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Hedley Bull and his contribution to international relations*

STANLEY HOFFMANN†

It was an honour and a privilege to be asked to review Hedley Bull's contribution to the study of international politics. Over the years we had discovered many affinities. We had a common way of looking at the theory and practice of international politics, even if we did not always give the same answers to the questions we both asked. I was always impressed by the extraordinary clarity and lucidity of his arguments, and by their fairness—by his way of taking into account all the points in his adversary's case, and all the objections to his own arguments and assumptions. Both of us looked at a discipline that had developed in the United States after the Second World War as outsiders who did not support all the premises of its main practitioners and theoreticians.

I was always an admirer of the extraordinary sweep of Hedley Bull's mind, and yet when I reviewed his work I was left with an inevitable sense of incompleteness. He accomplished so much, but there were also so many more directions in which he might have gone and in which he was beginning to go.

The most striking aspect of his work is its extraordinary unity and the coherence of his approach: the unity of method and of substance, and the consistency and continuity of his concern about international society and those contemporary issues which are decisive for the survival of an international society. However, there were also significant tensions in his work: they gave it its density, and make it particularly instructive and thought-provoking.

The first part of this essay will be devoted to Hedley Bull's world view, and part two to his writings about the contemporary world political scene.

Hedley Bull's world view

The first question to be taken up here is, where does Hedley Bull belong within the study of international relations? The second is his unity of method and substance, to which I have already alluded; and the third is Bull's view of international society.

At first sight it appears to be obvious where Hedley Bull fits into the discipline of international relations. He seems to take up a position close to realism, the school of thought that looks at international relations as the politics of states in their external aspects, to quote from his own account of Martin Wight's approach.¹ Realism starts by rejecting all forms of utopianism, as Bull himself did. His most magisterial criticism of utopianism is to be found in *The anarchical society*, where he disposed decisively of such concepts as world government, a new medievalism, a regional reconstruction of

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1. Introduction to Martin Wight, *Systems of states* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1977).

the world, and revolutionary schemes for change.² Even in his first book, *The control of the arms race*, he had been incisively critical of proposals for world disarmament.³

And yet things are not so simple. Unlike many destroyers of utopias and many realists—I have in mind George Kennan and Henry Kissinger—Bull never showed great enthusiasm for giving policy advice to usually indifferent princes. Many contemporary realists have been attracted to policy guidance like moths to a flame. Bull had no particular objection to scholars giving policy advice as long as it went to a morally acceptable government;⁴ he himself served as an adviser to the British government on arms control matters for several years. Yet, on the whole, he showed more tolerance than enthusiasm for this task. His attitude was similar to that of Raymond Aron: in the field of international relations, as indeed in political science in general, what Aron called ‘wise counsel’ was quite naturally derived from scholarly research, but the main purpose of scholarship was to advance knowledge.

To be sure, not all realists have felt a need to outdo the bureaucrats on their own ground (certainly Hans Morgenthau never did). But there were two other very important differences between Bull’s approach and that of the realists. The first came from his distrust of the realist model of state behaviour, which lies behind the realists’ prescriptions. Morgenthau was the one who put it most forcefully in the first few pages of *Politics among nations: the struggle for power and peace* (5th edn, New York: Knopf, 1973): one can derive from the study of history, from the logic of interstate relations in the international milieu, and from the geopolitical position of a state, something like a rational set of rules for the conduct of its foreign policy. Instances of departure from such rational behaviour are treated, in the realists’ works, as aberrations. Hedley Bull was no believer in the ordinary rationality of states, nor in the usefulness of developing prescriptions for rational action, because he was even more pessimistic than the realists. To them, departures from the norm are exceptions; to Hedley Bull, stupidity, folly, miscalculations and mischief were always possible.

The second major point of difference between Bull and the realists lay in his point of departure. He did not begin his study, as the realists do, by looking at the state and its power, a concept about which he has rather little to say. (And what he does say about power is actually quite close to the realist emphasis on military power as the heart of the matter.) Bull’s whole body of work takes as its point of departure the group, or milieu, or ‘ensemble’ which states form by interacting. It is the international system, and, above all, international society. When, in his famous article attacking the so-called scientific approach, he drew up a list of important questions to be asked in the study of international politics, Bull’s first question was: ‘does the collectivity of sovereign states constitute a political society or system, or does it not?’⁵ Similarly, in his critique of E. H. Carr’s *Twenty years crisis, 1919–39: an introduction to the study of international relations* (2nd edn, London: Macmillan, 1946), written thirty years after its publication, he concluded that ‘in the course of demonstrating how appeals to an overriding international society subserve the special interests of the ruling group of powers, Carr

2. Hedley Bull, *The anarchical society: a study of order in world politics* (London: Macmillan, 1977).

3. Hedley Bull, *The control of the arms race: disarmament and arms control in the nuclear age* (2nd edn, New York: Praeger, 1965).

4. In ‘Strategic studies and its critics’, *World Politics*, July 1968, Bull states that being an adviser to a government is, for a scholar or a scientist, unbecoming or not depending on ‘what we take the moral nature of that government and its objectives to be’ (p. 599).

5. Hedley Bull, ‘International theory: the case for a classical approach’, in Klaus Knorr and James N. Rosenau, eds., *Contending approaches to international politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 27.

jettisons the idea of international society itself. This is the idea with which a new analysis of the problem of international relations should now begin.⁶ Bull's interest in this idea was constant. Between the late 1950s and the 1980s, American scholarship moved away from general theories towards greater specialization, and it has tended to split into two groups—the strategists and the political economists. Bull never separated his interest in strategic questions from his investigation of the nature, history and evolution of international society.

Method and substance

Thus we come to what I called the unity of method and substance in Bull's work. The most fruitful way of grasping this is to start with his critique of the scientific approach to international relations theory: his rejection of 'propositions based on logical or mathematical proof, or upon strict empirical procedures of verification'.⁷ He attacked the practitioners of the scientific approach for a number of reasons. In the first place, this method kept its practitioners from asking what were, according to him, the essential questions about international relations.⁸ The practitioners of the scientific approach seemed to Bull like characters who, having lost a watch in the dark, look for it under a light even though they did not lose it there because the light happens to be there. As Bull put it himself, their method 'keeps them as remote from the substance of international politics as the inmates of a Victorian nunnery were from the study of sex.'⁹ Secondly, he disliked the scientific method because he thought its practitioners were obsessed by the quest for a far greater degree of precision than the field of international relations allows. Hence his harsh critique of Karl Deutsch's 'measurements', which, according to Bull, ignored the connections between the units being measured and the significance of what was being counted. Hence also his sarcasm about the abstract model-building technique displayed by Morton Kaplan, whose models, according to Bull, were scientifically disguised versions of reality which either lacked rigour and consistency precisely because rigour and consistency are not to be found in international reality, or achieved those qualities at the cost of a complete divorce from reality. They were not like economic models, which often manage to remain not only faithful to, but capable of explaining, the way in which economic variables interact. Thirdly, Bull thought that the practitioners of the scientific method were obsessed by an urge to predict and to resolve the issues which they tackled, and he accused them of brashness. These criticisms were addressed primarily to the behaviourist school of the mid-1960s. In 'International theory' he kindly exempted from blanket condemnation such kindred souls as Raymond Aron, Kenneth Waltz and myself. However, in his major work on *The theory of international relations* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1979), Kenneth Waltz himself subsequently became a prime example of the very approach which Hedley Bull had condemned many years before. Mercifully, Hedley spared Waltz's book, which, as far as I know, he never reviewed.¹⁰

6. Hedley Bull, 'The twenty years crisis thirty years on', *International Journal*, Vol. 24, No. 4, Aut. 1969, p. 638.

7. Bull, 'International theory', p. 21.

8. Hedley Bull, 'New directions in the theory of international relations', *International Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 2, p. 279.

9. Bull, 'New directions in the theory of international relations', p. 26.

10. On the basis of his remarks about game theory in 'Strategic studies and its critics', pp. 601–2, one can presume that he would have been equally sarcastic about current attempts by champions of 'rational choice theory' to use game theory not just 'to illustrate points that are independently arrived at' but 'in order to determine solutions' to problems of international relations.

What was his own preference? He talked about ‘a scientifically imperfect procedure of perception and intuition’, which sounds remarkably like Max Weber’s concept of understanding.¹¹ In Bull’s view, in other words, beyond the causal explanation of events or of sequences of events, the social scientist still has to travel one more step and try to grasp the meaning of the whole; and this requires, above all, judgement in the construction and testing of hypotheses. Interpretation, the attempt to seize the meaning of what has been explained, is an artistic enterprise rather than a scientific one. Unlike many of his colleagues in the field, therefore, and unlike Kenneth Waltz in his last book, Bull did not begin his study of international relations with the requirements of method. (Waltz, for instance, begins by laying down a very interesting and rigorous notion of theory, and then, by applying it to international relations, manages to leave most of the substance of the field outside the straitjacket.) Bull started with the questions which were essential to him: questions about society and culture, about the place of war and the conceptions of it, about the relations between the influence of the system and the nature of the state in the determination of events, about the right of states to intervene in each other’s affairs—and so on.

To begin with such questions is to realize, first, that they can only be understood by reference to the works of the political philosophers who have discussed and sharpened them. Secondly, they can only be answered comparatively across time and place; for instance, to be able to talk intelligently about what looks like the extraordinary amount of intervention that occurs in the present-day international system, or about the seemingly original network of contemporary transnational relations, it is useful to be able to compare the present system with past ones—something which led Hedley Bull to conclude that the amount of intervention today was not all that unusual, and that the network of transnational relations was far less original than many have claimed. Thirdly, to begin with these questions is to understand that they can only be evaluated by reference not merely to the state’s power but also to the rules which states observe, and particularly to that quite special category of rules which constitutes international law.

Bull called this approach a traditional one, and it was indeed traditional if one considers that the study of the history of ideas and of diplomatic history is the very thing from which the modern scientific approach had tried to emancipate the discipline of international relations; but it was a traditional approach at the service of as rigorous an understanding of international relations as the field allows. In this way, Bull’s work is very different from that of traditional international lawyers or diplomatic historians. His very concern for a systematic understanding of international relations leads him, as it had led Raymond Aron, to insist on conceptual distinctions in order to make a clear analysis possible. In *The anarchical society* one finds a whole forest of distinctions: between the different meanings and kinds of order in international affairs, between the different meanings of justice, between the different functions of war, between intervention and inequality, different types of balance of power, and so on.

Hedley Bull’s humanism

Ultimately, Hedley Bull’s work is a blend of intelligent social science and humanism. I insist on his humanism because it takes so many forms. Predominantly, it takes a Weberian form. Weber wanted the social scientist to respect and empathize with the

11. Bull, ‘International theory’, p. 20.

meanings which political actors gave to their actions, just as he wanted him to be aware of and to highlight the frequent divorce between actors' intentions and the results obtained. It is because of this divorce that it is possible to talk about a system—which might be described as a net of interacting variables which often foul up the intentions of the actor—but it is because human beings are the actors and have the intentions that there is no need to look at the system in the way in which, for instance, Morton Kaplan seems to have done: as a divinity which determines the acts of the various players as if they were puppets on a string. To illustrate this point one can say, as Bull often did, that a balance of power in the international society, or the current balance of terror, can develop even though their creation or preservation was not the deliberate policy or intention of all the participants in international society. On the other hand, how this balance will turn out, how stable it will be, *will* depend to a very large extent on the participants' intentions and policies.

Humanism is also manifest in the extraordinary density of the historical knowledge in Bull's works, particularly the most recent ones—something which is not to be found in the works of many of his American colleagues. Lastly, humanism is manifest in the importance of moral concerns in Bull's works.

Ethics and international relations

Hedley Bull's writings on ethics and international relations are more suggestive than systematic. The interest shown in ethics by specialists in international relations has increased enormously in the last ten years, as Bull himself noted. His own concern with this issue started much earlier, but even in his work an increasing emphasis on ethics can be traced in the last years of his life. His thoughts on the subject can be summarized as follows.

First, as far as the study of international relations is concerned, international society has a moral basis; indeed, Bull's concern for international society and his interest in moral conceptions are inextricably linked. The beliefs of the members of the international society cannot be reduced to their interests and strategies of power—a reduction for which Bull criticizes E. H. Carr sharply, particularly in pointing out that the famous principle *pacta sunt servanda* cannot be described merely as a cynical expression of the interests of the strong. According to Bull, the beliefs of the members of the international society influence the historical evolution of that society. Consequently, the study of international relations must address the question of moral beliefs, in particular in order to establish which beliefs represent a consensus of the members, what the substance of that consensus is, and where its limits and weak points can be found. This was a task which Bull performed rigorously in the last years of his life, both as regarded conceptions of justice in the present international system¹² and in his essay on South Africa. There, taking up the argument of South Africa's defenders, who complained that the South African government was the victim of a double standard, he argued:

there is not a world consensus against communist oppression, or oppression by military governments, or of one Asian or African ethnic group by another, comparable to that which exists against this surviving symbol of a white supremacism that all other societies in the world, to different degrees and in different ways, have repudiated over the last three decades . . . While this should

12. Hedley Bull, *Justice in international relations*, Hagey Lectures, 12–13 Oct. 1983 (Waterloo, Ont.: University of Waterloo, 1984).

not lead us to fail to protest against . . . other [violations of human rights,] we should also recognize that it is not now possible to unite the international community on any other basis than that of a clear repudiation of white supremacy.¹³

Secondly, Bull believed that the social scientist must recognize that there can be no value-free inquiry; and, he added, if it were possible it would be of little interest—another reason for Bull's distrust of the purely scientific approach.¹⁴ Nevertheless, while the presence of values is one thing, to smuggle them in or to peddle them explicitly is quite another. There are many warnings in Bull's work against this—against models of the future into which the writers inject their value preferences by indulging in excessive 'salvationism', and against moral preaching in writings on arms control and international justice which oversimplify highly complex moral issues and disregard some of the costs of the solutions they recommend. Indeed, Bull is critical of moral generalizations. To him they are impossible, because of the complexity of concrete situations and because of the very difficulty of the choices faced by statesmen. For instance, the avoidance of war is not always the highest imperative (Bull was writing about Munich); justice and order cannot always be reconciled; the universal promotion of human rights can be 'subversive of coexistence' because of the absence of any substantive consensus in this field.¹⁵ Bull was painfully aware not only of the gap between moral imperatives and political reality but also of the multiplicity of moral perspectives in the contemporary world. As he pointed out in his critiques of works by E. B. F. Midgley¹⁶ and Michael Walzer,¹⁷ neither natural law nor Walzer's brand of liberal individualism is acceptable as the truth: for instance, they have been rejected by revolutionaries and by absolute pacifists.

On the other hand, as early as p. 25 of *The control of the arms race* we find the following statement: 'Moral judgments . . . should never be overridden or sacrificed'. The social scientists need to ask broad moral questions. These questions—about the role of the great powers, or the claims of the Third World, or the virtues of the states system—Bull always asked. He did so because he believed that moral issues were susceptible to rational investigation, and could even be settled if the parties shared the same moral premises or if the premises involved were universally held—the respect for human life, for property and the sanctity of agreements.¹⁸ Both the multiplicity of moral alternatives and the possibility of moral argument led Hedley Bull to demand that social scientists and philosophers dealing with moral issues in foreign affairs should try to transcend subjectivity and lay out the foundations of their positions. (This was the rationale behind his critique of Michael Walzer, whom he commended for his determination to revive just war theory, but blamed for refusing to explain his own moral theory from the ground up.) However, it must be said that Bull himself never did lay out fully the foundations of his own moral position; he also recognized that, ultimately, there is often no rational way of choosing between moral ends.¹⁹

13. Hedley Bull, 'The West and South Africa', *Daedalus*, Vol. 111, No. 2, Spr. 1982, pp. 255–70, at p. 266.

14. Bull, 'New directions in the theory of international relations', p. 284.

15. Bull, *Justice in international relations*, p. 13.

16. Hedley Bull, 'Natural law and international relations', *British Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 5, 1979, pp. 171–81.

17. Hedley Bull, 'Recapturing the just war for political theory', *World Politics*, Vol. 31, No. 4, July 1979, pp. 588–99.

18. Bull, 'Natural law and international relations', p. 180.

19. Bull, 'Natural law and international relations', p. 181.

The third point to be made about Hedley Bull's thoughts on ethics and international relations is that this omission did not prevent him from making explicit prescriptions (in just the same way that he would have liked a 'self-proclaimed realist' like E. H. Carr to have made out a moral case against Munich). It is not surprising to find two sources behind Bull's own explicit prescriptions: the natural law tradition, and the values of the West. Natural law, 'a doctrine which proclaims that rules are valid among all mankind quite irrespective of the social and cultural facts of the time', he found particularly interesting, 'now that there exists a global international society that has clearly outgrown its originally European social or cultural base, . . . and doubts may be entertained as to whether any genuinely universal society or culture has yet taken its place'.²⁰ It was the values of the West which he evoked in his argument for 'some degree of commitment to the cause of individual rights on a world scale',²¹ as well as in his condemnation of South Africa and of Western, primarily American, arguments for supporting the white regime there.²² It is natural law, tempered by his awareness of the limits and fragility of consensus in the realm of justice, which informs his recommendations about the concept of justice we should embrace in the present international system. Taken together, Bull's writings show that he heeded his own advice about the need to go beyond the language of the sociology of moral belief to that of morals—to that of rights and duties.

Hedley Bull's view of international society

We now come to his view of international society. Here is where Hedley Bull's originality lies: it is *society* rather than *system* which he, virtually alone among contemporary theorists of international affairs, stresses and studies. *System* means contact between states and the impact of one state on another; *society* means (in Bull's words) common interests and values, common rules and institutions. His point of departure is what has sometimes been called the Grotian approach. More will be said about this below. Here we find one of the differences between Bull and Aron or Waltz: unlike him, they start with the international system. A second feature of Bull's originality, a consequence of his emphasis on society over system, is his theory of change, which is very different from that of Waltz or Robert Gilpin. Gilpin attributes change in international affairs to the rise and fall of hegemonic powers; Waltz sees change as the result of shifts in the distribution of power between states, leading from a bipolar to a multipolar system, or vice versa. In contrast, Bull is interested in the cultural change which produces a different perception of common interests in a context of coexistence and cooperation. He is, in other words, emphasizing the passage from a mere system to a society, or from a narrower society to one that includes many more members. He is also interested in the effects of major upheavals like the Reformation, the French Revolution and the Russian Revolution, which introduced drastically new beliefs and rules into the international society.

What was the origin of Bull's concern for the international society? It seems to have started with his dissatisfaction with alternative approaches. Bull rejected a purely Hobbesian view of international affairs as a state of war, or a struggle of all against all. He refuted Hobbes by using some of Hobbes's own arguments, so as to explain why the state of war between nations was more bearable than the state of war between

20. Bull, 'Natural law and international relations', p. 171.

21. Bull, *Justice in international relations*, p. 13.

22. Bull, 'The West and South Africa', pp. 269–70.

individuals, and why there was therefore no need for a universal Leviathan (the state's ability to protect the industry of its subjects, the lesser vulnerability of the state compared to the naked individual because of its greater power, the unevenness of states compared to the puny equality of individuals in the state of nature).²³ Moreover—unlike the Hobbesians—Bull denied that it was only the existence of central state power which could make possible the emergence of a society, or could prevent its collapse or disintegration; anarchy *is* compatible with society, because the state is not the only reason for obeying rules in society. In one of his first published essays on the British commonwealth of nations, he noted the incompatibility of theories of Realpolitik with the reality of a group of states whose mutual relations were not inherently antagonistic.²⁴

On the other hand, Bull also rejects what he considers to be Kant's universalism and cosmopolitanism, and he criticizes Kant for inconsistency²⁵—although, in my opinion, he misreads Kant, who was much less cosmopolitan and universalist in his writings on international affairs than Bull suggests. Kant never advocated a world state or government, after all, and Bull failed to distinguish here between two conceptions which Michael Walzer, for instance, separates carefully: cosmopolitanism, which tries to overcome the barriers to the unity of mankind set by the existence of nations and by national borders; and what Walzer calls the 'legalist paradigm', which looks at international relations as a society of states with mutual rights and duties, a conception which is not only similar to Bull's but actually quite close to Kant's.

The second source of Bull's view of international society is his intellectual sympathy for historical authors whose work stressed society even at a time when (as he recognized) reality was really more like a jungle than a society—the theologians and international lawyers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and particularly Grotius. Clearly there is a parallel between these men, writing at a time when, amidst considerable strife and chaos, a radically new system was being created out of the disintegration of the medieval one, and today's expansion of the international system into the first truly global one.

Bull's approach to the study of international society is marked by one important tension, which gives rise to a number of unanswered questions. This is the tension between his realism and his emphasis on the rules and institutions which dampen anarchy—international law, the balance of power, even war as a means of preserving a balance, the role of the great powers with their special responsibilities to international society, the rule of non-intervention. He also emphasizes the community of culture that makes international society possible and requires, if not ideological homogeneity, at least the toleration of ideological differences. In other words, he stresses elements which, taken to an extreme, cause him to appear perilously close to the construction of Hans Kelsen, which he himself criticizes. Kelsen analysed international law, both as the product of a system in which states interact in pursuit of their separate interests, and as the product of an organized society which collectively delegates functions to its members for the enforcement of the common good. In one of his very last works, on international justice, Hedley Bull wrote about 'the concept of a world common good' and about the need, 'in the absence of a supranational world authority, . . . for particular states to seek as wide a consensus as possible, and on this basis to act as local

23. Hedley Bull, 'Society and anarchy in international relations', in Herbert Butterfield and Martin Wight, eds., *Diplomatic investigations* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1966), pp. 35–50.

24. Hedley Bull, 'What is the Commonwealth?', *World Politics*, Vol. 11, No. 4, July 1959.

25. Bull, 'Society and anarchy', pp. 48ff; *The anarchical society*, p. 262.

agents of a world common good.’ In the next sentence, however, we are reminded that ‘states are notoriously self-serving in their policies, and rightly suspected when they purport to act on behalf of the international community as a whole’; such a pretence can be ‘in fact a menace to international order’.²⁶ The same oscillation can be found in some of his writings about questions of military security: in *The control of the arms race*, Bull’s concern, he tells us, is not national security but international security, the security of the society of states as a whole—a concept which I myself, with a view of international relations a little more Hobbesian and less Grotian than Bull’s, have always found difficult to understand, since in the matter of security ‘international society’ consists of members who distrust one another and spend most of their time if not actually attacking each other then at least protecting themselves from attack.

Bull’s own kind of realism, however, was never left far behind. He always managed to correct his Grotian inclinations by an infusion of what he called Oppenheim’s pluralism. As a reader of Oppenheim Bull had commented on the inadequacy of a domestic model for the understanding of the nature of international law or international society; and he stressed the role war plays as an ordinary instrument of state policy rather than as a crime condemned by international society or a sanction enforcing that society’s principles. Bull had commented that the adherence of states to international law does not mean that they respect it. He had expressed his scepticism about what he called ‘the neo-idealist fashions’ of today—the recent tendency of some American scholars to depreciate the continuing importance of force in international affairs and to celebrate the emergence of a transnational society.²⁷ Bull was aware of the fact that in the period following the First World War the revival of Grotianism had led to a utopian attempt to reform the international milieu into a society in which war would be banned unless it was an exercise of collective security—an effort that may have been detrimental to the placing of limits on the conduct of war (Bull cites such cases as the Italian invasion of Abyssinia, the Nuremberg trials, and the Korean war).²⁸

The questions that Hedley Bull left unanswered are of two kinds. In the first place they have to do with the delicate balance between Kelsen, or Grotius, and Oppenheim, or Hobbes—the distinction between society and system, which Bull never expounded systematically. He showed that anarchy was compatible with society; but how much society, as it were, is likely to flourish in an anarchical structure? Conversely, could the factors of society ever hope to overcome the antagonisms which are built into and grow out of an anarchical structure?

Bull’s own work laid stress on the emergence of a universal international society, a society previously dominated by Western states and gradually extended, first to non-Western states which accepted European values, and then to all the new states which emerged from decolonization after the Second World War. This expansion raised a question which Bull had only begun to address in his most recent work: can one have a universal society without a common cultural framework, with a cosmopolitan ideal that is only an ideal, indeed, one that is not even shared by all the cultural systems? Bull’s final answer was yes, so long as there are still common interests.

The second kind of question which Hedley Bull left unexplored, and which is sorely

26. Bull, *Justice in international relations*, p. 14.

27. Hedley Bull, ‘Civilian power Europe: a contradiction in terms?’, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 21, Nos. 1–2, Sept.–Dec. 1982, at pp. 150–1.

28. Hedley Bull, ‘The Grotian conception of international society’, in Butterfield and Wight, eds., *Diplomatic investigations*, pp. 51–73.

missed, concerns the distinction, not in theory but in international reality, between different types of international society, in the way in which Martin Wight had distinguished different kinds of states systems. From the point of view of the international order (and this was always Hedley Bull's), there must be a difference between an international society endowed with a common culture and one whose only cement is provided by the (perhaps very short-lived) common interests of its members. From that same point of view, much depends on the kind of culture which underlies a given international society, on the nature of its values, and on how broad or deep the culture is. These are questions which Bull had only begun to address in his writings about the present-day international system.

Hedley Bull and the contemporary world scene

The three aspects of Hedley Bull's work that will be taken up here are, first, Bull's analysis of the nature of the contemporary world scene; secondly, Bull and the nuclear conundrum; and thirdly, Bull's writings on the superpowers and the power balance.

Bull's analysis of the nature of the contemporary world scene is extremely rich; but it is marked by considerable ambivalence and unresolved tension. The question he asked was, what is the degree of society present today? His reply is complex and ambiguous.²⁹ He produces considerable evidence to show that there has been a dangerous weakening of the elements of society in the current system. He lists the following factors. First, obviously, there is the superpower conflict. Surprisingly enough, this is the factor Bull writes least about, perhaps because he believed his American colleagues were writing about almost nothing else; there is particularly little in his work about the ideological aspects of the superpower conflict. In the second place, Bull finds that the balance of power has been preserved, but, in contrast to that of the nineteenth century, it continues without a common culture as its basis. Thirdly, in addition to the balance of power, there is now mutual nuclear deterrence; but Bull finds it extremely fragile, for reasons to be mentioned below.

The fourth factor in the weakening of current society that Bull discusses, particularly in his most recent work, is the 'revolt against the West', the positions taken by the developing nations. This revolt he sees as triply dangerous. It is dangerous, first, because it entails a partial repudiation of the pre-existing rules and institutions of international society. He mentions practices by Third World states which violate the principle of diplomatic immunity; he refers also to multiple interventions by some of these states in the affairs of others, as if the barriers against intervention existed against intrusions by the West only. In his 1983 lectures on justice at the University of Waterloo, he added that many countries of the Third World repudiate the Western view that the rights which states enjoy in international law must be compatible with their obligations to the international community. The revolt against the West is dangerous, secondly, because it results from and contributes to the increasing cultural heterogeneity of international society. In a conference on international relations held in April 1968 at Bellagio—the conference attended by Aron and Morgenthau where Hedley Bull complained about the primitive character of Hans Morgenthau's theory—he remarked that we were now living in a worldwide international system that had 'outrun its cultural basis'. In his lectures on justice he gave as examples of

29. This analysis is derived from his essays in Hedley Bull and Adam Watson, eds., *The expansion of international society* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984), and in Hedley Bull, ed., *Intervention in world politics* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984).

increasing cultural heterogeneity the differences between Western and Third World conceptions of self-determination, human rights and economic justice. Lastly, the revolt against the West is dangerous because it increases what might be called structural heterogeneity, on two levels. On the one hand, as he pointed out, many of the new states are states by courtesy only. And at the level of the system, the demands of the Third World aim at attaining not only greater racial, economic, and cultural equality, but also a redistribution of power, which, according to Bull, raises insoluble issues, particularly in the military realm where the need for order (he had in mind the need to preserve the world from further nuclear proliferation) must sometimes supersede demands for justice.³⁰

Hedley Bull's optimism

Ultimately, however, Bull's reply to this question—what is the degree of international society today—is reasonably optimistic. Here again, several factors must be listed. First, the attractiveness of war as an instrument of policy has diminished, at least between the superpowers. Secondly, the superpowers themselves have set up various arrangements in order to preserve peace, although these arrangements—which include the Non-Proliferation Treaty of 1968—are not always in strict conformity with justice. Third come the many influences which reinforce the norm of non-intervention. Bull deemed these forces more powerful than the opposite forces which weaken it, and he presented them as a mixture of external power factors, domestic ones, and ideological or cultural beliefs. However, many of the factors which deter intervention are themselves ambiguous, because they are also facets of the revolt against the West: many barriers against intervention were set up by anticolonialist actors, by the revolt against racism, by the demands for greater economic justice. This ambiguity complicates the problem.

The fourth factor to mention, according to Bull, is the gradual acceptance by the non-Western states of the basic elements of international society, despite all the breaches of it which I have mentioned above. Bull thought that such essential ingredients of international society as the principle of state sovereignty, international law and international organization were being accepted, in theory and practice, by the non-Western states. He also gave to their demands for greater power and greater justice a reformist rather than a revolutionary interpretation. Fifthly, in his lectures at the University of Waterloo, he talked about an emerging consensus on certain common notions of distributive justice—despite the lack of agreement on who should be the distributor, the principles of distribution, and any theory of the concept of distributive justice in international relations. This emerging consensus may also have been one of the aspects of the contemporary cultural change which Bull saw as a positive factor: it would bring the different cultures which today coexist closer together. Lastly, he stressed his belief that it is possible for an international society to exist without a common culture, so long as there is a solid network of common interests; he pointed out that one should not identify, and confuse, present-day international society with the quite exceptional one of the nineteenth century. (One cannot fail to be struck once again here by the importance Bull attached to values and beliefs, as opposed to 'rules of the game' and what American theorists call 'international regimes', in his account of the components of present-day society.)

30. Bull, *Justice in international relations*, pp. 10–11.

The direction of contemporary change

This balanced analysis raised the question of the forces and directions of change in the current international system. Bull answered this in two ways. Analytically, his answer is somewhat ambivalent. On the one hand, he sees no evidence of the world moving 'beyond the states system'. In *The anarchical society*, he asserts that the states system is neither in decline, nor obsolete, nor dysfunctional. In his opinion, none of the schemes which have been presented for its reform are likely to be realized. On the other hand, he detects the beginning of a 'wider world political system of which the states system is only part';³¹ but, having given us this tantalizing glimpse, he proceeds to remove it from our sight by attempting to prove that what many scholars have presented as entirely new and beyond the states system—for instance, non-state actors and transnational society—either is not new at all, or is really only the states system (or, rather, one dominant state, the United States) in disguise.

The second part of Bull's answer to the problem of contemporary change lies in his prescriptions. At the end of *The anarchical society*, he recognizes that the book constitutes an 'implicit defence of the states system', in particular a defence of the principle of state sovereignty as the best contemporary way of protecting human beings against forcible external interference. Yet Bull was clearly aware of the need for change beyond the status quo, and in a number of directions. Most important of these was his plea for a broadening of the consensus on common interests among states in a way that would include the countries of the Third World. The need to take into account the demands of the 'have nots' was the one positive element he had found in the work of E. H. Carr. Bull's recommendations on justice in international relations showed his desire to satisfy the legitimate demands of the developing countries without in any way giving up essential Western values. This is why he insisted that the recognition of the rights of states should be kept subject to and limited by the rights of the international community, and why he emphasized the importance of what he called a profound change in the perception of justice in international law: 'the rights and benefits to which justice has to be done in the international community are not simply those of states and nations, but those of individual persons throughout the world as a whole'.³² Indeed, the most striking prescriptions in his most recent work concern the need to develop the cosmopolitan elements in the present world culture, not only as they affect the rights of individuals, but with reference to the new conception of a common good for the human species. In both these domains he was aware of the broad range of disagreements between states—especially on human rights questions—and of the absence of any consensus on the means and institutions for stemming 'the dangers of nuclear war, disequilibrium between population and resources, or environmental deterioration'. Nevertheless he tried to suggest ways of moving in this direction, which might be called, if not 'beyond and after the states system', at least a 'states system plus', a states system within a wider one that borrowed elements from the 'domestic model'. Society would thus be sought not only within the (anarchical) states system, but beyond.

Ultimately, in this part of his work we find one tension that could also be detected in the work of E. H. Carr: a tension between Bull's awareness of the special importance of the great powers because of their evident stake in preserving international society (a stake which he thought greater than that of other powers), and his awareness of their

31. Bull, *The anarchical society*, pp. 276ff.

32. Bull, *Justice in international relations*, p. 12.

inadequacy in a global international system in which they cannot fulfil their traditional functions alone any more—for two reasons: because of the greater capacity of smaller powers to resist, and because of the greater potency of ideologies of resistance and of international equality. Like Carr, Bull resolves this tension by an argument in support of a much broader definition by the great powers of their own interests—and of the common interest.

Hedley Bull and the nuclear conundrum

One of the main perils threatening the human species is the nuclear predicament. Hedley Bull's work on arms control is of considerable importance to students of international affairs. First, it was planted firmly in a political context, unlike, for instance, the contribution of Thomas Schelling. Like Schelling, Hedley Bull emphasized the unity of strategic doctrine and of arms control; but unlike him, Bull also believed in the unity of all military policies (whether strategic or arms control) and foreign policy. Secondly, the political context Bull had in mind was never just the superpower rivalry with which his American colleagues are obsessed. Bull tried to analyse the possible contribution arms control might make to international society as a whole, since contemporary society rests to such a large extent on a recognition of common interests. It is always from this point of view that Bull asserted that superpower arms control alone was inadequate.³³ Thirdly, although he thought it far more realistic than disarmament, Bull remained extremely sceptical about the value of arms control as a panacea. For him, it could become one, perhaps, but only if states had arms control as their central objective (and most of the time they do not) or if states behaved entirely rationally. But, once again, he greeted the concept of 'the rational action of a kind of strategic man' with derision, on the grounds that it was good only for 'formal theorizing'. Strategic man, he wrote, is 'a man who on further acquaintance reveals himself as a university professor of unusual intellectual subtlety'.³⁴

What were his main contributions to the study of arms control? They may not appear deeply original today, but they certainly were in 1961. Along with Aron's, his was the main non-American voice in the early—and still the best—chorus of 'nuclear theorists'. In the first place, Bull very soon became aware of the conditions for the stability of nuclear deterrence, and of the risks of destabilization. As early as 1961, in *The control of the arms race*, he had defined the conditions of stability as the absence of any capacity for a disarming first strike and the absence of any capability to defend one's population and one's industries. Destabilization could therefore result both from weapons of increasing accuracy and payload—Bull was disturbed by the appearance of multiple independently targeted re-entry vehicles (MIRV)—and from the development of anti-ballistic missiles or strategic defences in general. Many years ago, Bull reviewed the arguments which had been presented, particularly by the late Donald Brennan, in favour of strategic defences.³⁵ He analysed them with great fairness: he sympathized with the doubts Brennan and Dyson had expressed about the 'rationality models' that underlie deterrence theory. But ultimately he rejected their case: he thought that defences would lead to a dangerous escalation of the arms race,

33. Cf. Hedley Bull, 'Arms control: a stocktaking and prospects', *Adelphi Papers*, No. 55, Mar. 1969, pp. 11–20.

34. Bull, *The control of the arms race*, p. 48.

35. Hedley Bull, 'The scope for Soviet–American agreement', *Adelphi Papers*, No. 65, Feb. 1970, pp. 1–15.

largely because of the countermeasures which each side would obviously be eager to take in order to restore the supremacy of the offensive.

Bull's second contribution to the study of arms control was his awareness of the fragility of arms control as a basis for international order. At the end of his life he seemed to be more optimistic about the stability of nuclear deterrence, in spite of the fact that the theoretical vulnerability of land-based missiles was growing—something which was driving so many Americans crazy. He thought that countermeasures could make these missiles less vulnerable, and that stability could survive the vulnerability of one element of the triad of sea-based, land-based and air-based nuclear systems. Bull wrote that stable deterrence did not depend on or require the doctrine of mutual assured destruction. He thus acknowledged the possibility of what McGeorge Bundy would later call existential deterrence: a condition in which the nuclear powers deter each other from the use of nuclear weapons whatever their strategic doctrine may be.³⁶ Nevertheless, Bull believed that strategic nuclear deterrence could never serve as a satisfactory foundation of international order, for a whole series of reasons. First, deterrence concentrates on a set of *means*, whereas the important question for Hedley Bull concerned states' *ends*. Secondly, it focuses attention on military issues when the important issue in avoiding war is the management and control of political crises. Thirdly, deterrence deals with the prevention of war but leaves out of discussion what states should do if deterrence fails and war breaks out. Fourthly, deterrence is based on that assumption of rationality which Bull always distrusted. Fifthly, strategic nuclear deterrence is an intensely bipolar phenomenon in a world in which nuclear weapons are spreading. Sixth and lastly, a point which Bull made in passing with his usual discretion: peace based on nuclear deterrence alone is 'morally disreputable'.³⁷ It is the same awareness of fragility which made Bull sceptical about the scenarios—so often favoured by American scholars—of limited nuclear war used to compensate for Western conventional inferiority.

Bull's own recommendations in the nuclear realm were conspicuous for their realism. He could be scathingly critical of pleas for unilateral disarmament or for complete and general disarmament. He was sceptical—more, perhaps, than I would be—about the prospects of comprehensive arms control agreements; he showed more sympathy for unilateral and parallel restraints, and he thought partial agreements more probable. He was aware of the impossibility of distinguishing offensive from defensive weapons; and he did not think it was possible to distinguish between weapons on the basis of the different missions assigned to them, since each weapons system is capable of performing a whole variety of missions. He realized that many weapons systems, including anti-ballistic missiles and multiple independent warheads, could be both stabilizing and destabilizing. All these points contributed to his doubts about the chances of comprehensive negotiated arms control. Such negotiations, Bull noted, had actually generated new increases in armaments.

Nevertheless, Bull did not give up on the subject of arms control. He had his own prescriptions. He did not think states needed to put the threshold for mutual assured destruction as high as they did. In other words, it did not make much sense for the superpowers to have (as they now do) something like 10,000 strategic nuclear warheads each. But he was aware of the fact that if the threshold was set too low, the risks incurred in case of a violation—or, put another way, the incentive to attempt to

36. Hedley Bull, 'Future conditions of strategic deterrence', *Adelphi Papers*, No. 160, Aut. 1980, pp. 13–23.

37. Bull, 'Future conditions of strategic deterrence', p. 16.

disarm the adversary by a first strike—would rise correspondingly. He was hesitant about the best formula for arms control. In 1969, before the first large-scale superpower agreements, he suggested the superpowers should try to limit the numbers of deployed launch vehicles; in 1979, after the mixed record of the SALT process, he wrote that the formula of parity in numbers of deployed launch vehicles followed by reductions was unsatisfactory. He wanted nuclear weapons to serve only to deter from the use of other nuclear weapons—a position which anticipated the stand taken by McGeorge Bundy, George Kennan, Robert McNamara and George Ball, among others, against any first use of nuclear weapons in case of a conventional attack. (Bull himself doubted, however, that the conventional capabilities of NATO would allow it to adopt such a doctrine.) Finally, he advocated much greater urgency in the task of preventing nuclear proliferation, and he blamed the superpowers' 'high posture', their constant escalation of their nuclear arms race, for encouraging third parties to become nuclear states.

Hedley Bull and the present-day balance of power

Two interesting tensions are to be found in Bull's work on the subject of the balance of power in the present-day international system. The first of these is a tension between two modes of international society.³⁸ In the first mode, society can be, as he put it, 'contrived' or deliberately arranged. In this respect Bull pointed to the role of the great powers: they form a club which has special rights and duties and performs important functions even in the conflictual bipolar world of today. Bull stuck to this notion, largely because of his remarkably non-Manichaeian view of the contemporary international system. He emphasized the set of 'rules of the game' developed by the superpowers in the 1960s and expanded during the period of detente of the 1970s, which he greeted as a period of progress. But in the second mode, society can be more 'fortuitous'. In this perspective, Bull's emphasis was on a rather more mechanical and contentious balancing of power than the agreements between the superpowers or their observance of mutual respect for each other's spheres of local preponderance. For Bull, the balancing of power was a necessity for the survival of international society; and this conviction led him to repeat frequently an interesting argument, which enraged many Americans. According to Bull, in the world of today, only the Soviet Union is capable of balancing the power of the United States. Bull used this argument to explain, or perhaps explain away, the Soviet military build-up.³⁹

There was another tension in Bull's work on the balance of power: a tension between two approaches to universal society. At one point Bull depicted universal society as resting on a single culture. In the 1968 Bellagio conference, he pointed out that the United States was providing the only basis for the new global society, because American culture had spread through most of the world. He wondered whether the removal of this common basis would not be disastrous, since it could lead either to the risk of Soviet hegemony or to the multiplication of troublesome and potentially nuclear powers. But at a later stage he thought that the universal society which had been formed through the extension of membership to the nations emancipated from colonialism, and which was characterized by the revolt against the West, could only survive by accommodating all the different cultures which exist in it today—even if

38. Bull, *The anarchical society*, ch. 5 (see esp. p. 104).

39. Cf. Hedley Bull, 'A view from abroad: consistency under pressure', *Foreign Affairs*, supplement, *America and the world 1978*, pp. 445–6.

this kind of compromise provided a much weaker common basis than that which European culture had constituted for the international society of previous centuries.

It appears to me that Bull made one attempt to reconcile these divergent notions: in his plea for a West European entity capable of providing its own defence system. It is one of the paradoxes of recent years that non-Europeans have often been more militantly in favour of a European entity than the Europeans themselves. Bull's rather belated but spectacular conversion to 'Europeanism' was a way of achieving a synthesis of his different concerns. First, he saw in the European entity an answer to a problem which he saw as increasingly pressing: the need to balance the power of a United States which in recent years had repudiated detente and appeared to be seeking superiority or even hegemony. Secondly, a European entity was needed to balance the power of the Soviet Union, which had not repudiated detente and whose policy Bull interpreted as probably defensive in its inspiration, but which would remain defensive in action only as long as there was a strong Western guard. Clearly, Bull had become deeply disillusioned with both superpowers. Already in 1980 he had denounced them as ill fitted to the role which great powers had traditionally played—the United States because of its peculiar past and its tendency to proselytize its own vision; the United States and the Soviet Union together because of their instinctive belief that the menace of superior power can be cancelled by virtuous intentions. Both superpowers seemed to him to be insufficiently dependent on the world economy, and plagued by what he called the domestic self-absorption of very large societies.⁴⁰ If neither one nor both together could claim to be regarded as trustees for mankind, maybe Europe could.

Bull believed that Europe had a special link with the Third World, largely because of the combination of a colonial past and a sense of guilt about that colonialism. He thought that Europe was uniquely qualified to conduct in the Third World the policy of accommodation which, according to him, the Reagan administration had abandoned and repudiated. Bull also believed that the Europeans would not follow Mr Reagan's America in a policy of 'constructive engagement'—for instance, appeasement of South Africa—which he deemed strategically as well as morally wrong and attributed to cold war obsessions and oversimplification in Washington. Finally, he thought that the construction of a European political and military entity was vital for West European dignity.

In other words, the West European undertaking seemed to Bull to represent the choice of universalism over 'Americanism' in culture, and of a mixed policy combining balance (between the major powers) and deliberate contrivance (in the relations with the Third World) in international society. Bull's objective was still to strengthen that society: Western Europe, he thought, was the area where the greatest recognition of the need for international society was to be found; and he wished Western Europe to become a great power so as to prevent the rift in the superpower club from becoming irreparable. But, once again, the only thing missing has been the capacity and the will of the Europeans to play such an ambitious role.

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In *The control of the arms race* Bull had written that 'the world is very much more complicated than the arguments' he had presented, and that 'the destinies of nations are not determined by simple choices of the soul'.⁴¹ But Hedley Bull's work has

40. Hedley Bull, 'The great irresponsibles: the United States, the Soviet Union and world order', *International Journal*, Vol. 35, No. 3, Sum. 1980, pp. 437–47.

41. Bull, *The control of the arms race*, p. 212.

illuminated these complications in a way which is unique and original precisely because of the rich tension and dialogue between the Grotian elements of his work and the more pluralistic, conflictual views; the choices of this particular soul were never simple, but always generous and wise. This is why his disappearance at a tragically early age is such a serious loss for all students of international relations. In such a small number of years he has given us at least three reasons for admiring his achievements and continuing his effort. He provided us with the first comprehensive defence and illustration of arms control in an age dominated by the nuclear threat. He gave us the most panoramic and incisive analysis of the rules, institutions and prospects of the 'anarchical society' constituted by the modern states system. And he showed that one can recognize 'the limits of rigour and precision' and be 'on guard against their misuse' without ever 'abandoning rigour and precision in favor' of sloppiness or stridency.⁴² His was a highly civilized voice, in which scepticism and hope were admirably balanced. There are few such voices left.

42. Bull, 'Strategic studies and its critics', p. 602.