

The institutions of international society revisited: theory, practices, and performativity

Workshop directors

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Outline of the panel

Ever since its publication, Hedley Bull's classic *The Anarchical Society* (1977) has been a source of inspiration for scholars who sought to shelter the analysis of international relations from "economistic reductionism". The very idea of an international society, replete with meaning, rules and shared values (as opposed to a mere system of material co-existence and interaction) and the existence of "institutions" of international society remains intuitive, plausible, and analytically useful to date. At the same time, one senses that the analysis needs an update, both substantively and theoretically (Buzan 2004, Linklater and Suganami 2006, Navari 2009). This panel revisits Bull's framework; empirically, by addressing institutions within contemporary international and world society; and analytically, by linking their study to insights from practice theory.

A first substantive issue concerns whether Bull's list of five core institutions (diplomacy, war, the great powers, international law, and the balance of power) is empirically adequate, both with respect to the past and the present. At the very least, one observes that scholars writing in the same intellectual tradition have extended the original list to include such institutions as colonialism, sovereignty, humanitarian intervention, the state, religious festivals, multilateralism, etcetera (Buzan 2004). If Bull's social ontology allows for a thick description of international politics, it should now be explored to what extent his analysis needs further thickening, or even a complete revision of its descriptive contours.

Also, more than thirty years on, one would expect the institutions of international society to have changed meaning. As Bull and his associates made clear, social institutions are historically situated and thus subject to change. Early-modern diplomacy does not constitute the same game as late-modern 'techno-diplomacy' (Der Derian 1987). War has changed from a legitimate means of sovereign power to an institutionalised instrument that is only authorised under specific, regulated circumstances. Moreover, one imagines, it changes significantly in the absence of warriors (Coker 2002). International law, for its part, has to process the twin challenge of fragmentation and constitutionalisation (Klabbers, Peters and Ulfstein 2009). And no one needs introduction to the vagaries of the state in times of globalization. Clearly, the institutions of international society – whether few or many – are subject to evolution.

A third issue concerns the possible development of a world society, as the third dimension identified by Bull. This is a realm beyond international society, or perhaps beneath it. This world society has not been adequately analyzed thus far, but it articulates the intuition that there are significant global processes and encounters that do not centrally concern the state. Theorists of globalization

remark that globalizing processes favour the activities of world society as opposed to international society. If so, 'revisiting the institutions of international society' would mean 'encountering the institutions of world society'. This latter endeavour is still rather exploratory, but it promises, again, a much-needed thickening of our description of global politics, and an important update of Bull's analysis.

Thus there are three substantive issues to be addressed: (1) which are the institutions of (contemporary) international society; (2) how have these institutions evolved; (3) and how about the institutions of world society? These questions will be the substantive focus of our workshop's attempt at revisiting the key institutions of international life.

In order to ensure a measure of coherence, we propose to centre the analysis around two analytical concepts: 'practice' and 'performance',¹ which purportedly have undergirded the study of international society all along, but were never given theoretical attention (Navari 2010). One can understand these notions in their common sense, colloquial meaning. This pertains to focusing on actual processes in world politics in order to study its key institutions. Alternatively, practice and performance are understood as concepts with a specific theoretical meaning and analytical framework, as happens commonly in contemporary social and political theory with reference to the work of Pierre Bourdieu, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Theodore Schatzki (for practice theory) and Jeffrey Alexander, Judith Butler, and Victor Turner (for performance theory).

The concepts of practice and performance have well-established roots in political theory (Oakeshott 1975), and they have made an important inroad into the study of international relations (see e.g. Neumann 2002, Büger and Gadinger 2005, Müller 2008, Pouliot 2008, 2010, Adler and Pouliot 2011, Guzzini 2010), and also into that of political science more broadly (notably Bevir and Rhodes 2010). Both concepts share the potential to 'relax' the analysis of social and international intercourse by focusing on tangible processes. Notwithstanding its obvious appeal and apparent empirical successes, both practice and performance theory need further refinement. Outstanding issues include internal coherence, their mutual relationship, the theories' understanding of action and agency, and their understanding of causal analysis. There is also a potential conflict between the analytical and the overtly evaluative strands of practice theory that needs to be scrutinised. Finally, in light of the focus of this proposed workshop, there is also an interesting tension between Bull's original functionalist analysis of institutions as instruments for international order, and the reservations by theories of practice and performance regarding the analytical utility of the category of 'society'.

The primary purpose of this workshop will be to re-assess the institutions of international and world society. A secondary purpose will be to assess the merit and meaning of theories of practice and performance for the study of

¹ Such common ground not only should provide some direction to these broad themes and facilitate the discussion, but also is necessary for exploring the possibility of a joint publication as a result of the workshop

international and world society. A third purpose will be to assess the merit and meaning of theories of practice and performance as such. True to the focus on practices, this latter purpose will preferably not be pursued by means of purely theoretical or meta-theoretical chapters but by means of theoretically informed empirical papers.

Type of papers

This workshop invites different types of papers, that

- 1) empirically analyse contemporary institutions of international or world society and/or their historical change
- 2) contribute to the theorisation of the practice turn in International Relations; and / or
- 3) develop methodologies to apply these (meta)theoretical insights to the analysis of institutions of international and/or world society

We welcome papers primarily concerned with theoretical issues but also encourage participants to include a well-developed empirical illustration. Concretely, possible paper topics are:

- An analysis of changes within a traditional institution of international society (War, Diplomacy, Great Powers, Colonialism, International Law, the State, etc.)
- An analysis of the emergence of a new institution of international society (The Market, Human Rights, etc.)
- An analysis of an emerging institution of world society (Fashion, Pop Culture, Superhighways, but also World Social Forum, etc.)
- An analysis of issues within practice and performance theory, or of the substantive consequences of analyzing international society in terms of practice and performance
- An analysis that cashes out the evaluative strands of practice theory
- Etc.

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