

Week 9. International Politics and Bull 1977. Chapter 3: How is order maintained in world politics?

Main question: Well, how is order maintained in world politics?

Main answer: Rules and institutions play significant roles in maintaining international order. Rules provide guidance of behavior and imperative principles, which will help nation states achieve or maintain their common interests in the anarchical world society. Institutions then give substance and permanence to these rules. His explanation relies on causal explanation, not structural-functionalist. He points out some deficiencies of the structural-functionalist approach at the end (see below).

The Maintenance of Order in Social Life

In all societies, order is a pattern of behavior that sustains the elementary or primary goals of social life. Order in this sense is maintained by a sense of common interests in those elementary and primary goals; by rules, which prescribe the pattern of behavior that sustains them; and by institutions, which make these rules effective. The sense of common interests in achieving the elementary goals of social life may be vague and inchoate, and does not in itself provide any precise guidance as to what behavior is consistent with these goals, and what behavior is not.

What are rules? The contribution of rules is to provide this kind of guidance. Rules are general imperative principles, which require or authorize prescribed classes of persons or groups to behave in prescribed ways. The functions of rules are:

- 1) they must be made as rules for this society;
- 2) they must be communicated among members of society to whom rules apply
- 3) they must be administered – the acts prescribed in the rules must be carried out
- 4) they must be interpreted – questions about the meaning of rules must be settled
- 5) they must be enforced – there must be some penalty attached to non-compliance
- 6) they must be legitimized – members of the society accept as valid
- 7) they must be capable of adaptation to change
- 8) they must be protected against developments in the society, which could undermine the rules

Order in the Modern State

Within the modern state, an institution or set of institutions is available to help make elementary social rules effective i.e. the government. The government will carry out the functions of rules described above. However, the government will act with the goal of preserving order. They don't directly uphold or implement the rules, but they shape, mould, or manage the social environment in which the rules operate in such a way that they have the opportunity of continuing to do so.

Order in Primitive Stateless Societies

These primitive stateless societies are without government and central political institutions – legislative, executive, or judicial of any kind. In this case then, rules emerge from the practice of lineage or locality groups in their relations with one another, become embodied in 'custom' and are confirmed by moral and religious belief. Conformity to these rules is brought about by conditioning and inertia, by 'moral sanctions and by ritual or supernatural sanctions. In some instances, sanctions are not sufficient to deter actions, so these societies may resort to self-help – retaliation.

Order in International Society

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A primitive society is similar to the international society since there is no central government – an anarchical society, and also how rules emerge. The maintenance of order in world politics depends, in the first instance, on certain contingent facts which would make for order even if states were without any conception of common interests, common rules or common institutions. Besides, order is also a consequence of a sense of common interests, rules, and institutions.

Common Interests. These interests are the starting point of maintaining the order in international society. States develop a sense of common interests in the goals as instrumental to them. Their sense of common interests may derive from fear of unrestricted violence, of the instability of agreements or of the insecurity of their independence or sovereignty. Such development of common interests may have its origin in rational calculation that the willingness of states to accept restrictions on their freedom of action is reciprocal. Or it may be based on the treatment of these goals as valuable in themselves – a sense of common values.

Rules. Common interests do not provide guidance of behavior, hence a need for rules. These rules may have the status of international law, of moral rules, of custom or established practice, or they may be merely operational rules or ‘rules of the game’ worked out without formal agreement or even without verbal communication. These rules provide the means whereby international society moves from the vague perception of a common interest to a clear conception of the kind of conduct it requires. There are three main complexes of rules that help maintain international order.

The first set is the fundamental or constitutional normative principle of world politics in the present era. It identifies the idea of a society of states, as opposed to such alternative ideas as that of a universal empire, a cosmopolitan community of individual human beings, or a Hobbesian state of nature or state of war. Second, there are ‘the rules of coexistence.’ Given the guidance supplied by the constitutional principle as to who are the members of international society, these rules set out the minimum conditions of their coexistence. These rules seek to confine the legitimate use of violence to sovereign states, for example. Third, they are the rules concerned to regulate cooperation among states above and beyond what is necessary for mere coexistence. This includes the rules that facilitate co-operation, not merely for a political and strategic, but also of a social and economic nature.

Institutions. Institutions serve to symbolize the existence of an international society that is more than the sum of its members, to give substance and permanence to their collaboration in carrying out the political functions of international society, and to moderate their tendency to lose sight of common interests.

Functional and Causal Explanations

Bull resorts to causal explanation. He tries to show that these rules and institutions are part of the efficient causation of international order and that they are among the necessary and sufficient conditions of occurrence. He is not using structural-functionalist explanation, which means that these rules and institutions fulfill ‘functions’ in relation to international order. In other words, the international society has certain ‘needs’ and that the rules and institutions in questions are fulfilling those needs. Bull points out a couple of deficiencies of structural-functionalist explanation. First, structural-functionalist explanation implies that rules and institutions would be endorsed, which is not necessary the case (although they are essential in preserving the international order). Second, its assumption is the primacy of the wholeness or unity over parts of the society being explained. International society however does not display this kind of wholeness or unit. Such explanation would overlook cases in which individuals and groups, not states, are principal actors. Third, structural-functionalist explanation does not even fit when applied to societies, which seem to have more unities than a society of nation states. There are forces in those societies making for anti-social or non-social behavior which cannot be readily encompassed in a theory seeking to relate all social events as a whole.