



# **The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics**

*Hedley Bull , Stanley Hoffmann (foreword)*

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"The Anarchical Society" is one of the masterworks of political science and the classic text on the nature of order in world politics. Originally published in 1977, it continues to define and shape the discipline of international relations. This edition has been updated with a new, interpretive foreword by Andrew Hurrell. Bull explores three fundamental questions: What is order in world politics? How is order maintained in the contemporary states system? What alternative paths to world order are desirable and feasible? Laws and institutions, Bull points out, shift and change over time. "The Anarchical Society" addresses the unwritten rules which have allowed international order to exist across the ages.

## The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics Details

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# **From Reader Review The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics for online ebook**

## **Naeem says**

It is flawed -- especially chapter 4 on the relationship between order and justice. But this is the first book that develops what I would call a sociology of international relations.

Another must read for those wishing to study IR theory.

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## **Boro says**

I finally found another piece that I can recommend to an IR enthusiast, besides from Weber's Critical Introduction.

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## **Aleksandr Popov says**

A must for those interested in the way international society is organized. A clear and coherent presentation of the central argument of the book makes it even more enjoyable, thus providing an intellectual challenge to stay on track with your thoughts and the ones proposed by the author.

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## **James Voorhees says**

This is the primary text of the English school of international relations. As such, it has much to commend it: a moderate, reasoning tone and good prose. Hedley does not try to provide an all-inclusive explanation of how the world works. He is focused on how order is attained and maintained. He considers alternatives to what he describes as an international society based on the state system. He concludes that such a society, as it exists, is likely to be with us for the foreseeable future, warts and all.

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## **Erich Luna says**

El libro busca reflexionar sobre los rasgos que constituyen el orden en el campo de las relaciones internacionales. Sin embargo, a diferencia de posiciones que consideran solamente aspectos materiales o instrumentales, Bull da lugar a la importancia que pueden tener también las normas compartidas. Es ese aspecto el que lo lleva a hablar de una "sociedad" anárquica. La última parte discute críticas al sistema interestatal, mostrando los alcances y límites de dichas críticas. Finalmente, un punto valioso del libro es que no toma una posición normativa sobre si el orden actual es deseable en sí mismo. Ello es interesante porque permite discutir críticas revolucionarias a dicho orden. Pero también le permite ver más continuidades con el pasado, al punto de contemplar una alternativa neomedievalista, así como de cuestionar la imagen hobbesiana de la anarquía en pro de una imagen más vinculada a las llamadas sociedades primitivas.

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## **BDT says**

Canon of the British School of Global Politics, this work is sadly underestimated and underappreciated in the US. A must read for any student of Political Science or Global Politics

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## **Josh says**

Imaginative but sober, an excellent and underappreciated perspective (long neglected by American IR). As Barry Buzan has written, the English school offers a complete worldview that may bridge the myopic (and implausible) neo-classical debates.

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## **Leah Matchett says**

A must read for any student of international relations, and the foundational text of the English School.

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## **Raj Agrawal says**

[Disclaimer: This is a snapshot of my thoughts on this book after just reading it. This is not meant to serve as a summary of main/supporting points or a critique – only as some words on how I engaged with this book for the purposes of building a theoretical framework on strategy.]

Hedley Bull presents a dialectic perspective on world politics that pulls between two poles of realism and, in my perception, idealism. His book is a great brainstorm of possible options to solve for international anarchy, with his solution being “a thin pluralist international society of states” (viii). However, even while proposing this as a solution, he wrestles with its viability throughout the book, articulating potential alternatives and flaws. This book serves as a profound look into international politics without marrying itself to either pessimism or optimism – Bull clearly hopes for an international society that is self-governing, but also realizes that the necessary impetuses for such a society may or may not be present.

This book is ultimately a book about fairness in the management of world order – much of Bull’s language encircles the ideas of values and morality, with world order being the enabler of morality (and possibly a morality in of itself). The balance of power should “rather be understood as a conscious and continuing shared practice in which the actors constantly debate and contest the meaning of the balance of power, its ground-rules, and the role that it should play” (xx); “Bull’s core definition of international society highlights shared conceptions of interests and common values and the shared consciousness of being bound by legal and moral rules.” (xxiii).

Bull is very clear about operationalizing definitions such as international order and great powers. His clarity in how he builds his argument helps in understanding how he sees the interaction between states and how the great powers might provide a balanced structure for the lesser states to work within. War is not evil, or necessarily some to avoid, but may in fact be a mechanism of maintaining order and the values the

international society (or world order) desire to uphold. World order accounts not only for states, but for non-states as well. Bull tends to believe an international order already exists to some degree, but that a proactive management and understanding of its variables would help great powers to understand the important role they play in its maintenance, as well as to accept the role of regional powers in the club of great powers.

To me, Hedley Bull's theory leans too far into hope. He assumes that all great powers have complementary goals, or at least goals that can be played off of each other in such a way as to maintain international order. Even further, he assumes the possibility of an internationally accepted morality (with diplomats and world lawyers to hold states accountable to such a morality). What he does not recognize is the inherent cognitive biases of states (Jervis; Kahneman; Khong), the fear that asymmetric information causes (Brauer & van Tuyll; Jervis), and the conflict between paradigms (Kuhn) that may cause such friction between great powers that they may not be willing to accept their position among each other in the international order for the long term. While in an ideal society, it makes sense to maintain order, Waltz identified that the three images of man, the state, and the system of states all birth conflict out of what otherwise might have been peace. Again, according to Bull, war is not necessarily a bad thing, but when great powers go to war, they disrupt the society that Bull proposes, and what might have seemed a moral ideal to one group of states (the Axis powers) may fundamentally conflict with another group of states (the Allied powers).

This is a rich book that I appreciated reading! While the idea of solving for Waltz's third image is appealing, it would take an external agency to force great powers to accept their relative role in such a system, accept either the idea of self-help or external pressure, and then trust other states to have the interest of the international society at heart. I am pessimistic about such a possibility, even if Earth itself faced an existential threat.

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### **KimNica says**

A classic of International Relations theory written in clear and understandable prose. Bull proceeds systematically in his analysis of the international society of states, but in the end (although self-acknowledged) becomes a little too defensive of the state system, demonstrating perhaps a lack of political imagination. Despite being written in 1977, and therefore overly focused on bipolarity and nuclear warfare, much of the discussion is still relevant today.

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### **Marty Venty says**

his writing is so boring.

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### **Nicole says**

I read this as a textbook for an International Relations Theory course. The English School according to Hedley Bull lays out an interesting format for the shift between the international system and the world system using Kant's "Eternal Peace." This work is laden with theory similar to constructivism.

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## **Jennifer Taw says**

Having long assigned Morgenthau's *Politics Among Nations* as the introductory text for my honors freshman seminar on international relations, and having found Drezner's *Theories of Int'l Politics and Zombies* inadequate as a replacement, I turned this year to Hedley Bull's *The Anarchical Society*, which I'd always wanted to read anyway and understood to be a seminal text in the field. What a pleasure to read this book, which is written straightforwardly and clearly, defines terms, and provides invaluable jumping off points for discussions of levels of analysis, the paradigms, ethics, and (naturally) order. Bull himself appears to be an anti-positivist realist, an anti-normative constructivist, and an unorthodox liberal, insofar as he acknowledges the limitations of studies of politics (the final line of the book is: "It is better to recognize that we are in darkness than to pretend that we can see the light."), cautions against seeing the world how we would like it to be rather than how it is (illustrated by a wonderful analogy of someone lost in Scotland, but made clear in his frequent acknowledgments of great power dominance and of injustices in the system), reminds us constantly that our political structures and ideas and rules and institutions are all our own constructs (all while not presuming to judge them and sharply bringing any idealist tendencies we might have back down to earth), and, finally, suggesting that the state system's actually a pretty good system for order, with the potential to be better, while admitting that there could be other systems, though there's no sign of their emergence. The book was published in 1977 and seems to be a deliberate rebuke to radical idealists like Richard Falk, who is mentioned often and an indirect challenge to Waltz, who is never (surprisingly; I need to look that story up) mentioned by name, but whose ideas are, respectively, lauded (though attributed to other people) and rejected as drastic oversimplifications. There are some weak bits (the chapter on Diplomacy is particularly flimsy and the deliberate redundancy in the structure of the chapters becomes wearisome), and there are some bits that are definitely of the time (though they allow for useful comparison with contemporary conditions), but overall the book is an excellent introduction to the study of international relations.

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## **Leonardo says**

Sobre el concepto de “analogía doméstica”, tanto desde el punto de vista genealógico como desde el de la política jurídica internacional, ver Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society*.

Imperio Pág.11

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## **SpaceBear says**

Bull's book is one of the most important in the English School, as it lays out the causes of international order and how it is upheld by the presence of international society. He asserts that all societies seek three goals; security, maintenance of agreements, and protection of property. In protecting these goals, states have formed an international order; "by international order I mean a pattern of activity that sustains the elementary or primary goals of the society of states, or international society." He asserts that a system of states (or international system) is formed when two or more states have sufficient contact between them, and have sufficient impact on another's decisions, to cause them to behave – at least in some measure – as parts of a whole. This later becomes a society of states (or international society), which exists when a group of states,

conscious of certain interests and common values, form a society in the sense that they conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another, and share in the working of common institutions. Beyond this is a world order, meaning those patterns or dispositions of human activity that sustain the elementary or primary goals of social life among mankind as a whole. He argues there are three ideas of international society; the Hobbesian (realist), the Kantian (universalist) and the Grotian (internationalist; sees politics taking place in society). He rejects what he terms the 'domestic analogy', which is the idea that we need sovereign at domestically in order to maintain society, and therefore we need one internationally. There is society, he argues, at the international level, even though there is anarchy. He argues that order is maintained by common interest in primary or universal goals, and the existence of order presuppose common interests. Rules and institutions (meaning for him habits and practices) in this context are important, but they are intellectual constructs; they play a part in society only to the extent that they are effective and people follow them.

In the chapters beyond those recommended for comps, he discusses the following, in relation to defining them and questioning how they play a role in maintenance of order: balance of power; international law; diplomacy; war; and the great powers. He then looks at alternatives to the states system, asks whether or not it is declining, whether it is obsolete, and how it can be reformed. The concluding chapter provides an excellent summary of the whole book.

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