Co-Dependence In the Pluralist-Solidarist Debate

The English School begins with Martin Wight's three traditions that define the international sphere. The first tradition is the international system, associated with realism, and is philosophically backed by Hobbes and Machiavelli. The second tradition is the international society, which has Hugo Grotius as its philosophical patron, and is often referred to as rationalism. Finally, there is the world society, also referred to as revolutionism, which is supported by Kant (Buzan 2001: 474). The English School's primary thrust, as Buzan points out, has been the rationalism (Grotian) tradition and the development of an international society (2001: 476). The English School uniquely occupies both a middle ground in IR discourse, between realism and liberalism, as well as provides a grand theory of IR. As Tim Dunne claims, it "purports to offer an account of IR which combines theory *and* history, morality *and* power, agency *and* structure" (2010: 136; emphasis in original). As a result it possesses considerable theoretical breadth, leading to discussion from within about what demarcates it from its peers and what is the common ground amongst its foundational thinkers. Consequently, the English School approach of International Relations (IR) is brimming with internal debate.

Even within the rationalist tradition there are disagreements regarding what values and principles define it. In one of his earlier essays (1966), Bull distinguishes between two schools of thought within the rationalist tradition: the pluralist and the solidarist (or Grotian[1]) conceptions of international society. The solidarist conceives international society as being closer in semblance to the revolutionist tradition. In it they allow for a broad scope of shared norms and values, a greater level of cultural homogenization, and accept tenants such as 'standards of civilization', limited use of force, human rights, and interventionism. Moreover, under this position, the concept of sovereignty is less emphasized and enjoys a greater degree of flexibility (Buzan 2001:478). As Andrew Linklater points out, solidarism is evident in the Grotian tradition as it makes a distinction between just and unjust wars and, as Bull asserts, it is from Hugo Grotius "…from which [the] right of humanitarian intervention is derived … that individual human beings are subjects of international law and members of international society in their own right" (Bull 1966: 64, quoted in Linklater 2005: 93).

Pluralism *contra* leans towards the realist side of rationalism. It has a narrower scope for defining international society with less emphasis on cultural unity. Moreover, agreements between states typically rest on issues such as traditional Westphalian sovereignty, non-intervention, and diplomacy (Buzan 2001: 478). However, within the pluralist/solidarist debate, the two concepts are not mutually exclusive and oppositional, as is usually argued. Rather, the concepts of pluralism and solidarism are mutually dependent, and in being so, not only create a spectrum of degree that abate the argument, but also reproduce the methodological pluralism that underpin the English school as a whole.

The Co-Dependence of Pluralism and Solidarism

It has been observed by some (Linklater 2005: 98) that the pluralist and solidarist conceptions of rationalism share many similarities with realism and liberalism, respectively. As the concept of international society is the main focus if the English school, it is important that the constitutive elements of pluralism and solidarism remain within the realm of the Rationalist tradition. While it may seem axiomatic that elements of a tradition remain within the tradition, it draws attention to the fact the there must be some common ground between each other. The two concepts are mutually dependent. They are tethered to each other in order to remain in the rationalist tradition.

Co-Dependence In the Pluralist-Solidarist Debate
Written by Mack Clayton

As Nicolas Wheeler points out, Hedley Bull was quite clear on the difference between pluralism and realism:

And it may be said of the pluralist doctrine that so far from constituting a disguised form of *Realpolitik,* it presents a set of prescriptions more conducive to the workings of the international order than those of the Grotians… The view of the pluralists is not to be dismissed as a mere rationalization of state practice; it is the a conception of the international society founded on the observation of the actual area of agreement between states and informed by a sense of the limitations within which in this situation rules may usefully be made rules of law (Bull 1966: 70-71; quoted in Wheeler 1992: 468).

What is to be taken away from Bull's quote is that there is a threshold that delineates realism from pluralism. Indeed, the most enduring precondition of an international society is a shared culture that will unite members and offer a degree of common ground (Bull 1977: 16; Buzan 2010: 1; Dunne 2010: 143; Linklater 2005: 85; Wight 1977: 3). Buzan goes on to suggest that when an international society has grown past its original culture base, it will become unstable (Buzan 2010: 1). In order to remain in the confines of the rationalist tradition, and therefore secure, there must be elements of commonality or *solidarity* amongst states in a society. Phrased differently, there has to be some floor that pluralism can rest on, otherwise, it simply becomes realism by another name. The floor, in this instance, is cultural unity.

Bull similarly claims that solidarism is not congruent with world societies, and to do so undermines the precepts of an international society. "Carried to its *logical extremes*, the doctrine of human rights and duties under international law is subversive of the whole principle that mankind should be organized as a society of sovereign states" (Bull 1977: 152; emphasis added). Bull later claims that:

The vision of a states system that achieves order or harmony through the triumph in all countries of the true ideology is different from the Grotian or solidarist vision, for the latter assumes that conflicts of interest will continue to exist among states, and seeks to curb them through the overwhelming power of the collectivity, whereas the former maintains that when the true ideology is universally enthroned, conflicts of interest will not exist or will be of slight importance (Bull 1977: 245).

The element that pluralism uses to rein in solidarism is sovereignty. As Robert Jackson asserts, "Sovereignty is the basic norm, *grundnorm*, upon which a society of states rests. … A conceivable future world of non-sovereign states would have to be based on an alternative normative foundation of some kind e.g., global federation" (1999: 432; emphasis in original). Similar to pluralism, there must exist a threshold when an international society becomes a Kantian world society. If shared culture is the floor that contains pluralism, then sovereignty is the ceiling that contains solidarism. Buzan touches on this co-dependence briefly in his 2001 article when he states, "… the two concepts are in some ways foundationally linked together. Pluralism has to rest on some elements of solidarism, and solidarism depends on the pluralist framework to structure its political order" (479).

The Spectrum That Allows For Pluralism

If the two concepts are linked by elements of the other, and are representing different ends of the same tradition (rationalism), then they are creating a spectrum or continuum, rather than two insular concepts. This not only reins in the two concepts, but also allows for international societies to shift along the spectrum, based on historical analysis and context. Understanding the pluralist-solidarist debate as one of mutual dependence rather than of the mutual exclusion is similar Buzan's think/thin hypothesis. On the one end of the spectrum exists the pluralist, who has a minimal, or 'thin', concept of international society. Though there is a modicum of cultural unity, emphasis is placed on sovereignty and non-intervention. As one slides up the spectrum, the degree of cultural unity and shared values 'thickens' and the amount of emphasis on sovereignty and independence is reduced (Buzan, 2004; 59-60).

Moreover, viewing the pluralist-solidarist debate as a scale to move along on rather than as two oppositional viewpoints more accurately reflects the historical reality of sovereignty and state relations. In actuality, as academics such as Stephen Krasner (1995), Aihwa Ong (2006), and Jackson (1999: 449-454) argue, sovereignty as conceived by even the staunchest pluralists (Westphalian sovereignty) is an ideal, not the norm. A classic example of shifting

Co-Dependence In the Pluralist-Solidarist Debate
Written by Mack Clayton

notions of sovereignty is the European Union. As Jackson points out, the EU challenges the traditionally accepted definition of sovereignty that informs the pluralist model. He suggests that the EU is a unique polity in that the member states have relinquished some of its sovereignty to a supra-national entity, rendering them no longer fully independent. For example, individual states must yield to the European Court of Justice on specific issues, especially pertaining to social and economic policy. The European Union is not, however, a federation like the US is, nor is it a fully sovereign entity. The EU could be called a 'union of sovereign states' as the members retain all the basic rules, institutions, and organizations. (Jackson 1999: 450-452). As Jackson phrases it, 'the EU is the child and not the parent or even the sibling of its member states' (1999: 452). The EU, then, is not a purely pluralist entity, as it has moved away from a focus on sovereignty and non-intervention in the 1950s. Nor is the EU a wholly solidarist entity (though it is closer to solidarism than pluralism), instead falling somewhere in the middle. The EU is, as Georg Sørensen suggests, "neither an emergent *universitas* nor a continuing *societas* but, rather, it is an unusual intermediate entity (Jackson 1999: 450; emphasis in original; no citation given for Sørensen).[2] In fact, development of the EU since it's inception 1951 can be tracked along the scale from pluralism moving towards solidarism.

The creation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1951 was arguably the first instance of the European states giving sovereignty up to a higher political body, though at this stage of development, is was hardly unique historically. Later, with the signing of the Rome Treaties in 1957, which created European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (EAEC), member sovereignty further diminishes and socio-political relations increase. The further establishment of institutions such as the Schengen Area (1985) and the Euro (1999), as well as significant governing bodies such as the European Parliament, Council of the European Union, the Court of Justice of the European Union, and the European Central Bank, sovereignty was further ceded to a higher political body. Over time the European states, piece by piece, shifted away from traditional notions of sovereignty and moved towards greater integration.

Interestingly, while the European members shifted towards a solidarist conception of an international society, other members (the US in particular) retained strong notions of pluralist tendencies. The US, through gestures such as an unwillingness to commit to the International Criminal Court (United Nations n.d.), a continued indifference to UN resolutions (Linklater 2005: 97), as well as a historically strong realist political and academic tradition, demonstrated interest in retaining the traditional Westphalian definition of sovereignty, though admittedly only in relation to themselves. Alternatively, China has modified its definition of sovereignty at the domestic level through zoning technology and 'graduated sovereignty' (Ong 2006; 97-118). Through this, China is able to accommodate certain precepts of Western international society in specific regions (notably Hong Kong's and Macao's special administrative zones) that is required for membership (e.g., human rights, democratic practices, free markets) while maintaining socialist policies in other areas that might have otherwise disqualified them. Thus, there can be several members of an international society at different points along the scale.

These differences within the international society are only possible if the pluralist-solidarist debate is conceived as a sliding scale rather than two opposed notions. As Buzan points out, if rationalist pluralism and solidarism are polarized as opposing ideas, they reproduce the realism-liberalism binary that has plagued IR more generally within the framework of the rationalist (Grotian) tradition. Though this would 'lower the ideological heat of the debate,' it also subverts the methodological pluralism that is so central to the English School (2001: 479). If, however they are acknowledged as co-dependent and are understood as existing on a spectrum, then the plurality of viewpoints within the rationalist tradition does reproduce the methodological pluralism of the English School as a grand theory. This is especially true in the face of Buzan's broader three-pillar approach to the English School, where each pillar (rationalist, Revolutionist, and Realist) is of equal standing (2004: 27), though it is no less relevant in Bull and Wight's more limited, rationalist-centric definition of the English School.

Conclusion

The pluralist-solidarist debate is one that is not as inherently oppositional as originally presented. It is only when pluralism and solidarism are seen as dichotomized and opposed to one another does conflict arise. When the two concepts are understood as dependent on each other and viewed as two ends of the same spectrum, however, the conflict abates. Moreover, this spectrum allow members of the international society to hold a multitude of different

Co-Dependence In the Pluralist-Solidarist Debate
Written by Mack Clayton

positions while existing on that same spectrum This, in turn, reproduces within the rationalist tradition the methodological pluralism that is a defining cornerstone of the English School. Though this does not address all of the issues facing the pluralist-rationalist debate, or the English School more generally, it does offer a more nuanced understanding of the framework of the rationalist tradition.

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[1] In the English school, Grotianism can be used as an alternative term for the rationalist tradition. Yet older texts also use it to describe solidarism (e.g. Bull 1966). For the sake of clarity, the term Grotianism will be used to describe the tradition, while solidarism will be used for the debate position.

[2] In Jackson's 1999 article, a *societas* is society of states regulated purely by norms, rather than by an overarching authority. A *universitas* is a human association with an overarching authority (or Hobbesian Leviathan) which acts as the standard what all conduct is judged against. (436)

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Written by: Mack Clayton

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