

**A Review of *The Anarchical Society:
A Study of Order in World Politics,
Part 1 (2002) by Hedley Bull***

The purpose of Hedley Bull's text is to illuminate the nature of order in world politics through the prisms of prudence and virtue. Bull, a leading proponent of the English School of international relations (IR) theory, contends that within the anarchic international political system, conditions of order and cooperation do exist (Bull, 2002: xxxii). He further asserts that this existence can — and does — occur independent of international law or organisation (Bull, 2002: xxxii) through the English School's foundational claim "that sovereign states form a society" (Linklater, 2005: 84). This essay reviews Bull's vision of international order "within the present system of sovereign states", and broadly assesses his open question of whether this system "provides a viable path to world order" (Bull, 2002: xxxii).

In the absence of a supreme authority, Bull accepts the Hobbesian framework of an anarchic, self-help international system in which the principal actors are sovereign states and so "make the behaviour of each a necessary element in the calculations of the other" (Bull, 2002: 9-10). However, he rejects the realist maxim that balance of power (as systemic order) is the automatic goal of states. Contrary to Waltz, Bull separates balance of power from system, treating them instead as distinct concepts, thereby dismissing the idea that the natural condition of states is war beyond morality, legal restriction, or human society (Bull, 2002: pp.24, 45). Here, Bull's philosophical pendulum swings Kantian towards the universalist principle that states can mature beyond systemic interaction to share common interests, values, culture or civilisation to naturally form a "society of states (or international society)" (Bull, 2002: 13) distinct from the international system.

Bull's international society functions primarily to preserve the system, state sovereignty and "basic values of social life" (Bull, 2002: 5). It is bound by common interests of its member states, a shared set of rules (of law, custom, tradition, or morality) and institutions, therefore limiting conflict between states (Bull, 2002: 13). Activity that sustains these primary aims constitutes Bull's vision of

international order which he defines as a state of affairs rather than an objective to be attained (Bull, 2002: xxxiii).

In this way, Bull's channeling of English School theory can be seen as a synthesis of realist and liberalist elements striving for a less extremist iteration, and with historical precedence. As neorealism and liberalism can trace their philosophical roots to Hobbes and Kant respectively, so English School thought descends from the Grotian '*via media*' perspective (Wight, 1966: 91, quoted in Linklater, 2005: 85) which views international society as not only constrained by "prudence or expediency but also by imperatives of morality and law" (Bull, 2002: 25). Bull warns against "reify[ing]" any of these elements as this would distort reality into "an illusion" (Bull, 2002: 49). This ontological pluralism makes common sense. To illustrate, engaging realism in a contextual vacuum presents only a "geopolitical snapshot of the Cold War" (Falk, 1997, quoted in Little, 2000: 403), a fixed historical era. If we are to reconcile changes within world politics, it is logical to accommodate and compromise approaches in order to allow the complex reality of IR "to be illuminated by considering it from [any] particular point of view" (Watson, 1987: 53, quoted in Little, 2000: 402).

Bull maintains that the idea of society has always been present in international politics. Its survival is sometimes threatened (by vacillating predominance of one of the Hobbesian, Kantian, and Grotian traditions in states' policies throughout history, geography and circumstance, but it is never completely extinguished, even in conditions of war (Bull, 2002: 40). Rather, society goes "underground, where it continues to influence the practice of states" (Bull, 2002: 40-41). For example, Allied and Axis adherence to the Geneva convention during World War Two and the maintenance of American-Soviet diplomatic relations during the Cold War (Bull, 2002: 41) is strong evidence Bull cites of international society maintaining a degree of order during militaristic or ideological warfare. Thus, there is validity to Bull's dismissal of the neorealist argument "that the history of international relations consists simply of disorder or strife" (Bull, 2002: 22).

Ultimately, Bull's system of sovereign states as "local agents of the common good" and international society as 'rational political order for humanity' (Brown: 2001: 428) lays the foundation for his viable