or even engaged opponents explicitly.

The oral discourse, however, shows that the realism-idealism fractal was deployed at the conference and was seen as the overriding variation among scholars. The oral discourse illustrates that the realist-idealist debate is best viewed, not as a clash between two clearly delineated camps, but a fractal debate line used by scholars for organizing the academic scene and positioning themselves in it. The debate proceeded in a constant dialectic between realism and idealism with most positions being hybrids along the formula: the world is dominated by power politics but we should find ways to mitigate or, for some scholars, overcome it. Considerations of power were not absent but neither was justice and morality. Debaters tried to strike the appropriate balance between realism and idealism, as did Carr in *The Twenty Years’ Crisis* two years later.

The consequence for the two revisions of disciplinary history offered by revisionist historiographers—that interwar IR was never dominated by idealists and that the realist-idealist debate never occurred—is that the first is upheld here, the second not. The mythical realist-idealist debate was less myth than we have come to believe. The debate itself was not a post-hoc invention by Carr that staged realism as victorious. The primary manipulation by Carr and American post-war realists was to depict the idealist-realist disagreement as one between two exclusive camps—and the idealist one in control of, and thereby responsible for, international disaster. *The Twenty Years' Crisis* arguably popularized, immortalized, “focused and ended the debate” (Olson 1972:23). But the debate, conceived as fractal debate, had already played a prominent role in the 1937 conference on Peaceful Change. The implication is not that ‘Carr was right’, but that *The Twenty Years' Crisis* reflected contemporary academic discourse much more than usually thought.

Several of the ground-breaking insights attributed to Carr now look much less original. Of the three main themes emphasized in Hedley Bull’s essay on *The Twenty Years' Crisis*—Carr’s exposure of the bourgeois tendency of dominant powers to identify their interests with those of the world, his attempt to solve the problem of peaceful change, and his conception of world politics as a struggle between “Haves” and “Have-nots” (Bull 1969)—all three, especially the latter two, had been given sustained consideration at the Peaceful Change conference. Carr devoted an entire chapter to “Peaceful change”, which, he argued, is “the fundamental problem of international morality and of international politics.” (Carr 1939:283) and defined as change without war, but often facilitated by threats of war (Carr 1939:274–5). Moreover, Carr was kicking in open doors with his project of “counteracting the glaring and dangerous defect of nearly all thinking, both academic and popular, about international politics in English-speaking countries from 1919 to 1939 – the almost total neglect of the factor of power.” (Carr 2001:cv). His observation may be valid for early interwar scholarship but is misleading considering the 1937 conference on Peaceful Change, which he attended himself, albeit without making a contribution, written or oral. It is tempting to believe that he was mostly taking notes.

A final implication regards the need to recover and destigmatize the agenda of peaceful change as an IR question *par excellence*. Peaceful change has become synonymous with idealist notions of progress, pacifism, and not least appeasement, but it is often forgotten that realists also treated the subject of peaceful change. The stereotypical realist view of international relations as the realm of war and recurrence is actually upheld by few realists, or rather: exactly because realists see IR as a realm where war is ever possible and regularly recurring, do they attach great importance to the question whether tensions that build up can be accommodated by procedures other than war. Morgenthau also devoted a chapter of *Politics Among Nations* to peaceful change and post-war thinking on ‘peaceful change’ provides an interesting avenue for further recovering this long neglected puzzle. The need to recover the agenda of peaceful change is obvious at a time when new powers rise into the world order instated by the victors of WWII using concepts such as “Peaceful Rise”.

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