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An International Society – If You Can Keep It...

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Abstract: This paper is a defense of the ideal of an international society of sovereign states in an era of growing challenges to its practice. However, in order to defend the ideal of international society in an era of growing threats to the practice of this ideal, particularly in the forms of transnational harm, graphic interstate inequality, revisionist non-state actors and confrontational US foreign policy, I agree with those scholars that the theory of international society needs to be revised. While the English School (ES), also referred to as Rationalism, has examined and defended the ideal of an international society, the current problems facing the society of sovereign states require us to rethink the conceptual tools of the ES. While this paper defends the desirability of a society of sovereign states, I argue that the pluralist-solidarist divide invites us to make ultimately unhelpful choices about ethics and politics within contemporary world politics. Consequently, I am going to propose that rather than concentrating on the ends that such a society ought to uphold, we ought to concentrate on the ways in which an international society could be sustained and the roles that individuals could play in the contemporary constitution of a robust international society.

This paper is a qualified defence of an international society of sovereign states in an era of growing challenges to its practice. Contemporary issues such as the increasing incidence of transnational forms of harm, graphic levels of interstate inequality and state weakness, and unilateral US foreign policy all challenge the viability and defensibility of a world where sovereign states are the foremost sources of legitimate political community which are facilitated by the norms and institutions of international society which support the formal separation of these communities. However, in order to defend the ideal of international society I agree with those scholars that the theory of international society needs to be revised. While the English School (ES), also known as rationalism, is a group of scholars that have examined and defended the ideal and practice of an International society, the current problems facing the existence of a society of sovereign states require us to rethink the conceptual tools of ES.

In particular the pluralist-solidarist divide in ES thinking needs to be recast. The pluralist-solidarist divide asks whether the principle of sovereignty is valuable and whether states can only agree upon sovereignty or whether broader moral and political purposes can exist between sovereign states. While this paper defends the desirability of a society of sovereign states, I argue that that the pluralist-solidarist divide invites us to make ultimately unhelpful choices about ethics and politics within contemporary world politics, and is also based upon a weak conception of how international society norms are actually used. I am going proceed to defend the idea of international society and criticise the pluralist-solidarist divide in three steps. First, I am going examine the theory of international society and demonstrate some of the ways that the contemporary practice of the international society of states is under strain. Second, I am going to critique the pluralist-solidarist divide in international society thought. Lastly, I am going to and advance an alternative to this divide and propose that rather than concentrating on the ends that such a society ought to uphold, we ought to concentrate on the ways in which international society could be sustained.

Before proceeding it is important to spell out my motivations for developing this qualified defence of the idea of an international society. The reasons are three-fold. The first and foremost reason for defending the ideal of an international society is the actual world pressures on the practice of an international society and sovereign states in the face of challenges stemming from accelerating globalisation, uncompromising American foreign policy and other related phenomena. It seems clear to me that at the moment that the ever-fragile idea of a society of sovereign states is under considerable stress. Furthermore, and just as importantly, I don't think the pluralist-solidarist divide in international society theory is helpful in assisting us in articulating a reasoned defence of progressive form of international society within this context. While this divide is informative in regards to humanitarian intervention, when it is used in reference to other questions in international order it is less helpful. The intent here is open a door to more wide-ranging defences and critiques of international society rather than narrowing the debate.

The second reason for defending the ideal of international society, is that the main articulators of this ideal, the ES approach to IR theory, has faced a significant array of critics in recent times. Ultimately I am not convinced that these criticisms are totally reasonable¹, and although I do believe that constructivism is superior to ES in terms of explanatory capability and an ever deepening research agenda, I still think the normative aspects of the ES are important, often overlooked and in need of critical scrutiny. Third, I fear that a robust society of states may be the best we could have for the foreseeable future. While moral and political cosmopolitan arguments have become popular conjectural models for a future world polity, I doubt that we can depend upon such a universal moral or political order in the near future. The imperative to develop world order and justice within and through a society of sovereign states a crucial project of IR scholarship in my view.

The Practice and Theory of International society

An international society is “is both an idea and assumed to be an actual historical and evolving association between states”.² Such a society exists, as famously stated by Hedley Bull “when group of states, conscious of certain common 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”.³ It is important to see that the membership of this society is limited to states and when we talk about states being ‘conscious’ we in fact refer to the agents of states – statespeople. For an international society to exist it is necessary that statespeople act in accordance to norms and principles of international society, so that while they will act in accordance with national interest power politics as well as humanitarian interests and politics, they will act with “international responsibility” as well.⁴ This means that statespeople will attempt to act in accordance with the norms of international society such as international law so as to promote international order and so that their state will be seen as a good international citizen in their conduct with other statespeople.

Central to the normative order of an international society is the idea that states coexist and recognise the primary role of states in world politics *visa vi* other non-state forms of political organisation, and furthermore, that sovereignty is the institutionalised basis of this recognition. In essence, states in this society “regard themselves as bound by certain rules in their dealings with each other, such as that they should respect one another’s claims to independence that they should honour agreements in which they enter and that they should be subject to certain limitation in exercising force against one another”.⁵ Consequently, the cardinal norm of this form of international order is sovereignty and the related ideal practices include respecting each states territorial integrity, non-intervention in each states domestic affairs, sovereign equality and

¹ See for example: Ian Hall, ‘Still the English patient? Closures and inventions in the English school’ *International Affairs*, 77:4, (2001) 931-46.

² Paul Keal, *European Conquest and the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: The Moral Backwardness of International Society*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) p 2.

³ Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society. A Study of Order in World Politics* (London, Macmillan, 1977), p. 13.

⁴ Robert Jackson, ‘The Political Theory of International Society’, in K. Booth and S. Smith eds. *International Relations Theory Today* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1995): 110-118 at p.111.

⁵ Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, p. 13.

peacability between states as the normal state of affairs. These norms are enacted in diplomatic exchanges, mutual respect for international law, and in through membership of international organizations such as the United Nations.

A hallmark of the ES is an awareness that the logics of international society are paralleled by logics of power politics and the operation of transnational politics. In reality multiple reasons overlap in the actual practice of world politics, as Bull notes “international society is no more than one of the basic elements at work in modern international politics, and is always in competition with elements of a state of war and of transnational solidarity and conflict”.⁶ While this multilayered conception of world politics is one of the strengths of the ES, and reflects the conceptual pluralism held by ES scholars, it must also be remembered that the foremost significance was placed on the logics of international society, because the “characterization of the English School as advocating pluralism gives a false impression that all the three elements of world politics were held by those writers to be equally significant”.⁷ The focus on the logics of international society is also supported by the relative conceptual weakness of transnational politics – or world society as Bull referred to non-state realm – compared to the conceptual richness of the ES depiction of international society. This comprehension of international society was not just born from historical comparison, but by breaking down international society into a system of rules and institutions. These rules include “constitutive” rules that stipulate who is included in this society and reflect that only states are included in the international society of states; there are “rules of coexistence” that stipulate how states can act to accommodate each other – through the creation of international law and diplomatic relations – for instance; and “rules of cooperation” that facilitate international institutions to pursue common goals for mutual benefit.⁸ Consequently, those associated with the ES often become advocates of international society. But as we shall see, not all scholars articulate or defend the same vision of international society.

While some may allege that the idea of international society is a chimera, many ES and constructivist scholars have pointed to the historical and contemporary evidence of a society of states. While the general norms of a society of sovereign states originate from European international practice, these norms have taken hold within fabric of world politics. Indeed one of the

most striking feature of the global international society of today is the extent to which the states of Asia and Africa have embraced such basic elements of European international society as the sovereign state, the rules of international law, the procedures and conventions of diplomacy and international organization.⁹

So the practice of international society has become a global one – but only in the last 30 years or so. However, ES scholars are the first to point out that the development of a society of states was not a peaceful organic process. Contemporary international society was clearly disseminated through the use of force and cultural domination.

⁶ Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, p. 49.

⁷ Hidemi Suganami, 'The International Society Perspective on World Politics Reconsidered', *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, 2, 1.2002: p. 2.

⁸ Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, p. 64-8.

⁹ Hedley Bull and Adam Watson, (eds.) *The Expansion of International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press.1984): p. 433.

International society is also beset by echoes of this domination and the fact that the persistence of a world of states sidelines indigenous and minority communities that have forms of political organization that have been historically (and presently) overwritten by a world sovereign states. In addition processes of decolonisation are evidence that the spread of sovereign states after the Second World War was dependent on the demands on the part of colonised peoples for sovereign nation states. The process of decolonisation also demonstrates that the idea of sovereignty is enmeshed with the idea of human rights – given the use of decolonising group's use of human rights to argue for the right to a nation-state.¹⁰ In a sense that these ethical struggles intersect with sovereignty are evidence that we live within a world that is normatively embedded with sovereignty.

The ethical dilemmas surrounding the practice of humanitarian intervention is also evidence of norms of international society. That sovereignty and the concern that intervention in a sovereign state's affairs to stop human suffering could undermine international order are crucial components of the debates surrounding humanitarian intervention and a core area of focus for scholars associated with the ES.¹¹ Also the significant degree to which the debates have changed over time indicate that the international society is not a static normative complex. After the end of the cold war the norm of protecting sovereignty is being challenged by the strengthening of the moral pull that supports stopping immense humanitarian suffering.¹² It is now accepted that there has been an increased but by no means guaranteed willingness on the part of states to intervene in humanitarian suffering in other states.¹³ While significance of the changing norms of international society will returned to later in this paper, the important aspect of debates of humanitarian intervention is the degree to which such interventions lead us to question the viability and defensibility of a world where a society of sovereign states is the foundation of world politics.

Contemporary Challenges to the *Practice* of International Society

Nonetheless, there are other issues in world politics that lead us to question the viability of a stable society of sovereign states that have not been examined with the depth that humanitarian intervention has. Other contemporary issues and processes that are not often addressed by defenders of international society reflect the limitations of the ES such as its weak conception of world society and lack of attention to the role of the world economy in international society.¹⁴ These limitations are particularly problematic in respect to the contemporary salience of processes such

¹⁰ Christian Reus-Smit, 'Human rights and the social construction of sovereignty', *Review of International Studies*, 27:4, 2001, 519-38.

¹¹ Nicholas Wheeler 'Pluralist and Solidarist Conceptions of International Society: Bull and Vincent on Humanitarian Intervention', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 21:3, (1992) 463-87 and Alex Bellamy, 'Humanitarian responsibilities and interventionist claims in international society', *Review of International Studies*, 29:3, (2003) 321-40.

¹² Nicholas Wheeler, "Review Article - Humanitarian intervention after Kosovo: emergent norm, moral duty or the coming anarchy?" *International Affairs* 77, 1 (2001). See also Nicholas Wheeler, *Saving Strangers: Humanitarian Intervention in International Society*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000)

¹³ Nicholas Wheeler, "Review Article - Humanitarian intervention after Kosovo"

¹⁴ Barry Buzan, "The Challenge of Globalization and International Political Economy" in Alex Bellamy, (ed.) *International Society and its Critics* (Oxford University Press, London, 2005)

as globalisation and the global capitalism on the practice of international society. These processes and other contemporary political events create a series of overlapping challenges to the practice of an international society. These contemporary processes are not necessarily problems as such, but they are factors that either challenge the *capacity* of the contemporary society of states to maintain international order or challenge the *primacy* of a society of states in world politics.

The increasing prevalence of transnational forms of social impact and harm, such as environmental degradation or transnational terrorism, challenge the capacity of sovereign states to effectively address them and sustain international stability.¹⁵ These interconnections are related to contemporary processes of globalisation: a variety of related spatial phenomenon that entail the development of transnational relations, which are increasing the intensity, extensity, and deepening impact of worldwide interconnectedness amongst people and states.¹⁶ Although globalisation has been a long developing condition, contemporary globalisation is occurring through rather dramatic developments in transportation and communications which have sharply dropped the costs and difficulty of global interaction and increased the ease of some but not all cross state border interactions. While many aspects of globalisation are significantly overstated and some aspects are relatively unproblematic, there are aspects of globalisation that directly challenge the capacity of an international society to maintain international order. Clearly in a significantly globalised world, there is the proliferation of various forms of transnational harm such as environmental degradation in the form of acid rain or global climate change for instance, and transnational terrorism where networks of terrorism are able to manipulate transnational forms of communication and transport. As a consequence the significance of national borders and effective sovereignty by a government over its territory have been altered in significant respects.

While some scholars claim that transnational problems can only be totally addressed by a cosmopolitan democratic system¹⁷, it should be noted that these problems have provoked significant but by no means comprehensive response by states and publics in the form of the significant elaboration of public and private forms of international cooperation – a dramatic elaboration of the rules of cooperation since 1945. However, international cooperation has increasingly been paralleled by a range of transnational actors such as non-governmental organisations and social movements. These groups call into question the idea that the state has a monopoly on determining world politics and also demonstrates the rising impact of these private bodies on the policies of states and international organisations. Bull was more than aware of the significance of non-state actors and ‘world society’. Clearly there are revisionist social movements that do not wish to sustain the prevailing world or international order. While groups such as *Al queda* are most obvious here, there are many transnational actors that seek to radically reorientate the nature of world politics towards more ecologically and

¹⁵ Andrew Linklater, 'The problem of harm in world politics: implications for the sociology of states-systems', *International Affairs*, 78:2, (2002) 319-38 at pp. 329-31.

¹⁶ See David Held, *et al*, *Global Transformations* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1999) and Jan Aart Scholte, *Globalisation, a critical introduction* (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2000).

¹⁷ David Held, *Democracy and the Global Order* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1995).

socially sustainable paths. There are real questions as to what degree these transnational actors' goals are compatible with a society of states – given the real diversity of opinion among states in relation to the nature of the political projects of various NGOs, think tanks and TNCs. Yet while the bodies complicate policymaking¹⁸, revisionist non-state actors are the exception as most NGOs accept the centrality of states, and in fact, exist to influence states not usher in a global cosmopolis¹⁹.

However, while the impact of globalisation and global governance on states sovereignty and territoriality is far from clear or certain, there is a more significant shift within international society being ushered in within these processes. It must be stressed that most forms of global governance are an elaboration of the rules of cooperation that Bull indicated in the 1970s, which are crucial to a viable international society, but what seems to be shifting in significant respects is the decreasing supremacy of the rules of coexistence in the face of an increasing array of issue specific institutions such as the World Bank and WTO as well regional bodies²⁰. The key political question here is what logics are shaping these burgeoning rules of cooperation. While rationales like human rights and environmentalism have important influences over the form of international institution building, the norms of neo-liberal capitalism have become especially dominant in the last two or three decades.²¹ Neo-liberalism is an ideology that asserts that minimal political involvement in 'free markets' is the road increased profit, economic growth and development. The contemporary development of neoliberalism is normative and institutional order that is evident through policies of financial deregulation and trade liberalisation in countries around the world, in the policies of international financial institutions and the continued support by the US and most western states. The near worldwide amplification of neo-liberal norms can be seen to entrenching a 'market civilisation' which advantages private interests and restricts public institutions such as states to undertaking market friendly directions.²² Here we have a rather intriguing change in the fabric of world politics where states themselves are increasingly subject to global markets considerations and to the significant power of transnational corporations that seems to be rising in both wealthy and poor states. The fear here is that states may be unable to provide the stability that ES scholars such as Bull, thought was so crucial because of the impact of a unregulated system of global capitalism.

In particular, international order is being challenged fundamentally by some of the socio-economic outcomes of this system of global capitalism. It is argued by many observers that contemporary neo-liberal capitalism is worsening global inequality and developing new patterns of poverty and social dislocation. While Hedley Bull discussed the importance of addressing Third World demands for justice in relation to

¹⁸ Daniel Esty, "The World Trade Organization's legitimacy crisis", *World Trade Review*, vol. 1, no. 1, (2002): 5–22.

¹⁹ Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists beyond borders: advocacy networks in international politics* (Cornell University Press, Cornell 1998), pp. 32–3.

²⁰ Buzan, "The Challenge of Globalization and International Political Economy", p. 123.

²¹ James Richardson, *Contending Liberalisms in World Politics: Ideology and Power* (Boulder, Lynne Rienner, 2001)

²² Stephen Gill, 'Globalisation. Market Civilisation, and Disciplinary Neoliberalism', *Millennium*, 24(3), (1995): 399–423.

sustaining international order in the early 1980s²³, inequality (within and between states) has worsened considerably since then. Inequality between countries, particularly between wealthy OECD states and other states has risen.²⁴ While the second half of the twentieth century saw one of the greatest advances in reducing poverty in human history, since the 1980s there has been a series of setbacks across much of the world.²⁵ There is also the important relationship between poverty and state failure and weakness. The moral and practical problems of these patterns of international inequality has been an issue that has not got the attention it deserves in thinking about international society in contemporary IR theory especially because there are significant implications of this global inequality for international stability. In particular it is the case that it not only disadvantaged states that are contesting the reigning neo-liberal orthodoxy because increasingly high profile protests mounted by NGOs and individuals around the world in the Chiapas and on the streets of Seattle, Genoa and Cancun (among other places). Not only are these political struggles against the legitimacy of the neo-liberal economic order hard to ignore but they also represent challenges against the viability of a society of states being able to withstand such international inequality. Ultimately, it is not obvious that a robust and stable international society is compatible with modes of governance that privilege profitability and deregulation.

Another feature of contemporary world politics not as tightly connected to globalisation is the exercise of US power and foreign policy as exercised by the Clinton administration and especially the Bush administration. Particularly as exemplified by the Bush Doctrine as the US response to the terrorist attacks of 2001 and the war in Iraq in 2003-4, US power is undermining the theory and practice of international society of states that promotes the practices of sovereignty, non-intervention, sovereign equality and peacability in quite spectacular ways. There are two dimensions to this challenge to the practice of a society of states. The first relates to the practice of multilateralism in response to the terrorist of '9/11'. While the US clearly uses a variety of different institutions of international governance that are multilateral in design such as the UN in response to the terrorist attacks, the response to the terrorist attacks possessed a character that demonstrated an *ad hoc* nature that is not restricted by multilateral process or restraint. Perhaps more importantly, it was also the case that while many countries assisted the US with its prosecution of a war on terror, in the main part these countries did so on the terms determined by the US – not by multilateral cooperation established by the UN for instance. As Patrick Stewart indicates the coalition was a “hub-and-spoke arrangement founded on bilateral deals” and not the posture of multilateralism.²⁶ This runs against the ideas of formal sovereign equality and the internationalist spirit of the UN. It also raises the impression that the US is acting as an empire. The spectre of empire reminds us that there are alternatives to an international society. In a second challenge emerging from US policy stems in a direct fashion from the actions of the US in Iraq. This challenge is to fundamental elements of international law and the important role that the UN's notion of collective security and the UNSC plays in determining the use of force. It is

²³ Hedley Bull, *Hagey Lectures* (University of Waterloo, Ontario, 1984)

²⁴ UNDP, *Human Development Report 1997* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1997) pp.16-7.

²⁵ UNDP, *Human Development Report 1997* pp. 2-4, 89.

²⁶ Stewart Patrick, “Beyond Coalitions of the Willing: Assessing U.S. Multilateralism” *Ethics and International Affairs*, Volume 17, No. 1. (2003) p. 39.

clear than many states around the world were not at ease with the US use of Force in Iraq because it departed by accepted practice in international law and international responsibility. These actions can be seen to undermine the ideas of international society in direct and powerful ways. It is also apposite at this point to suggest that the biggest hindrance to international order is not only what the US does do to undermine international order but also what it does not do – but could do – to promote international order.²⁷

The preceding sketch gives an indication of the challenges to the viability and centrality of international norms in world politics. In the absence of unifying normative complex that everyone in the world agrees upon, the importance of sovereignty and international society norms is crucial to international order and stability that avoids interstate war and necessary for achieving cooperation for pressing humanitarian problems. Ultimately, an international society is fragile and its future is not guaranteed. Ultimately, the key potency of ES as a field of IR scholarship is that it is aware of the importance of international order and is conscious of its fragility. The question now is whether the ideal of international society can be defended in a way that addresses the contemporary challenges to international order?

Contemporary World Politics and the Pluralist – Solidarist Divide

In the face of these challenges we have to enquire whether the core concepts of the ES are helpful in illuminating the contemporary political and ethical dynamics of international society. In particular we need to focus on whether the pluralist – solidarist divide productively engages with the contemporary challenges to international society. ES scholars and international society theory scholars more broadly can be divided into three camps²⁸, which rest on different descriptions of *what* sovereign states are capable of agreeing upon and normative visions of *why* international society is to be valued. The first group is called *pluralism*, which includes scholars such as Hedley Bull and Robert Jackson who claim that states can only agree upon a minimal set of principles – essentially only sovereignty and other fundamental rules of coexistence. The normative vision sees the primary value of international society resting on the protection of international order, the promotion of coexistence and the defense of internal diversity of each state from outside interference. As such this account is a defense of a more or less ‘classical’ vision of the Westphalian order where states are the sole bearers of rights and duties.

The second position is referred to as *solidarism* and includes scholars such as John Vincent, Stanley Hoffman and Nicholas Wheeler who claim that states actually do agree upon a wider constellation of principles than sovereignty and as a consequence international society is thickly institutionalised over a range of different principles. The normative vision here is that an international society can agree upon a wider set of principles rather than just sovereignty. In traditional ES thinking, solidarism was associated with common human needs where sovereignty is accompanied by broader agreement on principles whereby international society can and ought to protect human

²⁷ Joseph Nye, “The American national interest and global public goods” *International Affairs* 78 (2), (2002): 233-244.

²⁸ Nicholas Wheeler, “Guardian Angel or Global Gangster: A Review of the Ethical Claims of International Society” *Political Studies*, 44, (1996): 123-35.

rights and prevent humanitarian suffering even if it does require international intervention and potentially destabilise international order. More recent reflections on this matter broaden this to include other forms of agreement on principles relating to economic, security or environmental rules and goals.²⁹ A third position that overlaps with the solidarist account is the *critical international society* position, which is primarily articulated by Andrew Linklater. This position supports the solidarist idea that the society of states ought to promote human potentialities rather than just sovereignty but that the only ways this can actually be achieved is through radical transformation of international society. This critical position is deeply interested in the potential of change in the prevailing Westphalian system. Thus the resting place of this position is ultimately in a cosmopolitan order that transcends an international society and includes all human beings at a *prima facie* level of moral consideration.

This divide rests primarily upon descriptive and normative evaluations of international order. The contention of this paper is that the pluralist and solidarist depictions of why international order is valuable or what states are capable of agreeing upon are not particularly helpful in relation to the dynamic nature of the contemporary challenges facing the contemporary society of states. I also contend that pluralist and solidarist positions to not examine the actual practice of international society norms in any significant measure. Consequently, I contend that there are three problems with this divide.

First, the pluralist – solidarist divide directs us to make *unhelpful normative choices* as most international society scholars would want to defend ‘as much solidarism as needed and as much pluralism as possible’. While some leaders around the world defend a pluralist conception of international practice that sees sovereignty as sacrosanct value, increasing numbers now see some limits to the practice of sovereignty imposed in the name of human rights. The range of positions within the solidarist camp further compounds the unhelpfulness of this divide. On one hand we have scholars such as Nick Wheeler that promote humanitarian interventions on the grounds of avoiding a “supreme humanitarian emergency” where “the only hope of saving lives depends on outsiders coming to the rescue”.³⁰ Here saving lives has a distinctively cosmopolitan cast – saving lives of those in other states is a moral good – even if it requires unilateral intervention that destabilises international order. On the other hand we have scholars, such as Stanley Hoffman, who argue that humanitarian interventions are necessary to strengthen international order: “insofar as the phenomenon of failed, troubled and murderous states is a disease of the Westphalian system, interventions can be interpreted as attempts at restoring a modified Westphalian state system—modified insofar as sovereignty can be curbed or overridden in certain circumstances”.³¹ Given how humanitarian disasters spread “domestic strife and violence” across borders, in a world of civil war, failing states and murderous regimes we have to intervene through multilateral avenues.³² While it would be clearly wrong to say that scholars such as Hoffman have no concern for

²⁹ Alex Bellamy, “Introduction: The English School and International Society” in Bellamy, Alex (ed.) *International Society and its Critics* Oxford (University Press, London, 2005)

³⁰ Wheeler, *Saving Strangers*, p. 34.

³¹ Stanley Hoffmann, ‘The Politics and Ethics of Military Intervention’, *Survival*, Vol. 37, No. 4, 1995-1996: 29-51, at p.35.

³² Hoffmann, ‘The Politics and Ethics of Military Intervention’, p.35.

human rights, the goal of using humanitarian criteria to strengthen international and the goal from realising human rights, are not the same goal. Here the idea of 'solidarism' brushes over very real political and moral differences. It should also be noted that some ES scholars and, more predominantly some constructivist scholars, have made examining the moral motivations a crucial part of analysing world politics – but not necessarily taking this analysis of actual norms into an understanding of ethical debates or scholarship.³³

The next problem with the pluralist – solidarist divide is that it is *descriptively static* in that it does little more than provide labels for variations that have existed in the society of states over time but does little to examine the differing motivations underlying action within international societies across history. Ultimately, the divide is framed in way where it appears as an unresolvable divide with the history of divide situated in a pluralist direction and the present pointing in solidarist direction that is increasingly seeing sovereignty as a contingent attribute. As such, the pluralist – solidarist divide is self referential and one-dimensional. Observers such as Chris Brown and Chris Reus-Smit have made the point that this divide ignores external factors such as world society.³⁴ This is a particularly noteworthy problem given the changes in the world political context of the international society has changed so significantly in the last 20 to 30 years to the extent that globalisation and related phenomena can be regarded as challenges to international society. However, there is an emerging tendency to argue as, Barry Buzan does, that globalisation stems from world society.³⁵ I think is dramatically underplays the role that states have played in initiating economic globalisation and adapting to – and therefore ratcheting up – global forms of economic integration.³⁶

These two problems with the pluralist – solidarist divide combine to suggest that the divide is far too abstract and does not delve deeply into the political and moral nature of world politics. The divide is strangely apolitical in that it possesses a weak conception of practice. It does not open the door to a deeper praxelological examination of the agency of those who use norms associated with international society in their political conduct. Nor does this divide help us address the changes in way people utilise the reasoning and norms of international society over the course of history – except in a very general way. Simply put, the pluralist – solidarist divide prejudices and assumes the motivations of people making international society claims and narrows questions of what sovereign states are capable of agreeing upon and why a society of sovereign states ought to be valued. It leaves little room to examine sovereignty or international responsibility alongside other goals or beliefs that states

³³ Richard Shapcott, "Solidarism and After: Global Governance, International Society and the Normative 'Turn' in International Relations." *Pacifica Review* Vol 12, No.2. (2000)

³⁴ Chris Brown, "World Society and the English School: An "International Society" Perspective on World Society." *European Journal of International Relations*, 7:4, (2001): 423-441 and Christian Reus-Smit, 'Imagining Society: Constructivism and the English School', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 4:3 (2002) 487-509.

³⁵ Buzan, "The Challenge of Globalization and International Political Economy", p. 128.

³⁶ Philip Cerny, 'Globalisation and the Changing Nature of Collective Action', *International Organisation*, 49(4), (1995): 595-625 and Philip Cerny, 'Paradoxes of the Competition State: The Dynamics of Political Globalisation', *Government and Opposition*, 32(2), (1997): 251-274.

may be imbued with. What is needed is broader analysis that grapples with the hierarchies of priorities and values that guide statecraft in decision-making in relation to international society norms.

A more political account of investigating the existence and importance of international society in world politics would examine the variety of moral judgements statespeople make about their own actions and others in respect to acting within the norms of international society. This could be done in a very specific sociological case-by-case study of particular states, or in a more general reference to various prospective normative positions that could be made in respect to international society norms. I argue that politics in this sense is an examination of the moral constitution and the power relationships of world politics that examines their agency and the praxeology of people and their institutions. The aim of such reflection is to garner some practical knowledge about political life and the intention of actors with the domain of world politics. I think a superior alternative is to ask *how is* international society actually maintained and *how should* international society be advocated and maintained. This is a political question that opens up a series of different scenarios or positions rather than poles in a divide. Nevertheless, three rather significant alternatives about how international society could be advocated and defended in contemporary world politics stand out.

First, it could be argued that international society should be upheld by a *few powerful states*. In this account an international society is an instrumental public good of dominant states and this is good or desirable condition because it promotes a high level of stability and reflects the role that dominant states *should* play in the promotion of international order. Lest it be claimed that this is an archaic idea that rests with the Congress System or the Concert of Europe of the 1800s, it is clear that this argument has strong contemporary parallels.³⁷ Alex Bellamy claims that humanitarian intervention and peacekeeping by western states could be seen as a case where international society is “manufactured and policed by powerful members of the society”.³⁸ The actions of the US led ‘coalitions of the willing’ in response to the events in Kosovo and Iraq in recent years reflect this sense of maintaining international order.³⁹ In fact the March 23 2003 letter by John Negroponte to the UNSC in regards to the US’s actions in Iraq reflects a sense of stewardship *over* international order:

The actions that coalition forces are undertaking are an appropriate response. They are necessary steps to defend the United States and the international community from the threat posed by Iraq and to restore international peace and security in the area. Further delay would simply allow Iraq to continue its unlawful and threatening conduct.⁴⁰

³⁷ Chris Brown, “Moral Agency and International Society: Reflections on Norms, the UN, The Gulf War and the Kosovo Campaign.” *Ethics and International Affairs*, 15:2, 2001: 87-98.

³⁸ Alex Bellamy, “Conclusion: Whither International Society” in Bellamy, Alex (ed.) *International Society and its Critics* Oxford (University Press, London, 2005), p. 292.

³⁹ Chris Brown, “Moral Agency and International Society”, p. 97.

⁴⁰ John Negroponte, “Letter dated 20 March 2003 from the Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council” http://www.usunnewyork.usmission.gov/s2003_351.pdf (22 of March 2006)

So here we see the idea of international society being a preserve of dominant states. This of course is not surprise to Hedley Bull who regarded the actions of great powers as an institution that upholds an international society. While the limits to the legitimacy of this articulation is clearly evident in contemporary times, it is important not to discount that this is a way that the idea of international society is raised in world politics.

Second it could be argued that the idea of international society is advocated *by all states*. In this account an international society is an organic society of states – it is the classical picture of interstate socialization that is sustained by the common interests of this evolving society and more pointedly the statespeople representing their states. Evidence of this practice is ubiquitous within world politics with equal formal recognition given to member states of the UN and some of the peacebuilding/statebuilding practices of the UN that seek to reconstruct states to prevent the reoccurrence of civil conflict. There is also considerable evidence that significant changes in the membership of international society can initiate changes in international norms and formal organizations such as the UN. This image of an international society could be seen to be desirable because it limits international order to realm of interstate relations and ultimately involves all states in the creation and maintenance of an international society as reflected in an admittedly imperfect practice of interstate dialogue and cooperation.

Last, it could be argued that international society is promoted by *people*. In this account international society and international order is to be maintained by the conscious actions of citizens – people who are politically active either through their respective states or through transnational networks. This promotion of international society norms could be considered desirable because, despite of the differences of people over the world, there is value in promoting international stability and the prevention of any one state from dominating. This is perhaps most evident with the 2003 protests against the US war in Iraq and the sidelining of the UN. Now, it could be suggested, that the critical international society approach of Andrew Linklater–grapples with citizenship and political community in a way that effectively sidesteps the pluralist – solidarist divide.⁴¹ However, I think Linklater's examination of political community is weighted so heavily in favour of cosmopolitan forms of reasoning and practice that it silences forms of citizenship that are not cosmopolitan. This boils down to the idea that world society is not automatically cosmopolitan and that we need to be conscious of non-cosmopolitan forms of citizenship and include their political stances in relation to international society.

In reality multiple reasons overlap in the actual practice of a society of states, as Bull indicated the logics of international society parallel a system of states and world society. So the purpose here is not to set up poles or divides. Rather the political purpose is to set up the various ways – the various balances and priorities – that agents articulate the idea of international society. But the normative question here is which of the various ways international society could be maintained is the best way to maintain international order? This is the question at the heart of much of ES thought.

⁴¹ Andrew Linklater, *The Transformation of Political Community* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1998), especially Chapter 6.

My answer here is that it depends upon factors that are *external* to the society of states. My argument is that in respect to the contemporary challenges facing an international society that sustaining international order increasingly falls upon us as individuals in a more conscious way than in the past. We (as individuals) are being affected personally by various forms of transnational harm, global poverty is becoming a potential force of instability, policymakers/statespeople are operating in a more public eye because of transnational social movements, and people are protesting because of the fears of US power and the consequences of US policy. These processes and the steady proliferation of liberal democracies are directly or indirectly pushing the maintenance of an international society more in hands of politically active people. This is not the idea that world society has some mystical capacity for agency. I wish to suspend any conception of what politically active people will wish to sustain because as observers such as Chris Brown have noted world society is, far from being a cosmopolis in waiting.⁴² In fact world society is actually a variegated space of subnational, national, regional and cosmopolitan agendas – even though it has been indelibly marked by the presence of an international society of states. In short it means we need to pay attention to the practice of citizenship in relation to international society.

Studying citizenship requires examining the actions of politically active people and arguments and debates surrounding what they ought to be doing. Importantly, citizenship includes the idea of “citizenship-as-status” – as being recognized as having the socially legitimated competence to be involved in political affairs within a political community and have rights within that community, and “citizenship-as-activity” which entails the socially formed expectation that people will engage productively in civic life in general, and participate in the composition and operation of government in particular.⁴³ Citizenship as a form of activity is an important indication of the need to examine the idea of citizenship at its broadest, again both at a sociological (actual) and normative (possible) sense. It has to be emphasised that citizenship is always a purposive activity. As Alastair Davidson indicated, by referring to the works of Norberto Bobbio: “the starting point of citizenship is the attempt by ordinary people to impose order on chaos”.⁴⁴ In an era of accelerating globalisation and an increasing array of other phenomenon that affect the nature of domestic politics, the focus on securing order has significant range of international and transnational implications of which international society norms play an important – if largely unexplored – role.

This means examining what citizens are actually doing in international politics. Consequently, further research is required to examine the agency of both transnational networks of NGOs and domestic societies around the world in relation to international society norms. The focus of NGO research has been understandably on the effectiveness of NGOs on particular issues or institutions – rather than their

⁴² Chris Brown, “World Society and the English School”

⁴³ Will Kymlicka and Wayne Norman, “Return of the Citizen: A Survey of Recent Work on Citizenship Theory”, *Ethics*, 104, January, 1994: p. 354.

⁴⁴ UNRISD. *Globalisation and Citizenship* (Geneva: UNRISD, 1997).

[http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/\(httpPublications\)/FFCD6CBCDF88D089C1256EAD00438AEB?OpenDocument&panel=relatedinformation](http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/(httpPublications)/FFCD6CBCDF88D089C1256EAD00438AEB?OpenDocument&panel=relatedinformation) (20 of April 2006), p.14

relationship with international society norms.⁴⁵ It also means examining aspects of citizenship that rest in realm of political theory, where citizenship is an ideal that guides the formation and operation of new forms of political community and citizenship. In particular it is important to open up this idea of political activity to different models of citizenship theory and broaden these models beyond simplistic accounts of cosmopolitanism and communitarianism. The question is what type of international society could be instigated by politically active people? Will it be a weak international society or a responsible and robust model of international society? Will cardinal norms of sovereignty be qualified? Ultimately, the character of international society looks like it will increasingly depend on the virtue and character of citizens who act simultaneously within their state, through their state and through transnational networks.

While it has become mantra in IR that the international system and ‘anarchy is what states make of it’, more attention needs to be made – politically and ethically – to the role that citizens have in shaping world society and in actually making states and the international system. A robust international society in an era of growing challenges to this practice will have to be supported by the actions of citizens, scholars and social movements.

Conclusions

This paper has posited three developments that pass, for the meantime at least, as conclusions. Conceptually it has defended the existence of an international society of states in world politics but it has criticised the theoretical utility of the pluralist-solidarist divide and suggested that we should rather be more attentive to the ways in which actors in world politics use international society norms rather than on why international order is valuable. This is especially the case because the practice of international society is interacting with processes of globalisation, neo-liberalism, international inequality and American foreign policy in ways where simple choices between sovereignty or a broader set of norms that include sovereignty are unhelpful. This paper has also sought to focus upon and enhance the political dimensions of agency in world politics. In particular it has sought not to prejudge the motivations of those using the norms of international society. It seeks to push scholars away from optimism or pessimism for international society towards being concerned with the ways that international society is or could be supported in practice.

Lastly, this paper has forwarded an ethical observation that tentatively follows from the previous points. In a world of globalisation it is my presumption given the nature of the challenges facing international society that responsibility for international order is going to fall upon us as individuals. As such it is important to open up a dialogue between international society theory and political theory – especially theorists of citizenship and theorists of transnational networks of NGOs and social movements. As a result, I think citizenship matters both to the ongoing practice of the sovereign state and increasingly to the practice of an international society of states. Given the contemporary challenges facing the practice of an international society of states, let

⁴⁵ See for example Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists beyond borders*, Esty, “The World Trade Organization’s legitimacy crisis” and Khagram, Sanjeev et al (eds.) *Restructuring World Politics: Transnational Social Movements, Networks and Norms* (University of Minnesota Press, 2002)

alone a progressive transformation of this society, people will have to play an active and more conscious part of people who are citizens of particular states but not yet citizens of the world.