

On Global Order:

Power, Values and the Constitution of International Society

(Hurrell, Andrew. 2007. New York: Oxford University Press)

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Since the 1990s, the English School of International Relations has re-emerged as a research program. The work of its classical authors has been taken up again and new theoretical investments have projected it onto the centre of the debates on transformations in the international order after the Cold War. The English School has thus gained a renewed momentum. In spite of the remark by Tim Dunne (1998) as to the alleged development of two streams within this tradition — classical theorists of international society and critical theorists of international society — what one has been able to observe is the theoretical-analytical dispersion around and based on the main concepts inherited from classical authors — Butterfield, Wight, Manning, Bull, Watson and Vincent, among others. However, such dispersion denotes not fragility but the vitality of a theoretical architecture that has plasticity as its central characteristic. Such plasticity has allowed contemporary authors to recover the concept of “international society” — a distinctive element of the English School of International Relations — and to place it, in the first instance, within a dialogue with the main theoretical debates of the field, and, secondly, at the service of an understanding of the problem of international order (see Weaver 1992, 1998, 1999). Such dispersion allows one to understand the recent writings of Linklater and Suganami (2002), on the one hand, and of Barry Buzan (2004), on the other. Both seek to confront one problem: how to deal with the growing density of international society in the light of the concepts inherited from the tradition and, in particular, in the light of the debate between pluralist and solidarist perspectives that marked the intellectual

history of the English School. Linklater and Suganami take up again the tradition with a view to offering it a cosmopolitan orientation. In this sense, the authors propose to treat systems of States in the light of a “comparative historical sociology” that has a markedly transcendental orientation (Linklater and Suganami 2002, 191ff). Such treatment allows for the construction of an ideal type of international citizenship resulting from a progressive process of civil socialisation of States and other international actors. Barry Buzan, for his part, reconstitutes the tradition through its dialogue with Wendtian constructivism. His work seeks to capture the transformations in the international order by means of the reconstitution of the dimensions of International Relations in terms of the triad interhuman societies/transnational societies/interstate societies (Buzan 2004, 90ff). In the author’s perspective, the pluralist and solidarist positions convert into two poles of a spectrum that permits one to understand the degree of socialisation present in each of the dimensions of his triad. In spite of their analytic potential, the propositions lose sight both of the specific dimension of power relations and of the normative tension inherited from the classical authors.

This context allows one to understand the delineations of Andrew Hurrell’s book *On global order: Power, values, and the constitution of international society* (2007). It is an ambitious piece, as it sets out to discuss the possibilities of promotion of a legitimate global political order by an anarchical society of sovereign States. Such a challenge is even more meaningful since the author proposes to shed light on the problem of manufacturing the international order based on three prisms, expressed on the book’s frontispiece: “the need to capture shared and common interests, to manage unequal power, and to mediate cultural diversity and value conflict” (Hurrell 2007, 2). The reading of international politics proposed by Hurrell also repositions the English School within the theoretical-analytic debates in the field of International Relations. Hurrell, though, takes up what is certainly the most fruitful element of the tradition: the tension between order and justice. Indeed, since he aims to comprehend the dynamic of international politics in the light of power relations and of the normative constitution of international society, Hurrell recovers that which at another moment he identified as the most ambiguous point in the work of Hedley Bull: “this point where justice becomes a constituent part of order and where power-political and moral arguments come together, but never wholly coincide” (Anderson and Hurrell 2000, 39).

Positioning the English School’s inherited tradition for the debate on the international order and its processes of legitimisation means, primarily, having a commitment to the irreducible plurality of values. In this sense, Hurrell begins his diagnosis of contemporary international politics with a warning: “the language of ‘international order’ or ‘global governance’ is never politically neutral. Indeed a capacity to produce and project proposals, conceptions and theories of order is a central part of the practice of power” (Hurrell 2007, 20). Such a warning announces the treatment that the author will offer to the debate

between pluralists and solidarists. One is not talking about adopting one perspective at the expense of the other, but rather of bearing in mind two questions that should guide the prudent researcher, inasmuch as they make relative the two positions: How do forms of global governance relate to the distribution of power (p. 55-6)? Under what conditions do actors accept playing a certain role or behaving in a certain way (p. 77ff)? Such questions allow the analyst to shed light upon one of the central issues in politics: legitimacy. In Hurrell's words: "Legitimacy, can therefore be seen as a strategic move in a political game and needs to be understood as much as a part of the messy world of politics as of the idealised world of legal or moral debate" (p. 79). Legitimacy therefore is the element binding order and justice: "the problem of legitimacy arises precisely because of the unstable and problematic relationship between law and morality on the one side and law and power on the other" (p. 79). Legitimacy as the central issue of international politics — this is the key to understanding both the analysis of the dynamic of international society in the twenty-first century put forward by Hurrell and its positioning within the process of dispersion around the legacy of the English School.

The book is organised in three parts. The first proposes a review of the debate between the pluralist and solidarist positions. At the end of three chapters, Hurrell suggests dealing with the problem of order in contemporary international society on the basis of the concept of complex governance. The author understands complex governance as processes of institution-building and of rule-making capable of regulating the flows and transactions that take place in a globalized environment. These are processes that occur between states and around them, through transnational networks that relate with civil actors and market agents (p. 95ff).

The second part of the book devotes five chapters to dealing with key questions in contemporary international politics: nationalism and identity politics; human rights and democracy; war, violence and collective security; economic globalisation and international inequality; and, lastly, the environment. For each of these agendas, the author describes the process of erosion of the pluralist conception of international order. In the field of international security, Hurrell notes, the pluralist conception built around a set of minimum norms of coexistence and the balance of power institution, gives way to an order that "(...) seeks much tighter control over the use of force and reaches deep into the ways in which domestic societies are organized" (p. 191). In this sense, the five chapters that make up the second part offer the reader a picture of the structural change within which one observes the wearing away of international governance formulas and, simultaneously, the demand for "deeply intrusive rules and institutions" (p. 292) from the point of view of the national *poleis*. Such institutions should be able to overcome, in the words of Volker Rittberger (2001), the jurisdictional and operational vacuum that is characteristic of a time when

one observes a mismatch between international institutions and a globalized international society. Lastly, the third part of the book devotes two chapters to an examination of two apparently contradictory tendencies: regional fragmentation and the construction of an imperial order.

The recognition of a growing demand for rules capable of producing order in an environment of a global scale marked by the increasing relevance of non-state actors ends up challenging the minimalist conceptions of international order. This challenge results above all from the loss in legitimacy of the institutions that used to sustain the nation-State as a receptacle capable of containing economic and cultural flows, as well as social relations, within a given territory. The most critical face of the incongruity of international institutions in the face of the very dynamic of international society can be found in the demands for justice. As Hurrell notes, “questions of justice inevitably arise in the context of changing patterns of global governance because of the way in which conflicting societal values and different social, cultural and economic preferences are to be ordered” (Hurrell, 2007, p. 296). Andrew Hurrell’s recovery of the problem of justice based on the raising of the debate on international institutions’ legitimacy takes him back to the cradle of the English School and positions him alongside the classics. But this positioning, unlike what is suggested by Tim Dunne’s formulation, does not mean a reproduction of inherited categories. Rather, it means a critical reconstitution based on what seems to make the tradition stand out: the tension between power and legitimacy.

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