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# **The Uniting of Europe and the Foundation of EU Studies: Revisiting the Neofunctionalism of Ernst B. Haas**

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## **Abstract**

This article suggests that the neofunctionalist theoretical legacy left by Ernst B. Haas is somewhat richer and more prescient than many contemporary discussants allow. The article develops an argument for routine and detailed re-reading of the corpus of neofunctionalist work (and that of Haas in particular), not only to disabuse contemporary students and scholars of the normally static and stylised reading that discussion of the theory provokes, but also to suggest that the conceptual repertoire of neofunctionalism is able to speak directly to current EU studies and comparative regionalism. Neofunctionalism is situated in its social scientific context before the theory's supposed erroneous reliance on the concept of 'spillover' is discussed critically. A case is then made for viewing Haas's neofunctionalism as a dynamic theory that not only corresponded to established social scientific norms, but did so in ways that were consistent with disciplinary openness and pluralism.

## **Keywords**

Neofunctionalism, Haas, regional integration, disciplinary history, EU studies

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Ben Rosamond

## **Introduction**

Academic fields of study cannot help but tell stories about themselves. In almost every discipline or sub-discipline, we find tales about antecedents, foundation, consolidation, evolution, progress and – oftentimes – error strewn blind alleys. It is actually rather unusual to tell these stories via detailed disciplinary histories. Normally, practitioners in given fields have a sense of how their area has developed over time and these accounts are not usually great sources of contention. After all, the cadence of academic discourse is such that we habitually view ourselves as progressing, adding to knowledge and – ultimately – correcting previous misconceptions in ways that bring us closer to a truthful understanding of our object of study. Of course, in the social sciences, we also have to contend with the probability that our very object of study may be undergoing processes of change that perhaps necessitate revisions in the way that we analyse it. Meanwhile, mainstream social science (for want of a better phrase) has long sought to deploy approaches that optimise the chance of uncovering routine dynamics and regularities, which in turn facilitate an explanatory and predictive form of enquiry.

Theoretical approaches within a field are, therefore, usually judged in terms of two sorts of criterion. The first insists that the theory is capable of asking meaningful questions about a given object, while insisting at the same time that a theory's success be judged in terms of its capacity to generate findings consistent with its derivative hypotheses. The second criterion is concerned with the theory's internal consistency and its conformity (or otherwise) to established rules of social scientific practice.

Such has been the fate of Ernst Haas's theoretical legacy to EU studies. There can be few students of the EU who are not made aware, at least in passing, about neofunctionalist theory. It is rare to find a textbook on the subject that fails to mention it and even its most trenchant critics feel obliged still to frame their analysis in terms of the shadow cast by neofunctionalism. For many of these neofunctionalism

represents a coherent ‘other’ against which their own (supposedly preferable) approaches to explaining the EU and elements of European integration can be defined. The symbolic importance of Haas’s neofunctionalism should – at one level – come as no surprise. It is not hyperbole to suggest that *The Uniting of Europe* (Haas, 1958) represents the founding moment of the field of what we now routinely term ‘EU studies’. At the same time, however, neofunctionalism is frequently represented as a theory of EU studies *past* with comparatively little to say to EU studies *present*.

This article presents a re-reading and a re-evaluation of the neofunctionalist theory within which Haas’s work is so prominent. It is a re-reading that suggesting Haas should be routinely revisited by students and scholars of the EU and comparative regional integration, not least because he has been mis-read to the extent that the commonplace stories told about neofunctionalism tend to draw over-exaggerated boundaries between past and present EU studies on the one hand and International Relations and political science on the other. In so doing they render inadmissible and under-read a remarkably rich literature as neofunctionalism is assigned a very particular, pre-historical and thus somewhat marginal place within the unfolding story of the field.

To the end of re-positioning neofunctionalism as still salient toolkit for EU studies, this article proceeds in three broad steps. The first involves situating neofunctionalism in its appropriate social scientific context. This carries with it a number of interesting implications for how we might think about the synergies and oppositions within EU studies, but it only a partial move. Thus secondly, the paper interrogates the extent to which neofunctionalism’s alleged obsolescence might be attached to an over-reliance on the notion of spillover, which in turn is said to dramatically attenuate the theory’s explanatory leverage. The case here is found to be not proven. Indeed and linking with the third section, the paper emphasises the dynamic – as opposed to static – qualities displayed by neofunctionalism in its period of ascendancy. The paper concludes two things about Haas’s neofunctionalism. The first is that the conceptual repertoire of neofunctionalism still has much to say to both EU studies and to studies of comparative regionalism. The second point draws attention to the lessons that should be drawn from neofunctionalism about the ways in which an open, pluralistic EU studies might be continued.

### **The intellectual coordinates of neofunctionalism**

One route to dismissing the continuing salience of neofunctionalism in contemporary EU studies is to claim that it is a theory emanating from the discipline of International Relations (IR). The case is made via a secondary claim that IR is congenitally incapable of asking appropriate questions about the EU political system where the prevailing dynamics are said to resemble the Laswellian constants in which (comparative) political science is so well-versed. Moreover because neofunctionalism is a theory of *integration* and because the day-to-day stakeholders within the EU polity are not motivated to act by a primary interest in the politics of integration, EU studies needs to be steered away from the *problematique* that generated neofunctionalist theorising (Hix, 1994). While Haas's self-definition as an IR scholar lends a degree of *prima facie* credence to the argument (see Kreisler, 2000), it runs into trouble when the broader intellectual location of neofunctionalism is considered in more detail.<sup>1</sup> And here, Haas is neatly lined up as an impeccable Weberian, as a recent evaluation of his work suggests (Ruggie, Katzenstein, Keohane and Schmitter, 2005). This feeds not only his particular interests – the possibility of the rational displacing the irrational in human life and the interplay between actors and ideas – but also his fundamental take on social science and its possibilities. This is crucial to a proper understanding of the intellectual space within which neofunctionalism arose. It is also important to read Haas and the neofunctionalists contextually. Like all academic projects, neofunctionalism was not solely related to its object of study (European integration/the European Communities), but also to the prevailing mores and cultures of academic discourse during its lifespan. To read the work of Haas purely from the vantage point of EU studies present runs the risk of imposing a 'presentist' reading of the theory, where our claims about the neofunctionalist project have more to do with establishing a coherent and stylised 'other', from which we – inevitably – are differentiated.

Haas described neofunctionalism as emerging as an alternate position to IR's dominant theoretical streams of the 1950s. Realism's tendency to inscribe a power-centred logic onto the international system was as problematic for Haas as liberal idealism's pretence that conflict might be transcended through the creation of a Kantian international legal order (Haas, 2004: xiv). Haas's critique of this prevailing academic

discourse drew fuel from two primary sources. First, there was a clear intellectual debt to the functionalist thinking of David Mitrany.<sup>2</sup> Haas was clearly attracted by functionalism's emphasis on the idea that post-national institution-building would/should be premised upon a technocratic engagement with human welfare needs. This helped to form an ontological claim of early neofunctionalism: that human governance was becoming a largely managerial exercise and that grand ideological narratives were on the wane (Haas, 1964: 30-35; Haas, 1968: xix). The most obvious point of departure from functionalism was the neofunctionalists' emphasis on the inherently *regional* quality of institution-building, as opposed to Mitrany's insistence on the flexible and variegated character of post-national institutional forms (a point noted by Mitrany, 1965). This differentiation is explained by the oft-neglected interest of neofunctionalism in the 'background conditions' that provoke institutionalised integration (discussed below).

The second departure from the recurring realist-idealist conversation is rather more significant. Haas (and his colleagues) imported a 'professionalised' social scientific mindset into their studies of European integration and it is here that the boundaries between Haas the political scientist and Haas the IR scholar become fuzzy, if not unsustainable. In this respect Haasian neofunctionalism is of the same intellectual moment that produced Karl Deutsch's transactionalist or communications approach to the integration of security communities (Deutsch, 1964; Deutsch *et al*, 1957). The emphasis, in other words, is on the application of agreed intellectual precepts that together provoke a 'rigorous' approach to the construction of theory. This is transcendent of the IR of the 1950s because of its grounding in empirical investigation and its insistence that theory-derived propositions be exposed to robust empirical tests using the latest intellectual technologies. It goes beyond purely empiricist treatments of European integration because of the analytical leverage that is said to follow from a systematic approach to theory building (see De Vree, 1972; Kaiser, 1965). The first edition of *The Uniting of Europe* (Haas, 1958) is a densely empirical study of the early years of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) and was largely treated as such by its early reviewers (see Rosamond, 2000: 74). But a careful reading, particularly of chapters 1 and 8, shows how Haas was positioning his study of the ECSC as an exercise in grounding a set of general propositions about regional integration in the European experience.

Neofunctionalism is also shot through, from the outset, with a definite interest in the expectation that modern industrialised societies are characterised by a tendency towards social pluralism. In this respect Haas's initiation of neofunctionalism coincided neatly with the high tide of the new pluralist political science that so took hold of US political science in the 1950s (Haas, 1964: 35-40; Haas, 2004: xiv; Lindberg, 1963: 9). This positioning has at least five implications for the conduct of neofunctionalist arguments. The first reinforces the argument made above about the style of social science that was inscribed into neofunctionalism from its birth. Pluralist political science does not simply describe a particular privileging of certain sorts of social actors. It is also bound up with the project to place the study of political phenomena onto ground where systematic explanation is the norm. Second it fuelled Haas's conviction that classical IR was serially flawed. Put simply he criticised the notion that complex modern societies are straightforwardly and permanently attuned to security imperatives with its corollary that international politics must, therefore, be nothing more than (a national) interest-based Hobbesian anarchy. Third, it shifted investigative attention away from national executives and international exchange and towards the significance (if not necessarily the primacy) of organised interests and the role that their dynamic interaction might play in the production of integration outcomes. Fourth, the affiliation to pluralism is integral to the very understanding of integration with which Haas's work began:

Political integration is the process whereby political actors in several distinct national settings are persuaded to shift their loyalties, expectations and political activities to a new center, whose institutions possess or demand jurisdiction over pre-existing national states. The end result is a new political community, superimposed over the pre-existing ones (Haas, 1958: 16)

Insofar as integration involved an outcome (and it is certainly worth noting Haas's emphasis on process in his definition), then Haas imagined an emergent form of political community that was at least analogous to the domestic pluralist polity. It is also important to note his preference for the phrase 'superimposed over' rather than – say – 'replacing'. This might even be read as an anticipation of the themes of the

multi-level governance literature, which speaks of the EU polity in terms of co-existent and overlapping levels of political action where policy stakeholders are relatively mobile between the various tiers of governance (Hooghe and Marks, 2001). The key, however, is the emphasis on the dynamism towards integration that follows from the self-regarding activities of political actors whose ‘loyalties’ are defined in terms of collective perceptions of how their interests might best be served. Such affiliational shifts were also characteristic of earlier functionalist reasoning, but neofunctionalists were rather more interested in the altering cognitions of collective actors than those of mass publics. The fifth implication of the neofunctionalist concern with pluralism is the built-in recognition, later teased out as neofunctionalism developed, that the propensity to integrate is greater among societies that are characterised by pluralist complexity. Here it is important to reiterate that Haas’s pluralism did not lead him to conclude that social pluralism was an ever-present feature of all societies. Rather he hypothesised that those societies characterised by pluralism would be more likely to engage in integration. Moreover, his affiliation to pluralism was emblematic of an attachment to a conception of social science that required the clear specification of variables and the postulation of testable hypotheses.

Haas admitted that the epistemological and ontological cartography of neofunctionalism was not openly acknowledged in its founding texts (Haas, 2001: 29, fn1). His last essays on the study of European integration (Haas, 2001; 2004) are perhaps best read as exercises in the retrospective intellectual placement of neofunctionalism that aimed to reveal the theory’s continuing salience *via-à-vis* an assortment of contemporary rivals. What Haas achieved in these papers was a very clear presentation of neofunctionalism as a variety of rationalist theory:

Its ontology is ‘soft’ rational choice: social actors, in seeking to realize their value-derived interests, will choose whatever means are made available by the prevailing democratic order. If thwarted, they will rethink their values, redefine their interests, and choose new means to realize them ... The ontology is not materialistic: values shape interests, and values include many nonmaterial elements (Haas, 2004: xv).



As suggested already, neofunctionalism is a theory that relies on actors – be they social groups or institutions – taking a utilitarian approach to the fulfilment of their interests. There is obvious differentiation from harder versions of rationalism since Haas’s re-presentation of neofunctionalism allows space for the endogenisation of interests through ongoing interaction. Hard rational choice – described by one recent intervention as the ‘normal science’ of EU studies (Dowding, 2000) – treats actors’ preferences as (a) exogenous and to interaction and (b) formally predictable, and institutional exchange as a mechanism for delivering positive sum bargains subject to the formal rules of those institutions (Haas’s dispute with hard rational choice is summarised in Haas, 2001: 30, fn4). Most intriguingly, Haas used these final essays to search for affinities between neofunctionalism and (what is now labelled) constructivism. His interest in developing a ‘pragmatic constructivism’ (Haas, 2004) out of neofunctionalism’s legacy engaged his work with that of a particular breed of constructivists who – epistemologically at least – share Haas’s commitment to the precepts of theory building. It also opens for scrutiny the extent to which neofunctionalism in its heyday was a theory that took seriously the cognitions of actors to the extent that it was able to link the dynamic pursuit of objectives in conditions of societal pluralism to the capacity to change the identitive qualities of those very actors. Haas reiterated that neofunctionalism was an approach to the question of community building (2001: 29). In that respect it shares a primary concern with Deutsch’s transactionalism, an approach that has also recently become susceptible to constructivist capture (Adler and Barnett, 1998). Also the deployment of constructivist vocabulary allows neofunctionalists to cope with some of the problems that their approach to integration encountered in the light of the experience of the European Communities from the mid-1960s. Consider the following passage from Haas’s essay *The Obsolescence of Regional Integration Theory*, which is often (mis)read as an obituary for neofunctionalism:

In large measure the disappointment resulted from not allowing for the possibility that actors’ motives change, that interests and values considered salient and positively linked to integration may give way to different interests and to values with a more equivocal impact on integration (Haas, 1975: 8).

The point is not necessarily that neofunctionalists failed to incorporate a theory of cognitive change into their overall approach, but that it was probably always there within their conception of loyalties, persuasion, the evolution of expectations (Haas, 1958: 292) and interests.

What is also striking about the retrospective reminder that neofunctionalism belongs to the soft rationalist family tree is how this allows us to recast the supposed ‘great debate’ between neofunctionalism and intergovernmentalism, which many appear to take as the (unhelpfully) dominant conversation in EU studies. At a metatheoretical level neofunctionalism and intergovernmentalism (especially as systematised by Andrew Moravcsik, 1998) are pretty much indistinguishable. Haas took this somewhat further in his later essays. He playfully noted that liberal intergovernmentalism’s (LI’s)

core assumptions are identical with those of [neofunctionalism] and seem quite compatible with certain kinds of constructivism as well. It is difficult to understand why he makes such extraordinary efforts to distinguish his work from those sources (Haas, 2001: 30, fn10).

Perhaps the key point here is that, from the vantage point of rethinking images of the disciplinary history of EU studies, the supposed ‘great debate’ between neofunctionalism and intergovernmentalism is not such a great debate after all. This paper has already suggested that neofunctionalism has been narrated into a coherent and stereotypical ‘other’ to allow particular claims about the appropriate disciplinary identity of EU studies to be made. It may also be the case, therefore, that (liberal) intergovernmentalism has been perhaps premature in casting neofunctionalism as its ‘other’ and that LI’s advancement has been partly conditional on the plausibility of this claim.

### **Spillover: neofunctionalism’s intellectual error?**

Moreover, if Haas was correct to suggest that the familial resemblance between constructivism and neofunctionalism is indicative of the latter’s continuing salience, then the work of Haas and his associates should be reintegrated into the field and not simply be treated as a foundational approach that is talked about only as a theory from

which we (in our latter day wisdom) have moved on. The foregoing is a reminder that a disciplinary history/sociology of knowledge approach to Haas's work is likely to chip away at the numerous truth claims that are made about neofunctionalism. But a full reinstatement will require a rather deeper analysis. In particular, we return here to Haas's own insistence that his approach to social science is a method of securing analytical leverage and transcending descriptive empiricism.

The neofunctionalist project was from the outset a comparative exercise in regional integration theory. The explicit purpose of the neofunctionalists was to utilise the pioneering European experience of integration to generate hypotheses for testing in other contexts. In short, the plan was to develop not a theory of European integration, but to arrive at a more generic portfolio of propositions about the dynamics of integration in any context (Barrera and Haas, 1969; Haas, 1961; 1967; Haas and Schmitter, 1964). Without this capacity for application beyond the European case, neofunctionalism would become nothing more than (at best) an exercise in dense description. It would be 1 and, as a result, alternative methods of securing analytical leverage would need to be found.<sup>3</sup> The primary problem that is often used to show why neofunctionalism failed in this enterprise is that (again at best) neofunctionalism discovered a series of dynamics that were able to account for the early years of European integration (roughly 1950-1965), but then emphatically failed to account for the evolution of the Communities thereafter. In addition, because these dynamics were specific – both temporally and spatially – there was no way in which neofunctionalism could operate as a general theory.

At the core of this problem, it seems, was Haas's discovery in *The Uniting of Europe* of the process of 'spillover'.<sup>4</sup> Spillover was originally used to capture the process through which the expectations of social actors shifted in the direction of support for further integration. Haas described how key social groups within national contexts came to support deeper and more expansive integration. New supranational institutions became focal points for such actors, not least because these actors were able to envisage these new centres of authority as potential suppliers of outcomes that were consistent with their preferences (Haas, 1958: 292). Haas also concluded from his study of the ECSC that an initial decision to integrate was likely to spawn

pressures for deeper and wider integration. Moreover, this would happen independently of any overt ideological preference for ‘more Europe’:

Sector integration ... begets its own impetus toward extension to the entire economy even in the absence of specific group demands and their attendant ideologies. Thus, ECSC civil servants speaking for national governments have constantly found it necessary to ‘harmonise’ their separate policies in order to make it possible for the integrated sectors to function, without necessarily implying any ideological commitment to the European idea (Haas, 1957: 297).

Spillover was suggestive of automaticity – the idea that the logic of integration is somehow self-sustaining, rational and teleological. In this respect, Haas was arguing along the same lines as emerging theorists of economic integration (notably Balassa, 1962) who saw a decision to initiate a free trade area as potentially unleashing a set of logics that might culminate eventually in the total merger of hitherto discrete national economies overseen by centralised institutions of economic governance. The idea of spillover as an automatic process was reinforced with Leon Lindberg’s more formalised definition, which

refers to a situation in which a given action, related to a specific goal, creates a situation in which the original goal can be assured only by taking further actions, which in turn create a further condition and a need for more action, and so forth (Lindberg, 1963: 10).

It has often been said that neofunctionalism contained within itself a conception of ‘cultivated spillover’ (Tranholm-Mikkelsen, 1991), that is a specific theory of how, once created supranational institutions act as strategic advocates on behalf of functional linkage and deeper/wider integration. The idea does not feature as heavily as is sometimes supposed. There are hints in Lindberg’s idea that the actions the new institutions create situations that are only resolvable through spillover (1963: 11). In his essay ‘International Integration: the European and the Universal Process’, Haas (1961) thought through the circumstances in which contracting national governments would not default to lowest common denominator outcomes. One such condition

would be an act of delegation by those governments of a measure of authority to an institution, whose mission would be ‘inherently expansive’ (Haas, 1961: 376). The key to provoking spillover dynamics, as Haas later noted, is the exposure of a sector or a set of tasks to supranational control (Haas, 2004: xxi). The initial assumption of both Haas and Lindberg was that the spillover process was inherently expansive and irreversible.

While Haas (1958) and Lindberg (1963) were able to argue that they had detected evidence of spillover within the European Communities, the assumption of automaticity appeared to run into severe empirical trouble in light of the Gaullist recalibration of the EC into a more overtly intergovernmental direction. Moreover, and perhaps more tellingly as a test of the theoretical purchase of neofunctionalism, spillover appeared to be a phenomenon that was entirely local to the European context. Joseph Nye (1971) expressed the problem in terms of the probability that neofunctionalism had unearthed a genuine phenomenon, but one that was utterly specific to the case and not at all generic to processes of regional integration. A logical extension would be to suggest that a theory with spillover at its core could not survive in the competition to develop a general explanation of integration worldwide.

This line of thinking is reinforced somewhat if we contemplate the circumstances in which neofunctionalism secured a mini-revival during the late 1980s and early 1990s (see *inter alia* Mutimer, 1989; Tranholm-Mikkelsen, 1991). The so-called *relance* of the integration project under the jurisdiction of the Delors Commission seemed to suggest that spillovers were once again occurring. However, this partial revival did not overcome the objection that spillover was a European specificity, thereby underscoring neofunctionalism’s dubious credentials as a theory of integration. Haas (1971) himself acknowledged this problem long before this partial rediscovery of his theoretical apparatus. Nor did it take into account the substantial amount of work undertaken by neofunctionalists in general and Philippe Schmitter (1971, 2004) in particular to refine the concept in ways that took account of the possibility of disintegrative dynamics taking hold and decoupled the ideas of spillover and automaticity.

However, a careful re-reading of the development of neofunctionalist thinking casts a degree of doubt upon the notion that the lack of spillover elsewhere somehow destroys the potential of the theory. Here it is useful to look at those contributions of Haas and others that endeavoured to look beyond the European case and think about the probabilities of regional integration taking hold (or not as the case may be) elsewhere. At this point there is a very clear recognition, within *early* neofunctionalism, that spillover is to be treated as an empirical phenomenon that is found (probably) only in the European Communities. The question then becomes why did spillover take hold in the European context? As David Mutimer (1989) notes, there is a presupposition in this literature that spillover takes hold only within a set of specified conditions, namely situations where there is an *a priori* interdependence between the component economies. Charles Pentland (1973: 119) reinforces this replacement of the concept of spillover by describing it as ‘merely an organizing concept or hypothesis about the likelihood of integration when certain specified conditions are met’.

In other words, the real action in 1960s/1970s neofunctionalism was the search for candidate independent variables that might help scholars to assess the likelihood of either (a) the initiation of regional integration or (b) the success or failure of integration schemes that were already set in motion. Thus the ‘failure’ of first wave regional integration to take off in the manner of the European Communities was much less of a problem for neofunctionalists than might be imagined. Philippe Schmitter recently pointed out that the capacity to explain non- or dis-integrative outcomes is a unique feature of neofunctionalism in its original guise (Schmitter, 2004: 47) and notice how Haas presented the impasse of Latin American integration as a success for neofunctionalism:

We predicted successfully that regional integration would not readily occur in Latin America and I explained in the preface of *The Uniting of Europe*, 1968 edition, that the explanatory power of NF in leading to new political communities was confined to settings characterised by industrialised economies, full political mobilisation via strong interest groups and political parties, leadership by political elites competing for

political dominance under rules of constitutional democracy accepted by leaders and followers (Haas, 2001: 29-30, fn2).

In Haas and Schmitter's careful restatement of neofunctionalism, we find a clear hypothesised explanation of why spillover occurs in some situations of integration but not in others. The Haas-Schmitter typology suggests that certain unions are more prone to automaticity and politicisation (i.e. to spillover) and that the explanation resides in a cluster of background variables that account not only for motivations to initiate integration schemes, but also for the likelihood of spillover dynamics setting in once initiation has commenced. Thus scholars are directed to the *ongoing* examination of these background variables (rates of transaction between participating units, the adaptability of participant actors to moments of crisis and the prevalence or otherwise within participating units of bureaucratic styles of decision-making) (Haas and Schmitter, 1964: 718).

The exploration of 'background conditions' is embedded in some of Haas's earlier work on the subject (for example, Haas, 1961), where societal pluralism, high levels of economic development and ideological convergence among participating units appear as crucial precursors for the formation of regional integration schemes. Having said this, the early attempts at theorising background conditions did tend towards treating spillover dynamics as a kind of dependent variable (Barrera ad Haas, 1968; Haas and Schmitter, 1964). In other words, the search for reliable independent causal mechanisms was premised on the idea that what was to be explained was the functional and political linkages through which the remit of integration would expand and deepen. The conflation of integration and spillover does appear to have been a problematic quality of a good deal of neofunctionalist work, but a recovery of Haas's original (much less determinate) definition of integration would imply that there could be a disassociation of the dependent variable from localised European discoveries. In particular, as Haas (1971) noted, the recasting of the dependent variable of integration theory as the creation of some form of post-national community could be explained by independent variables other than those originally ascribed by neofunctionalists to the European case. In short, integration theory/neofunctionalism should (a) open itself to numerous possible independent causal mechanisms and (b) think of its dependent variable as 'putative' (1971: 27) and

non-teleological. Both *explanans* and *explanandum* could be divorced from their Eurocentric grounding and neofunctionalist reasoning could still prevail. This would necessitate a re-focussing of the neofunctionalist project onto its foundational tenets: that integration (whatever its destination) was an instrumentally driven process that proceeded through the prosaic interactions of stakeholders whose perceptions, cognitions, values and loyalties might change in the course of that interaction.<sup>5</sup>

### **The dynamism of neofunctionalism**

There is a temptation to develop presentational ‘snapshots’ of theoretical perspectives, where we list a series of foundational propositions, which are then amenable to some form of external critique. The foregoing has already hinted that such a reductionist approach to neofunctionalism carries with it the danger of (a) misreading the intentions of its practitioners and (b) simplifying an otherwise rich and textured theory. To these perils must be added the problem of presenting neofunctionalism as a static theory, thereby ignoring its almost pathological tendency towards auto-critique. This is yet another reason why it is important to understand neofunctionalism’s epistemological roots. It is precisely because Haas and his colleagues allied themselves explicitly to Weberian social scientific norms that they practised ongoing self-reflection and thought very carefully about the limitations of and the necessary refinements to their theory of regional integration.

We have noted already how Haas and others worked hard to distinguish the empirical discovery of spillover in Europe from the general propositions of their theory. What strikes the reader of these works now is how this group of scholars managed to re-evaluate and reiterate core neofunctionalist ideas in spite of profound empirical and epistemological challenges. This section examines three moments where the dynamic and reflexive qualities of Haas’s theory became apparent: the empirical challenges to neofunctionalism posed by the ‘Gaullist moment’ in the Communities that commenced in the mid-1960s, the extensive epistemological self-critiques of the early 1970s and Haas’s heroic attempt towards the end of his life to reinstate neofunctionalist theories of regional integration into academic discourse.

Stanley Hoffmann’s (1966) intergovernmentalist engagement with integration theory is probably the best-known example of neofunctionalism coming under sustained



pressure. Hoffmann's lengthy critique commenced with a demonstration that de Gaulle's ascendancy as a dramatic actor within the Communities provided evidence of the enduring qualities of national interests and nationalist sentiment, both of which were – in Hoffmann's reading – neglected or by-passed in neofunctionalist reasoning. Along with the later, more social science-oriented intervention of Roger Hansen (1969), Hoffmann developed an argument that emphasised the hard barriers between 'low', technocratic politics and 'high' politics, where non-negotiable issues of national interest came into play. Hence the neofunctionalist prediction of the politicisation of functional integration was seriously questioned. To this Hansen added arguments about neofunctionalism's neglect of the role of external structural imperatives in shaping member-state preferences in the direction of positive sum integrationist bargains. He also hypothesised that societal pluralism – for neofunctionalists a precondition of integration – could be responsible for retarding integrative progress as sophisticated societies are better able to receive messages about potential threats (such as those posed by supranational institutions) to their integrity.

Haas worked through many of these objections in the author's preface to the second edition of *The Uniting of Europe* (Haas, 1968). While he regretted the apparent bracketing of national sentiment in the original formulation of his theory, he did note that the original technocratic/'end of ideology' assumptions had brought forward the important observation that the idea of 'the nation' was not fixed and immutable (Haas, 1968: xiv). Moreover, the impact of de Gaulle in the mid-1960s merely served to illustrate the absence of such 'dramatic actors' at the Communities' point of origin (Haas, 1968: xxiv). The institutional and strategic design of the ECSC was inscribed with functionalist, incrementalist and technocratic logics because these were the prevailing ideas of the time. Also, Haas admitted that pluralism is not a static condition and that complex European societies had undergone significant change in the decade and a half that had elapsed since the Treaty of Paris. This meant that societal expectations would develop autonomously of the growth of the Communities and thereby have the capacity to exercise independent effects upon the integration process as it evolved (Haas, 1968: xv). Finally, and in anticipation of Hansen's arguments Haas took the first steps in acknowledging the significance of exogenous stimuli upon the conduct of integration and the constituent states of the Communities.

His point – again underlining neofunctionalism’s departure from classical IR – was that the imperatives set by the global security structure of the 1940s/1950s did not amount to a sufficient condition for the institutional choices made by European actors at the time (Haas, 1968: xiv-xv). He later extended the analysis of external conditions to postulate that variable (perceptions of) exogenous contexts might help to explain why different integration projects might take alternative pathways (Haas, 1975, 1976)

Therefore, critiques of the early intergovernmentalist variety allowed neofunctionalists like Haas to clarify their propositions. It is striking how Haas responded to his critics by reasserting the significance of societal, external and ideational preconditions of integration. In so doing he laid the ground for (a) the reorientation of neofunctionalism as a theory of ‘background conditions, (b) Schmitter’s (1971) efforts to perfect neofunctionalism as a theory of disintegration as much as integration and (c) Nye’s (1971) interest in ‘perceptual’ background conditions.

Neofunctionalism’s second moment of auto-critique was centred around Lindberg and Scheingold’s edited volume *Regional Integration: Theory and Research* (Lindberg and Scheingold, 1971), a project evidently designed not to plug the holes in a leaky theory, but rather to take it to a new level of analytical sophistication (Rosamond, 2000: 86). Haas’s personal contribution to the project (Haas, 1971) was, as ever vital. Aside from his hugely important dissection of the dependent variable problem (discussed above), Haas showed how there was an inherent tension between (a) the logic of spillover and the attendant presupposition of the politicisation of the integration process and (b) the continuing emphasis on integration as a process inspired by short-run interest fulfilment and shaped by ‘muddling through’ rather than grand designs and dramatic political acts. The logic of (a) would suggest the downgrading of (b), yet (b) was given primacy in the neofunctionalist account because it helped to explain both conditions of foundation and the conduct of actors once the institutional arena was functioning.

In this respect Haas was joined by others in conceptualising integration in political systemic terms. This was always present in neofunctionalist writings, a fact that seems to have been forgotten (see Rosamond, 2004 for a more detailed argument). Haas’s

initial definition of political integration (quoted above) together with Lindberg's own brand of neofunctionalism (Lindberg, 1965; 1967) tied together notions of integration and system. The common denominator, yet again, was the consequence of societal pluralism and incrementalism as a prevailing political condition. Thus social complexity is not only a background condition; it also defines the parameters of action within a regional integration project once initiated. Lindberg and Scheingold's (1970) Eastonian take on the European Communities explored the conditions by which integrative dynamics might be extended to new sectors and how more expansive networks of actors might be drawn into the web of integration. Meanwhile Haas's concept of 'turbulent fields' (Haas, 1976) applied to the Community system a form of policy analysis that anticipated integrative solutions to dilemmas arising in contexts where self-regarding actors operated in a climate of perpetual complexity and imperfect knowledge.

In short, neofunctionalism remained true to its roots as a critique of IR orthodoxies. Its appropriation of political science and policy analytic ideas of pluralism and incrementalism enabled it – eventually – to reach a plateau where the generic sources of integration could be hypothesised and where the once rather 'Whiggish' idea of spillover was not only subsumed, but also refined to the extent that it became associated with explanation of how actors engineer greater mutual interdependencies. Thus, contrary to some later claims about neofunctionalism, it aspired by the mid-1970s to offer analytical leverage in two comparative directions. The first involved a capacity to formulate a revised theory of regional integration and the second showed the way to thinking about how systemic environments should be conceptualised in conditions of complexity.

Also apparent was a growing recognition of cognitive and ideational variables as key to understanding integrative processes. It is fitting, therefore, that Haas's final contributions to EU studies (2001; 2004) should devote themselves to exploring the connections between neofunctionalism and constructivism. This matter is dealt with elsewhere in this special issue, but for the sake of this paper's argument it is worth emphasising that Haas's neofunctionalism was shot through with an interest in cognitions, perceptions, the sociological dimensions of institutionalised interaction and what we would now label intersubjectivities.

Having said that, the attempt to consummate some sort of meta-theoretical union between constructivism and mature neofunctionalism does present difficulties, which – for some – are likely to pose profound problems. In the first place, neofunctionalism and constructivism are different varieties of theory in that the latter in a ‘first principles’ claim about the social (as opposed to rationalistic) status of interaction. Thus there are obvious and potentially irresolvable oppositions at an ontological level between theoretical treatments of integration that follow from constructivist premises (see Christiansen, Jørgensen and Wiener, 2001; Risse, 2004) and varieties of rationalist theory (such as neofunctionalism and intergovernmentalism). Perhaps Haas’s late moves to look for points of reconciliation between the two approaches can be read as consistent with the claim made by some (notably Fearon and Wendt, 2002) that, while ontological differences between rationalists and constructivists remain deep and insoluble, there is nevertheless a case for the pragmatic ‘bracketing’ of these metatheoretical disagreements.

## **Conclusions**

This paper has tried to offer a re-evaluation of neofunctionalist thinking, paying particular attention to the contributions made by Haas. The core argument, stated simply, is that stereotypical constructions of neofunctionalism tend to (a) place the theory firmly in a camp labelled IR and (b) treat neofunctionalism rather too statically. The intention here has been to tease out ways in which neofunctionalism continues to speak relevantly to contemporary EU studies. A re-reading of the work of Haas and his various collaborators and associates is essential to show that the story of neofunctionalism is better told as a tale of theory building and evaluation that resonates with long-established social scientific norms. The twin ideas that it was defeated by the unravelling realities of the European Communities and a drastic loss of analytical leverage deserve (at the very least) to come under sustained scrutiny. Aside from the obvious bridges between neofunctionalism *circa* 1958-1976 and twenty-first century treatments of the EU polity such as multi-level governance and historical and sociological institutionalism, there are two further lessons to be drawn.

First, if the re-inspection of Haas’s work reveals that – in his words – neofunctionalism ‘is no longer obsolescent’ (Haas, 2004: liii), then the candidacy of neofunctionalism for reinstatement within theories of comparative regionalism should

be seriously considered. The latter has recently undergone something of a revival, but within this academic discourse neofunctionalism has been treated very much as a component of the 'old' (as opposed to the 'new') regionalism. As Alex Warleigh has recently argued (Warleigh, 2004), the drawing of hard boundaries between these two phases of regional integration studies parallels the processes of differentiation that this paper cautions against. The second lesson is more localised to EU studies. The recovery of neofunctionalism from its reputation as a failed academic experiment is rather more than an exercise in academic excavation. The fact that it was buried in the first place is indicative of a tendency within the present scholarly community to produce narratives of the field's history that draw robust boundaries between past errors and present rigour. In the wrong hands this can induce all manner of closures and the establishment of claims that effectively outlaw particular kinds of work. Beyond its (recovered) analytical salience, neofunctionalism was/is a remarkably open-minded intellectual project that drew sustenance from across the spectrum of the social sciences. In this regard, there is no better exemplar for scholars of the EU than Ernst Haas.

## Notes

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1. The caricature of IR that emerges in such critiques of neofunctionalism is also deeply problematic, but largely beyond the scope of this paper (see Rosamond, 2000: ch. 7; 2004 for more detailed arguments). Haas himself seemed perplexed and somewhat irritated by the debate about whether IR or comparative political science should be the appropriate parent discipline of EU studies – a debate he dismissed as ‘silly’ (Haas, 2004: xv1, fn4)
2. Mitrany’s work on functionalism spanned some four decades. Many of his key works on the subject are gathered in Mitrany, 1975.
3. Hix’s (1994) rejection of integration theory together with the research agenda endorsed by the relatively new journal *European Union Politics* should be read as one way in which the *sui generis*, n = 1 dilemma can be resolved. By changing the co-ordinates of EU studies to think of the EU as a political system of the sort familiar to seasoned political scientists, numerous comparators (i.e. other political systems) come to the fore.
4. I note *en passant* that the term ‘spillover’ does not feature in the index of *The Uniting of Europe*.
5. Perhaps the most systematic attempt to re-state neofunctionalist premises in these terms is provided by Nye, 1971.

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