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The Disorderly State of ‘International Order’ In Search of an Elusive Concept

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‘Order’ is a funny, fuzzy term in the international relations literature. Scholars have adopted many different conceptualizations of what ‘order’ means in international relations. Yet most have not been clear on how their own particular order conception relates to similar concepts, how it can be measured, or how it complements or clashes with other treatments of order.

This paper can be treated as an extended exercise in concept formation. Specifically, I present a ‘two-step’ conceptualization of international order that I hope will help clarify the debate over the concept. The first step establishes a baseline definition of what kind of behavior constitutes a state of order in the international system. The second step focuses on the ‘stuff’ that must be present to induce the behavior identified in the first step. I posit that the dominant IR paradigms ultimately agree on the first step, while their major disagreements come over the second.

Yet what each of the paradigms share in common, I argue, is a series of conceptual holes and logical weaknesses. After introducing my classificatory scheme and critically evaluating these existing conceptualizations, I present my own conception of order in the second half of the paper. In particular, I argue that order is best conceptualized not as particular material, institutional or ideational environments, but as the presence of *observed rules* in world politics.

I. What Is Order, and What Are We Even Looking For?

1.1 Step 1: Basic Definitions

It is useful to begin by briefly defining some basic terms. Ideally, conceptualizations and explanations of order should be applicable to international relations before the advent of the nation-state (and, perhaps, after its dominance as well). I thus use the terms *unit* and *polity* to denote a basic and discrete political conglomerate of people that has at least nominal separation between its domestic political system and the international political realm, and employs some sort of

representative to speak and act for it (whether legitimately or illegitimately in the eyes of its citizens) as a collectivity on the international level.

Following Hedley Bull, Robert Jervis and others, I define a *system* as a condition of two or more units that have enough contact and interaction with one another that they “have sufficient impact on one another’s decisions, [causing] them to behave—at least in some measure—as parts of a whole.”¹ The ‘whole’ in a system is not simply reducible to the preferences and behaviors of the individual units. As Jervis puts it, “[w]e are dealing with a system when (a) a set of units or elements is interconnected so that changes in some elements of their relations produce changes in other parts of the system, and (b) the entire system exhibits properties and behaviors that are different from those of the parts.”² The term system is therefore synonymous with some basic level of interdependence.³ Setting aside its potential causes or consequences or the kinds of specific relations it may inspire among units, ‘system’ implies only “the existence of units, among which significant interaction takes place.”⁴

Finally, we come to *order*, a more difficult term to define generally, even as a first step. One common approach has been to link ‘order’ to the types of behavior it allegedly produces. In particular, many scholars identify order with peace. As David Lake recently argued, for instance, “[a]ll political orders must include security against violence resulting in physical harm, an assurance that property will not be subject to constant challenges, and an expectation that promises and

¹ Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*, Third Edition (New York: Columbia University

² Robert Jervis, *System Effects: Complexity in Political and Social Life* (Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 6.

³ Though the threshold for system is probably lower than what the term independence is now used to denote. See for example Robert O. Keohane and Joseph P. Nye, *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1977).

⁴ Barry Buzan, "From International System to International Society: Structural Realism and Regime Theory Meet the English School," *International Organization* 47, No. 3 (1993), p. 331.

agreements will be kept.”⁵ Likewise, most conceptions of *disorder* start from the premise that it must be associated with violence or insecurity.⁶

While it would be difficult to define order completely independent of its effects on unit behavior, adopting this close association between order and peace is faulty. ‘Order’ and ‘disorder’ should not be reduced to peace and war, or to peaceful and warlike unit behavior. If it could be reduced to those things, there would be no point in discussing ‘order’ to begin with and scholars would be better off simply focusing their attention on peace and war. Instead, a workable, generalizable definition of order should only point to *general* patterns of behavior.

Keeping these issues in mind, I offer the following first-step definition: **order is a pattern of equilibrium-perpetuating behavior among the units of a system.** That is, in an ordered system, units behave in ways that reproduce the status quo. In terms of individual unit behaviors, an ordered system should experience very few attempts by units to ‘take on’ the status quo. In terms of aggregate system-wide outcomes, we should expect to see an even lower level of success for such attempts, as well as a low level of unit extinction and destabilizing, total conflict across the system.

While order might lead to more peace and/or justice between units, it need not. Some orders could be premised on intense inequalities, conflicts or competition between units. But in an ordered system, even antagonistic behaviors are patterned and circumscribed so as to avoid destabilizing the foundation of that order.⁷ As Richard Ned Lebow has suggested, [o]rder does not prevent war, but

⁵ *Hierarchy in International Relations* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), p. 94.

⁶ As a group of prominent comparative politics scholars recently defined it in regards to domestic politics, “[p]olitical order exists...when the participants find it in their interest, given their expectations about the actions of others, to obey the written or unwritten *rules that call for respect for one another*” and a large percentage of the system’s actors do not “*fea[r] for [their] lives, families, or sources of livelihood and wealth.*” Douglass C. North, William Summerhill, and Barry R. Weingast, “Order, Disorder and Economic Change: Latin America vs. North America,” In Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and Hilton Root, eds., *Governing For Prosperity* (New Haven, C.T.: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 4. John Hall provides the complementary definition of disorder: “a triumph of *force* and arbitrariness over settled expectations.” John A. Hall, *International Orders* (Cambridge, U.K.: Polity Press, 1996), p. 3. Emphasis has been added in both quotations to highlight the problematic elements of the definitions.

⁷ As Yuen Foong Khong similarly sees it, “ ‘order’ describes a pattern or method that signifies the lack of chaos.” Charles A. Kupchan, Emanuel Adler, Jean-Marc Coicaud, Yuen Foong Khong, *Power in Transition: The Peaceful Change of International Order* (New York: United Nations University Press, 2001), p. 36.

regulates it and keeps it within bounds.” And while “[j]ustice is best served by an ordered world” where unit behavior and inter-unit outcomes are more patterned and predictable, order is at best a necessary but insufficient requirement for justice.⁸ Since this definition of order does not hinge on dimensions of peace and violence, these dimensions also cannot be used in defining its opposite, *disorder*. Disorder cannot simply be synonymous with chaos, war or violence. Instead, disorder implies a lack of constraint on a system’s units, thereby failing to achieve patterned, equilibrium-perpetuating outcomes. But, as with order, “disorder does not entail specific behaviors; its set of possible actualizations is infinite.”⁹

In sum, I argue that ‘order’ and ‘disorder’ imply very little about the likelihood or prevalence of violent behaviors or outcomes among a system’s units.¹⁰ Instead, order refers only to a system where units behave in ways that reinforce the equilibrium. If this definition sounds incomplete or even tautological, it is, at least without more conceptual information. Different approaches contend that very different kinds of things produce this kind of equilibrium-perpetuating behavior. This is the second step of the two-step conceptualization, and it is where different IR approaches part ways by offering dramatically different conceptions of the ‘stuff’ that constitutes what order actually is.

--Figure A here--

1.2 Order as a Three-Level Concept

While first-step definitions are important, they are not enough. As methodologist Gary Goertz argues, “[t]o develop a concept is more than providing a definition: it is deciding what is important about an entity.”¹¹ In order to add conceptual clarity to this discussion, I adopt and

⁸ Richard Ned Lebow, *A Cultural Theory of International Relations* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 14, 558-560. On the relationship between order and justice, see also Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, Ch. 4.

⁹ Janice Bially Mattern, *Ordering International Politics: Identity, Crisis, and Representational Force* (New York: Routledge University Press, 2005), pp. 30-31.

¹⁰ As Fred Halliday observes, “A stable hierarchical society may rely just as much on violence and on the international sustenance of that violence as a society in the midst of mass revolt.” *Revolution and World Politics: The Rise and Fall of the Sixth Great Power* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), p. 167.

¹¹ Gary Goertz, *Social Science Concepts: A User’s Guide* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 27.

employ Goertz's methodological framework of a 'three-level concept'. Goertz posits that any concept has a basic level, a secondary level and an indicator level. At the basic level is the term most often directly employed in our theories and models, as well as a first-step definition that even approaches that profoundly disagree on the secondary and indicator levels can support. The basic concept of interest here is, of course, is 'order,' and it is depicted in Figure A. I have included the first-step definition of order at the basic level, as I believe even competing conceptualizations of international order can agree about this starting point.¹²

Skipping over the secondary level for a moment, the indicator level contains the highest degree of specificity. The indicator level serves two purposes: most importantly, it provides the specific, observable empirical measures or facts that signify the presence of the concept itself. Second, because most indicators are substitutable—that is, they need not all be present together to indicate the presence of secondary level concepts—they provide a “natural way to incorporate historical and cultural diversity into a larger theoretical framework.”¹³

Most of the contestation over important and widely used concepts occurs at the secondary level. Constructing this level is also what I refer to as the second step in the two-step process of concept formation. It is here where one specifies the multiple dimensions that ontologically embody the basic concept. This is not to say that the secondary level factor “cause” the basic concept—in this case, order—but instead that it is the essential parts of what constitutes it. Without the presence of the secondary level component, in other words, ‘order’ does not exist.¹⁴

¹² NOTE: For now, please ignore the content for the particular boxes for the secondary and indicator levels in Figure A, as they represent my attempt at a new conceptualization for order detailed in the second half of the paper.

¹³ Goertz, *Social Science Concepts*, p. 65.

¹⁴ Goertz is less clear about the potential causal powers of secondary and indicator level factors on the basic concept, noting that “[s]ince one cannot avoid causal hypotheses when building concepts one should be as conscious as possible about them.” *Social Science Concepts*, p. 65. While I agree with his call for clarity in justifying one’s secondary level dimensions in particular, I am more skeptical about his claim that there is almost always some causality going on within any three-level concept.

1.3 Step 2: Conceptualizations

Theorizing the secondary level is the second step in the process of comprehensive concept formation. It is here, I posit, where the fundamental disagreements over what international order is take place: realists conceptualize order's secondary level as the material environment, institutionalists as the institutional environment, and constructivists as the ideational environment (see the left column of Table 1). I evaluate each in detail in the next section.

--Table 1 here--

Before getting there, however, it is useful to establish some ground rules with which to evaluate the different approaches. In particular, I posit that an effective second-step conceptualization of order must satisfactorily address three conceptual questions. In the following sections, I use these questions to assess some of the strengths and weaknesses of existing conceptions of international order:

- 1) What exactly makes up an order? More precisely, what is the foundational element or the actual observable phenomena that constitutes the substance of international order?
- 2) Can the answers to #1 be sufficiently differentiated from the hypothesized *causes* order? Or does the conceptualization presuppose a particular explanation of order's origins? (Table 1)
- 3) What constitutes the divide between order and *disorder*? (And what are the thresholds for 'more' order and 'less' order?)

Answering #1 tells us what embodies an order in world politics. Answering #2 allows us to separate order from the conditions that bring it about. Understanding the concept is a crucial first step that must be taken before attempting to explain order. This is true because many existing explanations for order gain or lose plausibility based on the definition of order from which they are operating. For instance, scholars have long criticized Kenneth Waltz's definition of international structure/order for 'stacking the deck' against ideational explanations and inherently favoring the materialist power-based explanations emphasized by IR realists. As Jack Donnelly has argued,

Waltz's conceptualization is "problematic because it is not analytically neutral. It pushes us toward political realism by arbitrarily excluding [in his definition of what important international phenomena need explaining] the variables needed for any other kind of theory."¹⁵ Finally, question #3 focuses on defining the boundaries of order. A complete conceptualization should tell us how the concept can vary between 'high' and 'low' values, in this case more order or less order. It should also be able to theorize the negative pole of the concept, in this case, *disorder*.

In the next section, I use these questions to evaluate four prominent types of order conceptualization.¹⁶ The first three approaches correspond with the dominant IR theory paradigms of realism, institutionalism and constructivism. The fourth, 'relationalism,' explores the interesting recent work of the prominent scholar David Lake.

II. Order in International Relations Theory: Existing Conceptualizations

2.1 Realists: *Equilibrium through Material Environment*

From the perspective of the realist tradition, the fundamental attribute of order in world politics has always been the distinct *lack* of order. What makes international relations distinct is the anarchic environment in which no unit has the authority to rule over any other. Yet upon closer inspection, realists *do* have a conception of order. Realists look for order and account for its variation by examining a particular consequence of anarchy—namely, the fact that the system's units must by necessity evaluate one another only according to their relative power. They see order when the material environment produces or perpetuates equilibrium. More specifically, most realists would argue that in an ordered system, the material environment is such that it is in no major actor's

¹⁵ Jack Donnelly, "Rethinking Political Structures: From 'Ordering Principles' to 'Vertical Differentiation'—and Beyond," *International Theory* 1, No. 1 (2009), p. 79.

¹⁶ I emphasize that these are four *types* rather than singular conceptualizations because even within each camp different scholars frequently disagree over significant issues. I do not mean to trivialize these intra-paradigmatic differences. Nonetheless, because the most notable fall between the paradigms rather than within them, I emphasize the similarities within each group more than the differences.

interest to fundamentally upset or seek to overturn the status quo. This does not depend upon actors' intentions, nor does it hinge on their 'satisfaction' with the system in which they live. Instead, actors either recognize or learn that the material costs of seeking major change outweigh the material benefits.

For realists, 'material environment' refers to the international distribution of capabilities among a system's units. This itself is dependent upon raw power differentials between units as well as the system-wide distribution of military technology. While the materially induced equilibrium constitutes what order *is* (question #1 above), it is these material variables that represent the *causes* of order, order change and order variation in realist theory. This separation of concept from cause is difficult to disentangle and is not explicitly theorized, complicating realism's ability to answer question #2 above.

Nonetheless, some separation is possible, and many realists have focused on polarity, or number of great powers in the system, as their defining cause.¹⁷ The dynamics of an order will be fundamentally different if there is only one great power (unipolarity) versus two equally matched great powers (bipolarity) versus more than two (multipolarity). Realists are divided, however, on the precise effects of these different polar arrangements for order, and, specifically, on which configuration is likely to be the most durable, peaceful, and/or 'orderly.' The biggest divide falls between those who see a *balance* between more than one great power as the principal precondition for equilibrium and those who believe that the *preponderance* of one power above all the rest maximizes the chances for such order.¹⁸ I take up each in turn.

¹⁷ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, M.A.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1979), pp. 97-99; Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 9.

¹⁸ On this differentiation within realist theories of order, see Michael Mastanduno, "A Realist View: Three Images of the Coming International Order," in *International Order and the Future of World Politics*, T.V. Paul and John A. Hall, eds. (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1999). For a recent attempt to explain and reconcile this divide, see Victoria Tin-Bor Hui, *War and State Formation in Ancient China and Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

In the *balance* conception, even states that are rivals and allied against one another implicitly work together to maintain an approximate parity of power, assuring that neither side or any single unit has enough to make a destabilizing bid for control of the entire system.¹⁹ Order here is produced by a symmetrical balance of power, while the strength of that order depends upon the likelihood that equilibrium can be preserved. According to Waltz, the leading advocate of this perspective, “[a]n imbalance of power, by feeding the ambition of some states to extend their control, may tempt them to dangerously adventurous activity. Safety for all states, one may conclude, depends on the maintenance of a balance among them.”²⁰ Order as material equilibrium is preserved because the temptation for aggression, expansion or the general desire to pursue major gains at the expense of other actors is checked on each side of the balance by the certainty of retaliation from the other.

Alternatively, a different school of realism argues that a *preponderance* of power by one unit, not a balance, is the primary cause of order in world politics.²¹ Variations on this theme abound, but most agree that only a hegemonic actor standing far above the system’s other units has the capacity and incentive to induce equilibrium and provide order. This view is most notably adopted by Robert Gilpin, who frames the history of international orders as the rise and fall of hegemonic powers. Order thus exists when there is a sizable asymmetry of power, whereas disorder results from symmetry (or lack of sufficient asymmetry). Similarly, ‘more’ order exists where the preponderant power has a vast material lead over potential competitors that is likely to endure into the distant future.²² Order breaks down when changing power differentials preclude the hegemon from

¹⁹ Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, pp. 119-121.

²⁰ Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p.132. And as he notes later, “Close competition subordinates ideology to interest; [by contrast,] states that enjoy a margin of power over their closest competitors are led to pay undue attention to minor dangers and to pursue fancies abroad that reach beyond the fulfillment of interests narrowly defined in terms of security.” Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, pp. 205-206.

²¹ For a summary of some of these ideas, see Mastanduno, “A Realist View,” pp. 31-36.

²² Wohlforth, “The Stability of a Unipolar World.”

enforcing equilibrium and allow other actors to rise, both of which provide other units incentives to act in ways that disrupt order.²³

Material environments certainly play an important role in the origins of international orders, and these realist scholars do well to illuminate the ways in which orders are at least in part shaped by the distribution of raw and technology across units.²⁴ Yet in spite of the likely importance of material power in *causing* order, realism offers only a sparse and thin *conceptualization* of order. Order as materially induced equilibrium does not tell us much about apparent continuities in order when the material environment experiences significant changes (as well as vice versa). For example, why did we not see significant changes in order in the 1990s, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and transition from bipolarity to unipolarity? While preponderance and balance realists disagree over which system produces equilibrium/order, both groups should agree that a transition from one type of polar system to the other would have major order repercussions. Yet if orders in the way realists have defined them do not always change with major changes in the international material environment, we must still be missing significant elements of the concept.

Furthermore, if different material environments in general and polarity in particular explain most of the relevant variation across orders, what are we to do with all the other ‘stuff’ that actors in world politics often recognize as significant components of the international system? If bipolar or hegemonic systems are supposed to display similar foundational characteristics according to realist logic, then why are some orders characterized by large numbers of consensus norms, international institutions, or rules against violence while others with the same material environments are not? Realists might answer these difficult questions by a) arguing that these are quibbles over details that do not ultimately matter; or b) conceding that explanations for these things must be found at the

²³ Gilpin, *War and Change*, pp. 9-13.

²⁴ Indeed, the hypotheses I pose in the next chapter are in part based on the insights and assumptions of the preponderance variant of realism, namely that dominant actors often have the greatest hand in influencing what international order will look like.

unit-level, within the great power leaders of particular orders. Neither explanation is satisfying, the latter because it directs us to search outside of realism for answers, the former because “if governments are not likely to be constrained by the rules to which they agree, why do they spend time and other resources negotiating them in the first place?”²⁵

2.2 Institutionalists: Equilibrium through Institutional Environment

From a second perspective, the ‘stuff’ that makes up order isn’t the material environment produced by the distribution of power, but the degree of institutionalization in world politics. Order in this view is the proliferation of formal networks of interaction between actors or units, or the institutionalization of inter-unit communications and exchanges. The effect of such institutionalization, Robert Keohane argues, is a more stable, cooperative and predictable international environment:

International systems containing institutions that generate a great deal of high-quality information and make it available on a reasonably even basis to the major actors are likely to experience more cooperation than systems that do not contain such institutions, even if fundamental state interests and the distribution of power are the same in each system.²⁶

This is the focus of the paradigm of IR theory commonly known as institutionalism (or neoliberal institutionalism).²⁷ Institutionalists argue that states interact in fundamentally different ways in a heavily institutionalized system than in one lacking institutions.²⁸ As one prominent institutionalist

²⁵ Beth A. Simmons and Lisa L. Martin, “International Organizations and Institutions,” in Walter Carlsnaes, Thomas Risse, and Beth A. Simmons, eds. *Handbook of International Relations* (London: SAGE Publications, 2002), p. 195.

²⁶ Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 245.

²⁷ Accordingly, the term ‘liberal’ in the section heading refers to neoliberal institutionalism, not other strands of liberal theory such as those focused on domestic level processes (traditional liberalism) or idealism and progress (classical liberalism).

²⁸ For prominent examples of neoliberal institutionalism, see Keohane, *After Hegemony*; “The Demand for International Regimes,” *International Organization*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (Spring 1982); Kenneth A. Oye, ed., *Cooperation Under Anarchy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986); Arthur Stein, “Coordination and Collaboration: Regimes in an Anarchic World,” *International Organization*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (Spring 1982); Robert Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation* (USA: Basic Books, 1984); Charles Lipson, “International Cooperation in Economic and Security Affairs,” *International Organization* Vol. 37, No. 1 (October 1984); Lisa L. Martin, “Institutions and Cooperation: Sanctions During the Falkland Islands Conflict,” *International Security*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (Spring 1992).

has put it, “the relation between international institutions and order is a relatively simple one. The entire point of institutions is to embody norms and rules, and thus to induce more certainty and predictability in patterns of international interactions.”²⁹ Systems without effective institutions are thus significantly distinct from institutionalized systems. The latter are ordered; the former are not (question #3).

In the most comprehensive institutionalist conception of order to date, G. John Ikenberry defines order as the degree of institutionalization between actors in world politics, institutionalization that exists independent of the material distribution of power in a system.³⁰ Specifically, he contrasts balance of power and hegemonic orders—both premised on the realist conception of order as material environment—with constitutional orders characterized by “agreed-upon legal and political institutions that operate to allocate rights and limit the exercise of power. In a constitutional order, power is ‘tamed’ by making it less consequential.”³¹ An ideal constitutional order, Ikenberry argues, contains entrenched international institutions that set “binding and authoritative limits on the exercise of power” and are hard for even the most powerful actors to manipulate to their advantage. ‘More’ order exists in the institutionalized environment with the strongest checks on the use of power imbalances to one’s advantage, acceptance by the largest number of political entities over the most issue areas, the most resistance to external ‘shocks.’³² ‘Less’ order presumes either fewer institutions, less agreement over them, or less effectiveness in them (question #3).³³ But implicit in all institutionalist scholarship is the belief that institutions

²⁹ Lisa Martin, “An Institutional View: International Institutions and State Strategies,” in *International Order and the Future of World Politics*. T.V. Paul and John A. Hall, eds. (Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 91.

³⁰ G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order After Major Wars* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 6, 23.

³¹ *After Victory*, p. 29. Ikenberry explicitly notes that “constitutionalism depends heavily on the role of international institutions” in his argument (p. 35).

³² Ikenberry himself does not explicate beyond this what makes an order stable, arguing only that the more institutionalized/constitutional an order is, the more stable it will be. See *After Victory*, pp. 44-48.

³³ Ikenberry does not discuss what makes for an effective versus an ineffective institution. He does, however, discuss three ways in which institutions can potentially bind the power of strong states. See *After Victory*, pp. 62-63.

produce stable, equilibrium-perpetuating behavior because actors come to see the mutual benefits of institutionalization. As a result, units continue to work within institutional structures long after the conditions that produced them (particular distributions of power, for instance) have faded.

The institutionalist vision of order succeeds more than the realist one in separating concept from cause (question #2). Of the various causes scholars hypothesize for the gradual institutionalization of international politics—technological changes that have increased interdependence and produced more common interests between actors and the proliferation of constitutional democracies that are either more capable or more willing to submit to transnational regulations and regimes, for instance—these *explanations* remain distinct from the *conception* of order itself. A focus on the proliferation of transnational institutions across issue areas in international relations also directs us toward interesting and important developments that are neglected by the sparse conception of order in realism: Why, since the end of the Napoleonic Wars, have we seen the steady proliferation of formal international organizations? Why in general have actors resorted more and more to institutional settlements to settle contentious issues when they had for so long settled for ad hoc, informal solutions? Without a doubt, these are important questions for scholars of world politics that institutionalists bring to our attention.

Yet while the institutionalist approach is more conceptually clear and logically consistent than realism, it fares less well on other issues. For a number of reasons, it remains questionable whether institutions must be central to a comprehensive conceptualization of international order. First, the distinction between institutionalized and non-institutionalized systems is not as clear-cut as some scholars suggest (related to question #3). Ikenberry himself blurs this distinction, noting that “[t]he ‘weak’ versions of balance-of-power and hegemonic order involve the presence of rules and institutional processes that diminish the pure operation of balancing or hegemonic coercion...As a result, these weaker—that is to say, institutionalized—versions of balance and hegemony can take

on characteristics that make them look somewhat like a constitutional order.”³⁴ In other words, elements of constitutional order may often be present in the systems that by the very conceptual definition employed by institutionalists should be classified as *disordered* (or at least ‘less’ ordered). Recent scholarship has also suggested that the proliferation of institutions in international relations may be both a product of, as well as a cause for, unit tendencies to pursue power-maximizing strategic behavior at the expense of others both inside and outside of institutional restraints.³⁵ If different systems that produce vastly different patterns of behavior can still possess significant and similar levels of institutionalization, one may reasonably begin to wonder whether order really hinges on the presence of institutions.

Finally, whether institutions have fundamentally transformed the nature of international relations is itself open to debate.³⁶ After all, institutionalist scholars admit that “[f]ew empirical studies specify the conditions under which institutions should have the predicted effects,” concluding from this that “the casual significance of institutions remains open to challenge.”³⁷ Institutional proliferation has not, for example, prevented frequent or major inter-unit militarized conflict from occurring. Some forms of cooperation—such as the lowering of tariff barriers and increase in aggregate trade—have certainly increased, but others have remained largely unaltered

³⁴ *After Victory*, p. 49. For similar admissions, see Ikenberry, “Liberalism and Empire: Logics of Order in the American Unipolar Age,” *Review of International Studies* 30 (2004).

³⁵ See Lloyd Gruber, *Ruling the World: Power Politics and the Rise of Supranational Institutions* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000); Daniel Drezner, *All Politics is Global: Explaining International Regulatory Regimes* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007).

³⁶ Many of the functionalist institutionalists admit as much, noting that while institutions at the margins increase cooperation and the availability of information, they do not fundamentally alter states’ underlying identities, preferences or interests. See, for example, Martin, “An Institutional View,” pp. 81-84.

³⁷ Simmons and Martin, “International Organizations and Institutions,” p. 200. Similarly, in a sweeping overview of international institutions and the academic literature surrounding them, another group of scholars concludes that “international organization has generally been a response to or manifestation of deeper changes in international relations, not a driver of these changes” Alexander Thompson and Duncan Snidal, “International Organization,” *International Organization* (1999): p. 698.

since the onset of institutionalization. In addition, observed increases in certain forms of cooperation could also be as much a cause of institutionalization as an effect of it.³⁸

Institutions prove to be either a) intervening variables for some more important cause of order along the way; or b) one possible causal pathway that is neither necessary nor sufficient for producing order. As Hedley Bull put it a generation ago, while “[a]t the present time an important means to the legitimation of rules is to have them endorsed by international assemblies and international organizations,” this need not necessarily be the case.³⁹ The rules that make up the content of existing institutions may well be important for order—in fact, I argue later in the chapter that they are foundational to order—but this does not mean that such rules must be expressed through formal and functionalist international institutions. While logically consistent, we have reason to suspect that the institutionalist conception of order remains incomplete.

2.3 Constructivists: Equilibrium through Ideational Environment

Yet another group of scholars sees international order not as the product of material or institutional environments, but ideational ones. Social constructivists equate order with a stable social structure that exists above units and conditions their behaviors and identities. More specifically, order is constituted by a common set of ideas that pertain to fundamental issues in international politics. “[T]he fundamental structures of international politics are social rather than strictly material (a claim that opposes materialism), and... these structures shape actors’ identities and interests, rather than just their behavior (a claim that opposes rationalism),” writes Alexander

³⁸ On the relationships between these three phenomena, see Bruce Russett and John O’Neal, *Triangulating Peace.: Democracy, Interdependence, and International Organizations* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001).

³⁹ Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, p. 69. Though he discusses the importance of ‘institutions’ for order, Bull clearly assigns different meaning to the term than do institutionalists: “But to find the basic causes of such order as exists in world politics, one must look not to the League of Nations, the United Nations and such bodies, but to institutions of international society that arose before these international organizations were established, and that would continue to operate...even if these organizations did not exist,” pp. xxxiv-xxxv.

Wendt.⁴⁰ Common ideas held by a system's units form the ideational environment (also described as 'shared understandings,' 'collective knowledge,' 'collective identity,' and 'world culture'). This environment then acts back upon the agents, influencing their behaviors, ideas and identities.⁴¹ Constructivists argue that the modern international system is remarkable not for the disparities and conflicts it produces, but for the uniformities in beliefs and behaviors across actors regardless of their historical or material circumstances.⁴² These similarities serve as evidence of a powerful international social structure bearing down on the units, driving them towards the kinds of behaviors that feed back into and reproduce that social structure.⁴³ As John Meyer and his colleagues have influentially argued, the tendency for these actors to "routinely organize and legitimate themselves in terms of universalistic (world) models like citizenship, socioeconomic development, and rationalized justice" goes significantly beyond a rational desire to keep up and compete with others. Instead, it is indicative of an influential ideational environment.⁴⁴

Scholars have expanded upon this basic conception in different ways. Though a self-identified realist, Henry Kissinger's classic conception of 'legitimate' order is actually closer to the constructivist conception than a realist one. Legitimate order, Kissinger says, exists when "[p]rinciples of obligation...are taken so much for granted that they are never talked about, and such

⁴⁰ Alexander Wendt, "Constructing International Politics," *International Security*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Summer 1995), pp. 416-417.

⁴¹ That the ideas are *collective* in nature needs to be stressed. They are not just similar ideas born in individual, isolated minds, but common beliefs that collectively rise from a truly *shared* experience. In Wendt's words, "In principle...structures might be constituted entirely by private ideas, but in practice they are usually constituted by shared ones" Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 249.

⁴² As Wendt puts it, "...contemporary states share a great many beliefs about the rules of the international game, who its players are, what their interests are, what rational behavior is, and so on. Few would deny, in other words, that the structure of the contemporary international system contains a lot of culture." *Social Theory*, p. 190.

⁴³ This is true even if actors fail to realize that such a structure and such commonalities between them exist. See Wendt, *Social Theory*, p. 259.

⁴⁴ "As [these universalistic traits] are implemented in the furthest corners of the globe, they operate as framing assumptions producing consequences that in no reasonable way can be seen as 'functional' for the societies that implement them." John W. Meyer, John Boli, George M. Thomas and Francisco O. Ramirez, "World Society and the Nation-State," *The American Journal of Sociology*, 103, No. 1 (1997).

periods therefore appear to posterity as shallow and self-righteous.”⁴⁵ In more recent times Mlada Bukovansky has defined the ‘political culture’ of the international system as “that set of implicit or explicit propositions, shared by major actors in the system, about the nature of legitimate political authority, state identity, and political power.”⁴⁶ In the same way, Bruce Cronin writes about ‘transnational communities,’ or groups of international actors/polities characterized by “a commitment... to maintaining a particular set of social relationships with each other.”⁴⁷

There are many appealing aspects in the constructivist vision of order. It would be a difficult task to produce a viable conception of order that did not incorporate basic acceptance among a system's actors over some common ideas, principles or norms. Constructivists have aptly critiqued realist and institutionalist conceptions for taking for granted aspects of the international system that are actually products of the ideational environment (including, for instance, that states are the principal and legitimate units; that security is their principle goal, and that territorial sovereignty is a universally accepted right).⁴⁸ If these issues are of vital importance to our understanding of world politics, we must conclude that order cannot be adequately conceptualized without reference to the shared ideas that make up international social structures.

That said, the mainstream constructivist approach to order still suffers from notable weaknesses and ambiguities. First, ‘social structure’ as it is now used by constructivists is too vague a concept to be treated as a synonym for order. Rather than focusing on how this structure accounts

⁴⁵ Henry Kissinger, *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh and the Problem of Peace, 1812-1822* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1957). For a similar and more recent treatment of ‘legitimate order,’ see Randall L. Schweller, *Unanswered Threats: Political Constraints on the Balance of Power* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 28.

⁴⁶ Mlada Bukovansky, *Legitimacy and Power Politics: The American and French Revolutions in International Political Culture* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 2. For a very similar conception to Bukovansky's, see Rodney Bruce Hall, *National Collective Identity: Social Constructs and International Systems* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 28.

⁴⁷ Bruce Cronin, *Community Under Anarchy: Transnational Identity and the Evolution of Cooperation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 37.

⁴⁸ The most notable example here is Alexander Wendt's claim that in *Theory of International Politics*, Kenneth Waltz has “added to his theory of structure two things which he says do not belong there: non-capability attributes (egoistic motivations), and the quality of relations among units (self-help). He has in other words made an implicit assumption about the *social* structure of international politics.” *Social Theory*, p. 107.

for the patterned constraints and opportunities that units face, most constructivists argue that social structure actually *constitutes* those actors themselves. Social interactions determine not only which actors are most important and what behaviors they are likely to perform, but also dictate their very interests and identities to begin with. But if we accept the conception of order as social, then order's opposite isn't just disorder, but instead a lack of 'system' altogether. Following constructivist logic through to its logic conclusions, lack of system means the absence of consistent actor interactions. And since social interaction is the basis for identities, isolated actors would remain unsocialized and primitive.⁴⁹ This matters because even if actors are socialized in the way constructivist scholars argue they are, social actors still frequently exist in environments that we would never otherwise consider ordered. The logical conclusion to draw here is that the threshold for what constitutes a *social structure* in international relations is notably lower than the social threshold for an international *order* (related to question #3).

Put another way, if we accept the constructivist conception of order, the international system has been not just *constantly* ordered but also *similarly* ordered since the advent of the modern states system in the 17th century. If the logical alternative to 'order' is a pre-social state of nature where actors lack mutually recognizable ideas or identities, then not since before pre-civilizational times has the world been without some continuous order. While this view might be empirically correct, it renders order overly general and ultimately trivial, since it cannot help us account for the hundreds of years of interesting variation since then.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ This is evidently the view of one prominent constructivist, who argues that "[t]here can be no mutually comprehensible conduct of international relations... without mutually recognized constitutive rules resting on collective intentionality... these constitutive rules prestructure the domains of actions within which regulative rules take effect." In other words, "[n]o consciously organized realm of human activity is imaginable without them, including international politics." John Gerard Ruggie, "What Makes the World Hang Together? Neo-Utilitarianism and the Social Constructivist Challenge," *International Organization*, 52, No. 4 (1998), p. 879, 873.

⁵⁰ To take but one example, Wendt only divides types of international systems (or structures, or cultures) into three possible categories, and in his view the system has undergone a major change from one of these types to another only once or twice over the course of three centuries. The most revealing passage on this point: "For much of international history states lived in a Hobbesian culture where the logic of anarchy was kill or be killed. But in the seventeenth century

Second, the constructivist approach often confuses concept with causes (question #2). By definition, constructivism already tends to blur the boundary between causes and outcomes more than realism or institutionalism, as actors' ideas, behaviors and interactions create the very ideational environment that then acts back upon them. In regards to order specifically, this becomes more problematic: It means that constructivists presuppose a genuine agreement on and internalization of the shared ideas/identities among the actors of a given order. The accepted, internalized legitimacy of these shared ideas is already assumed, not questioned. Because of its prominence in the discipline, I use Alexander Wendt's *Social Theory of International Politics* as example. "To say that a norm is legitimate," argues Wendt, "is to say that an actor fully accepts its claims on himself... It is only with this degree of internalization that a norm really constructs agents."⁵¹ More than other conceptualizations, this view comes prepackaged with a particular set of order causes. The constructivist presupposition clearly violates ontological neutrality toward the potential *causes* of order. It does so by claiming that order must be the product of 1) interaction and socialization among actors; and 2) actor internalization of the ideas that come to characterize that order.

Furthermore, it does not logically follow that the ideas that make up social structure *must* be internalized across the system. How are constructivists to account for prominent international orders in history that lacked true socialization yet were nevertheless powerful and enduring? Many scholars claim, for instance, that between 1648 to 1815 there existed a set of common ordering principles in Europe that significantly conditioned actors' behavior, even before the emergence of a post-Napoleonic conference system. There is little evidence, however, that the units of that system internalized some consensus agenda or adopted any sense of 'we-ness.' Overall, one can accept

European states founded a Lockean culture where conflict was constrained by the mutual recognition of sovereignty. This culture eventually became global, albeit in part through a Hobbesian process of colonialism. In the late twentieth century I believe the international system is undergoing another structural change, to a Kantian culture of collective security," Wendt, *Social Theory*, p. 314. See also Ruggie, "What Makes the World Hang Together?" p. 872.

⁵¹ *Social Theory*, p. 273. For a more complete explication of the social learning process through which agents construct, internalize, and reproduce shared ideas, see p. 331.

aspects of the ideational *conception* of order while rejecting the mainstream constructivist *explanation*, granting that order is constituted by common ideas but disputing that these principles have been truly internalized. To the extent that we observe actors recognizing common principles but not necessarily internalizing them, we cannot rely on the constructivist conceptualization of order as it currently stands.

Even if we were to accept these limitations, a final important question remains unaddressed in the constructivist literature: internalization or consensus *over what*? What issue areas are important enough where a consensus over them constitutes ‘order’? Unfortunately, prominent constructivists are rarely explicit about which issue areas count the most toward producing order. For instance, at different times Wendt identifies the principal content of international social structures to be: 1) understandings about violence; 2) the nature or trustworthiness of other units/actors; or 3) the most appropriate means for interaction between units. Does a broad consensus on any one of these issues constitute an order? We receive no answers from Wendt, while constructivism in general remains surprisingly vague on international order’s specific content. Epitomizing this problem, one constructivist has recently argued that “because order is defined in terms of stable shared expectations, the substantive *content* of particular expectations and behaviors is irrelevant. No particular shared expectations and behaviors is [sic] irrelevant. No particular shared expectations and behaviors are ruled out from becoming the ‘stuff’ of an order.”⁵²

2.4 Relationalists: Equilibrium through Authority

I have thus far subsumed discussion of important scholars and theories into the big three IR paradigms because each has shared more commonalities than differences with the important paradigmatic assumptions regarding order. Yet recently, the prominent work of David Lake appears

⁵² Janice Bially Mattern, *Ordering International Politics: Identity, Crisis, and Representational Force* (New York: Routledge University Press, 2005), p. 30.

to defy this classification.⁵³ Lake's starting point is to challenge the dominant IR assumption that order is best characterized by anarchy and sovereign equality between units.⁵⁴ While *de jure* anarchy and sovereign equality remain the law of the land, he argues that many polities willfully participate in *de facto* hierarchy, surrendering portions of their sovereign rights to more powerful actors in exchange for physical security or security over prosperity. In this way hierarchy is consensual, not coerced. Unlike for 'preponderance' realism, hierarchy is dependent not simply upon material power but on *authority*, or legitimate, rightful rule.⁵⁵ "Authority is a relationship between ruler and ruled," argues Lake. "Hierarchy is a variable defined by the authority of the ruler over an increasing number of issues otherwise reserved to the ruled."⁵⁶ Authority is thus key to Lake's conception of order and hierarchy is dependent upon it.

What makes the relationship between a dominant and subordinate polity legitimate? Put another way, how does a dominant unit gain *authority*? For Lake, authority exists only in the face of an acknowledgement of one unit's legitimate rights over another: "authority is not a claim made by the ruler, but a right granted by the ruled. A does not possess authority unless B acknowledges a duty to comply with A's will." On the one hand, this interpretation seems to fit nicely into a constructivist worldview. Since pure "[c]oercion is regarded by neither the perpetrator nor the victim as legitimate" without some sort of prearranged social contract between them, authority goes beyond mere coercive capability. Instead, it represents some genuine ideational-contractual

⁵³ The most prominent of these accounts are David A. Lake, "Anarchy, Hierarchy and the Variety of International Relations," *International Organization* (1996); *Entangling Relations: American Foreign Policy in Its Century* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999); "Beyond Anarchy: The Importance of Security Institutions," *International Security*, Vol. 26 (2001); "Escape from the State of Nature: Authority and Hierarchy in World Politics," *International Security*, Vol. 32, No.1 (2007); and *Hierarchy in International Relations* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2009). But see also Alexander Cooley and Hendrik Spruyt, *Contracting States: Sovereign Transfers in International Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

⁵⁴ Though he does not dispute that the international system remains anarchic *overall*, he observes significant 'pockets' of hierarchy amidst this larger anarchy. In sum, "[i]nternational relations is not a Hobbesian state of nature, but rather is a mixed society with pockets of relative anarchy in which self-help remains the rule and pockets of relative hierarchy in which a measure of authority, peace, and free trade prevail." *Hierarchy in International Relations*, p. 174.

⁵⁵ *Hierarchy in International Relations*, p. 8; "Escape from the State of Nature," pp. 56-57.

⁵⁶ *Hierarchy in International Relations*, p. 45.

understanding between polities where “the ruler acquires the ability to punish individuals because of the broad backing of others.” This broad backing is provided to the ruler because of a collective understanding among units about the ruler’s legitimate authority over them.⁵⁷

On the other hand, the basis for this recognition comes from a mutual agreement between polities that more closely resembles the logic of institutionalism. Lake argues that the origins of authority rest in a ‘social contract’ between actors. Specifically, a subordinate polity voluntarily cedes some sovereignty or freedom of action to a dominant polity in exchange for some external guarantee of security or stability.⁵⁸ It is rational for both dominant *and* subordinate actors to enter into these contracts, he argues, because both gain more utility from the relationship than they would have achieved on their own unilaterally.⁵⁹ Authority is thus consecrated in social contracts between rational, utility-maximizing dominant and subordinate polities. And because both polities enter into the agreement for utility-maximizing purposes, these hierarchical relationships also tend to be durable and self-enforcing, reproducing the types of equilibrium behaviors that made them advantageous in the first place.⁶⁰ While hierarchies may or may not become associated with formal institutions, they often remain stable because actors develop vested interests in them.⁶¹

There is much to admire in this vision of order as authority-based hierarchy. It blends elements of constructivists’ attention to legitimacy and institutionalists’ arguments about contracts as

⁵⁷ *Hierarchy in International Relations*, pp. 8, 18-22. Lake goes on to discuss how even though the ruler has to stake individual contracts with each member of the system or community, it is the collective sum of these contracts that gives the ruler its dominance: “[P]olitical authority is never a dyadic trait between a ruler and a single subject, but rather derives from a collective that confers rights upon the ruler... [F]rom the perspective of a collectivity, compliance with legitimate authority is voluntary, but from the standpoint of any particular individual, compliance is mandatory. Even as individuals obligate themselves to follow the commands of A, they choose collectively whether to accept A’s authority,” p. 19.

⁵⁸ Confusing here is the fact that Lake refers to the security and stability provided by the dominant polity as “political order.” I assume here though that ‘authority’ and ‘hierarchy’ for Lake come closest to what other scholars have termed ‘international order,’ and I thus do not hold him to or focus on this narrow definition in my analysis here.

⁵⁹ “Relational authority is premised on an exchange between ruler and ruled in which A provides a political order of value to B sufficient to offset the loss of freedom incurred in his subordination to A, and B confers the right on A to exert the restraints on his behavior necessary to provide that order.” *Hierarchy in International Relations*, p. 29.

⁶⁰ *Hierarchy in International Relations*, p. 94.

⁶¹ See David A. Lake, “Rightful Rules: Authority, Order, and the Foundations of Global Governance,” *International Studies Quarterly* 54, No. 3 (2010), pp. 589-594.

the rational fulfillment of units' interests.⁶² Lake also offers some nuance that helps differentiate hierarchical authority relationships from those premised on pure coercion as emphasized by realists.

Yet on differentiating authority-based hierarchy from the preponderance school of realism, Lake does not go far enough. Most importantly, he does not adequately consider the role that coercion plays in the origins of the social contract between units.⁶³ As a result, we are left to believe that dominant units could directly coerce subordinates into hierarchical relationships that subordinates only come to accept later for lack of exit options.⁶⁴ In short, noting that hierarchical relationships today are not characterized by unrestrained coercion says little about the larger logic through which those relationships were first formed.⁶⁵

Lake's view of order hinges on the assumption that hierarchies are mutually beneficial and consensual for both dominant and subordinate polities. But in addition to not theorizing the origins of social contracts, he also does not explain the distribution of polities into 'dominant' and 'subordinate' roles in the first place. This leaves open the possibility that these roles reflect differences in material capabilities prior to negotiations over the social contract. Yet if dominant polities are dominant because of their superior material capabilities, it is difficult to imagine them allowing subordinates to negotiate a contract that helps both sides but benefits the dominator less

⁶² Overall, this institutionalist bent in Lake's arguments overpowers and subsumes the constructivist component. Though he continues uses the language of legitimacy and authority, the concepts are closely tied to actors' self interests and do not seem to play any independent role in his account (such as reconstituting actor identities, for instance, or creating lags between changes in the material environment/nature of the social contract and actor responses).

⁶³ This is unfortunate, since he does well to show how the persistence of hierarchical relationships, *once established*, cannot be explained primarily through the dominant state's coercion of the subordinate.

⁶⁴ Subordinates could also be indirectly forced into undesirable hierarchical relationships. For instance, the emergence of *some* hierarchy in the system—brought about by a few weaker units agreeing to a contract with a dominant polity—may quickly drive other actors to seemingly embrace their own subordination for fear of a future environment where they alone do not have a dominant state benefactor. In other words, subordinate polities freely accept their subordination, but only as a least-worst alternative to the other possibilities. Yet they would ultimately prefer a system without hierarchy, dominance and subordination to begin with. For arguments along these lines, see Gruber, *Ruling the World*; Drezner, *All Politics is Global*.

⁶⁵ Admittedly, this critique has more to do with the origins of order than Lake's conceptualization. But in this case assessing the possible causes of order is crucial for determining whether Lake's conception is 1) realistic; and 2) sufficiently distinct from other conceptualizations. But because he fails to theorize how, why, and where the hierarchical social contract comes into being, his approach remains too ambiguous to pass either of these tests.

than a coerced contract would have.⁶⁶ On this possibility, Lake himself is surprisingly candid, noting that fully theorizing the origins of the contract would probably “modify the proposition advanced in the theory that hierarchy must leave subordinates at least as well off as the next best governance alternative.”⁶⁷ In essence, this conceptualization asks us to assume that order is fully consensual and mutually beneficial between materially unequal polities, even as the origins of this mutual bargain and the distribution of polities into pre-bargaining positions are left unexamined.⁶⁸

While the authority-based hierarchy approach to order admirably combines elements of all three of the dominant IR paradigms, in the end it is not the fundamental revision of world politics that Lake means for it to be. Order here is supposed to be premised on an agreed exchange between stronger and weaker polities of protection for legitimacy that leaves both sides better off. Instead, it remains deceptively close to the materialist conception of order associated with realism. Just as for ‘preponderance’ realists, order is reduced to what dominant units want. And just like with realism, we are left not knowing why much of the interesting ‘stuff’ of order varies across materially similar environments.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ In other words, the assumption requires dominant polities consistently showing the restraint necessary to forego forcing a relationship that leave subordinates worse off while maximizing their own advantages. “On balance, we expect dominance to ‘pay,’ even if the net benefits are hard to measure, and rest in part on conjectures about the alternative nature of world politics under anarchy” 137. But elsewhere he implies that dominance pays specifically because “[t]he power to write rules has been long recognized as an awesome power, and it may be one of the most important benefits of being in authority” *Hierarchy in International Relations*, pp. 137, 34.

⁶⁷ *Hierarchy in International Relations*, p. 180. He is even more explicit in this concession in “Rightful Rules,” pp. 591-593.

⁶⁸ Rationalist arguments like Lake’s tend to theorize authority structures “in a social contract fashion as deriving from the free choices of sovereign actors.” Yet in doing so, they “ignore an important possibility: that international inequalities might be characterized by de facto authority relationships” even before the social contract is made. Alexander Wendt and Daniel Friedheim, “Hierarchy Under Anarchy: Informal Empire and the East German State,” *International Organization* 49, No. 4 (1995), p 690. Lake in particular “focuses on ‘control’ and ‘power asymmetries’ and largely discusses situations in which one party gains greater decision-making over another. Instead of examining mutually advantages [sic] relationships...he emphasizes ‘subordination’ and ‘domination’” exclusively, thus focusing on the very types of relationships likely to be characterized by significant coercion and control. Katja Weber, *Hierarchy Amidst Anarchy: Transaction Costs and Institutional Choice* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), pp. 132-133, fn 18.

⁶⁹ To compare it to a key realist work, Lake’s conceptualization ends up looking like a mere extension on Robert Gilpin’s ‘power plus something else’ conception of order in *War and Change in World Politics* rather than a fundamental challenge to it.

III. An Alternative Conception of International Order: Equilibrium through Observed Rules

For the remainder of the paper, I develop a different second-step conception of order. While it departs from the conceptualizations surveyed above in significant ways, it draws on some of their strengths as well. I address some of the most important similarities and differences towards the end of the paper.

Like other approaches, I start from the first-step definition that at its foundation, order is a pattern equilibrium-perpetuating behavior. But rather than necessarily focusing on power, institutions or social structures, I draw attention to the importance of **rules** for the study of international order. More specifically, I conceptualize international order as the presence of observed rules among the units of a system. By *rules*, I mean system-wide standards of behavior and of membership that are clear and definitive. Hedley Bull provides what is still probably the clearest articulation of rules in international relations: “Rules are general imperative principles which require or authorize prescribed classes of persons or groups to behave in prescribed ways.” While they “may have the status of international law, of moral rules, of custom or established practice” it remains possible that they are instead “worked out without formal agreement or even without verbal communication.”⁷⁰

By **observed**, I mean that such rules are both widely *recognized* and widely *practiced*. Only when rules are both recognized and practiced—that is, when they are observed—are they sufficient for producing order. If rules are practiced but not recognized as such, they may just correspond with behaviors that are already adopted regardless of whether or not a rule exists. For instance, we do not need national constitutional laws prohibiting us from jumping off buildings to our deaths, just as a state does not require treaties prohibiting it from using its own nuclear weapons to annihilate itself. If such rules existed, they would be both redundant and irrelevant. While actors’ actions would be

⁷⁰ Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, pp. 52, 64.

consistent with them, we could not credibly claim that such actions were taken or not taken because actors recognized them. Likewise, rules that are recognized but not practiced are also insufficient for producing order. This is true because actors could pay lip service to all kinds of rules without ever actually complying with any of them. This is the perspective that many realists adopt toward international agreements: states agree in principle to a whole host of international laws, treaties, conventions, and institutions, but rarely follow through on these agreements in practice.⁷¹ Instead, “a rule, to be effective in society, must be obeyed to some degree, and must be reckoned as a factor in the calculations of those to whom it applies, even those who elect to violate it.”⁷² Units can and often do violate rules, but violations should not be widespread and should sometimes trigger backlash or punishment against the offender.⁷³

Returning to the three-level conceptualization of order depicted in Figure A, this idea of ‘observed rules’ constitutes my secondary level component. Figure A also displays a first attempt at identifying some of the more obvious indicators for observed rules. These indicators identify empirically observable phenomena that I believe can best indicate the existence of observed rules. These include widely accepted international law, institutions and/or organizations, a common justificatory vocabulary for explaining and defending one’s actions, and restraint even when engaged in serious conflict.

3.1 Ordering Principles: Inter-Unit and Membership Rules

To restate what we have established above, an international order is in part a set of established foundational rules that are observed by a significant number of important actors at a

⁷¹ Realist Stephen D. Krasner, has even coined a phrase for this phenomenon, labeling it ‘organized hypocrisy.’ See his *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), esp. Chapter 2.

⁷² Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, p. 53.

⁷³ That said, widespread and systematic rule violation likely indicates that the rule is no longer observed and is thus ineffective. As Bull discusses, in the modern system it is not uncommon that “states change the old rules by violating or ignoring them systematically enough to demonstrate that they have withdrawn their consent to them,” *The Anarchical Society*, p. 70.

given time. I refer to a particular set of these rules as **ordering principles**. Specifically, the term denotes a set of rules that potentially governs both the *interaction* of units on the world stage and the very *types* of units recognized in international politics. Ordering principles therefore come in two major types: those that govern external behavior and relations between states (**inter-unit rules**), and those that govern some aspect of internal behavior and to some extent dictate relations within states (**membership rules**). These rules, discussed below, are outlined in Figure B.

--Figure B here--

Inter-unit rules govern interactions between units, and typically pertain to: 1) the use of force; 2) the legitimate means for ‘system maintenance’ tasks such as peacekeeping missions; 3) whether units designated as ‘great powers’ are afforded any special privileges, such as the ability to intervene in others’ domestic affairs; or 4) whether inter-unit relations are characterized by ad hoc or institutionalized interactions. These rules set the parameters for both the legitimate goals states can seek (the ends) and the legitimate actions they can take to accomplish them (the means). In practice, they have less to say about what types of political entities ‘count’ in international relations and take the existence of universally accepted and recognized unit types as a given. Instead, they prescribe and proscribe types and patterns of unit behavior and interaction on the international stage. There is room for rules over almost limitless kinds of behavior here, including violence and war. War need not and often is not evidence of order breaking down, so long as units still recognize (and some still observe) common rules.⁷⁴

All orders must, however, contain some variant of one particular inter-unit rule: *the mutual recognition of other units and their conditional right to exist*. Without some basic level of recognition, “units can only assert their claim to autonomy and establish it by sustained and successful defense against

⁷⁴ “The state which alleges a just cause” for war, argues Hedley Bull, “even one it does not itself believe in, is at least acknowledging that it owes other states an explanation of its conduct, in terms of rules that they accept.” *The Anarchical Society*, p. 43.

challengers.” But with some baseline acknowledgment of others’ rights, “units can have their claims validated by the recognition of others...The right to exist adds importantly to the security of units by defining the boundaries of legitimacy and order within which they function.”⁷⁵ This right to exist need not be unconditional, however. Oftentimes, additional rules specify when units may deny each other recognition. This may involve a polity losing such rights after egregiously violating other important inter-unit rules. Alternatively, recognition may be denied less for how a unit behaves and more for what it *is* (or is not). This brings us to the second type of ordering principle rules, those of membership.

Membership rules define who or what is seen as an acceptable unit and member of the system. Very broadly defined, this means what type of *unit structure* is treated as an acceptable international actor. Are sovereign states the legitimate entities in international relations, or are they subordinate to city-states, empires, dynastic kingdoms, or transnational networks? In recent centuries, unit structure membership rules have remained relatively fixed and unchanging. More narrowly defined, but much more relevant and contested today, are membership rules that refer to particular internal attributes of units, or *unit characteristics*. These rules often pertain to: 1) the type of regime, or from where and whom the regime derives its support; 2) the stability of the regime; 3) the nature of domestic economic transactions; or 4) the capacity or willingness of the regime to uphold basic human rights. Both unit structure and unit characteristic rules are important for international order and the study of world politics more generally. Yet rules of unit structure have remained fixed since before even the earliest empirical focus of my larger research project (1648), when the conditionally sovereign state gained legitimacy over political forms. Because unit structure has not

⁷⁵ Barry Buzan, "From International Order to International Society," p. 347.

been contested to a significant degree since that time, I focus predominantly on unit characteristics in this project (and thus use that term interchangeably with ‘membership rules’).⁷⁶

What exactly does it mean to ‘count’ as a member of an order? Certainly, recognition through official diplomatic missions and economic and cultural exchanges is a part of membership.⁷⁷ Yet there is more to membership than formal recognition. When a polity meets an order’s membership requirements, it is afforded whatever privileges and protections are set forth in that order’s inter-unit rules. If there are protections against certain types of conquest, for instance, ‘members’ will be protected from such encroachments, no matter how small or weak they may be. Non-members, by contrast, would not be afforded the same protections.⁷⁸

This idea of membership is not dissimilar to the concept of ‘club’ goods, important for international relations and for everyday life. We all reap the benefits of belonging to certain clubs while simultaneously recognizing (and perhaps lamenting) that we remain non-members of others. For example, AAA members are entitled to certain privileges—such as reduced hotel rates—and certain protections—including quick roadside assistance when experiencing car trouble—that are unavailable to non-members. Likewise, the great power victors of the Napoleonic Wars established a membership rule that only legitimate and traditional regimes (in practice, monarchies) were rightful members of the new order. As a result, while these great powers acted to preserve the autonomy of monarchical regimes like Saxony against conquest, they ignored or even supported similar conquests in polities with non-traditional and liberal regimes. Because these regimes were not considered

⁷⁶ Unless otherwise noted, the reader should assume that my subsequent discussions of membership rules refer specifically to unit characteristics, not unit structure. But for an account that focuses, in my terms, on the contestation of unit structure, see Hendrik Spruyt, *The Sovereign State and Its Competitors: An Analysis of Systems Change* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994).

⁷⁷ On the importance of recognition for individual units in international relations, see Spruyt, *The Sovereign State and Its Competitors*.

⁷⁸ In a similar discussion, Jack Donnelly refers to the idea of defining who is not a member entitled to privileges and protections as ‘ontological outlawry.’ See Donnelly, “Sovereign Inequalities and Hierarchy in Anarchy: American Power and International Society,” *European Journal of International Relations* 12, No. 2 (2006), esp. p. 147.

rightful members of the order of 1815, they were disqualified from receiving the great power protections promised within that new order's inter-unit rules.

While other approaches have specified more types of rules giving attention to more specific issues, I believe that my conception of ordering principles captures many of these particularities without needlessly complicating the concept. For instance, I see less need than others often do for assigning special status to rules over conflict and war. Inter-unit rules frequently delineate what kinds of conflict between units will be tolerated and in which contexts. And as discussed in the previous paragraph, membership rules often specify which units are protected through whatever constraints inter-unit rules put on conflict.

Unlike others, I also do not treat 'sovereignty' as *the* defining principle of international order. I acknowledged earlier that mutual recognition is a crucial and basic component of order. But why the recognition of 'sovereignty' must be part of this is unclear. For one thing, recognition of another unit's basic right to exist does not seem dependent upon also recognizing its sovereignty. For another, and as Krasner has persuasively demonstrated, actors have throughout history violated 'sovereignty' in all of its varied meanings nearly as often as they have upheld and defended it.⁷⁹

Finally, ordering principles can also encompass status or rank issues.⁸⁰ Nothing in my conceptualization precludes, for instance, the division of an order's membership principles into different tiers of membership.⁸¹ From 1815 on, in fact, a defining characteristic of order has been the special status of units designated 'great powers.' This designation implies only that great powers have some privileged membership status in the order. It does not mean that any unit not a great power is disqualified from being an ordinary, non-privileged member. At the same time, by

⁷⁹ See his *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy*.

⁸⁰ See Gilpin, *War and Change*, and especially Jack Donnelly, "Rethinking Political Structures."

⁸¹ I thus tend to disagree with Donnelly's assertion that "'[w]ho counts' (unit differentiation) is appropriately treated as analytically distinct and qualitatively different from how or how much 'those who count' count (vertical differentiation) and what 'those who count' do (functional differentiation)." "Rethinking Political Structures," p. 73.

delineating the boundaries for rivalry between units and specifying the forums in which they compete, inter-unit rules will often define the dimensions of rank or status (material power? wealth? legitimate authority?) that will be most salient in any particular order.

--Table 2 here--

In sum, the principles that constitute an international order are broad-based rules that come in two types: rules governing unit interaction and rules designated which units are members of the order and why. Table 2 depicts the most significant proposed changes in ordering principles in the modern states system. Explaining these major changes is the principal analytic focus of my larger research project.

3.2 Other Dimensions of Order

ORDER DEPTH

Based on the content of an order's principles—that is, the specific inter-unit and membership rules that are observed by units across a particular system—we can also generalize about the order's depth. I define order *depth* as a dimension for how far into that system's individual units the ordering principles penetrate. All things being equal, international systems are more likely to be characterized by inter-unit rules alone than by membership rules alone. To put this another way, we are unlikely to observe the presence of membership rules without also observing inter-unit rules.⁸² I label the ordering principles of a system shallow when they address only unit interaction but not membership. By contrast, a deep set of ordering principles includes both inter-unit *and* membership rules. As Table 2 indicates, 1815 was a key historical turning point from this perspective, since it marked the first time that deep ordering principles were enacted that included explicit membership rules.

⁸² For whatever reason the opposite is not true, as we do at times find the presence of inter-unit rules where no membership principles have yet solidified.

ORDER BREADTH

While ‘ordering principles’ and ‘order depth’ tell us about the shape and character an order takes, they tell us little about the political or geographical reach of those principles. Admittedly, order breadth is a much more difficult dimension to theorize. Nonetheless, while we may not be able to find the precise tipping point at which a certain number of units with a certain amount of power constitute an ‘order,’ we can at least agree on the extremes. For instance, one unit—even a great power—favoring a particular set of rules that is rejected by all of the system’s other units hardly constitutes an order.

In general, I can posit that to be considered ‘ordered’ in the first place, a set of common ordering principles must be observed by at least half of a particular system’s most powerful or influential units. Alternatively, a group of units observing a common set of principles that together comprise at least half of a system’s material capabilities could also serve as an acceptable threshold.⁸³ Important to remember is that such assessments hinge on the specifications of the particular system in question. If the entire planet is today interconnected enough to be considered a system, then a truly international order must encompass at least half the units of the world. But for much of history—and, arguably, still today—systems have been much smaller than that. Up until the late nineteenth century, the world’s most advanced and significant international system barely extended outside of Europe. Simultaneously, other systems existed and continue to exist in other regions of the world—the Asia-Pacific and the Americas, for instance. While some of these systems became or are becoming orders, others did not and will not.

Beyond this approximate ‘half a system’ tipping point, however, systems already appropriately classified as orders still vary in their rate of acceptance, or what I call order *breadth*. At one end of the spectrum some orders might come close to universal consensus among all the units

⁸³ For an alternative approach to order breadth, see North, Summerhill, and Weingast, “Order, Disorder and Economic Change.”

of the system, while consensus in other orders might remain closer to only around half the system's units. The closer a set of ordering principles comes to universal acceptance, the broader that order's consensus. The further it moves away from universal acceptance, the narrower it is. It is worth repeating, however, that this dimension is very difficult to measure. These guidelines for classification should thus only be considered approximations.⁸⁴

--Figure C here--

When we bring together these two dimensions—the *depth* of an order's observed rules and the *breadth* of consensus over them—we can construct a preliminary typology of international orders (see Figure C). The strongest form an order can take is 'anchored'. An anchored order is both broad and deep. In it, a significant number of a system's important units agree upon a set of principles containing both interaction *and* membership rules. Anecdotally, the post-World War II liberal western order comes closest to anchored. To a lesser degree, the first decade of the European Concert system was also relatively anchored. At the other extreme, in an 'anemic order,' only a small percentage of a system's units consent to rules governing only inter-unit interactions. This probably best describes relations following the peace of Utrecht in 1713, as even the loose, weak inter-unit rules advocated by Great Britain were not observed for long by the other most important actors. Between the extremes, in 'affixed orders' a larger consensus exists over a set of inter-unit principles only, while 'attenuated orders' are characterized by the presence of both inter-unit and membership

⁸⁴ Constructivist scholars of order have also had difficulties answering the critical question of how many actors (and which ones) constitute an international order. In particular they often fail to specify the impact of material capabilities on this dimension. For instance, though Alexander Wendt theoretically cedes little explanatory power to 'rump' material forces, empirically he frequently invokes the material concept of a 'tipping point,' or the moment at which the actions of some number of actors becomes materially significant enough to transform the entire system. In discussing the possibility for systemic cultural change, he notes, "...there is still a gap between cultural change and identity change because cultural change requires not only that identities change, but that their frequency and distribution cross a threshold at which the logic of the structure tips over into a new logic. A Lockean culture with 200 members will not change just because two of its members acquire a Kantian identity, unless perhaps they are also its only superpowers" (*Social Theory*, p. 365). The difficulty here is that Wendt never truly defines the tipping point, failing also to specify a) the particular value or percentage that constitutes one; and b) precisely what metric should be used to assess possible tipping points in the first place (is it power? coercive military capabilities? authority? legitimacy? moral standing?). As a result, we know little about the threshold a consensus must reach to be considered foundational for international order.

principles to which few relevant actors consent. What was left of the larger European Concert system in the second half of the nineteenth century might fit the former, while the smaller Holy Alliance that developed within the original Concert system best describes the latter. To the extent that any sort of order briefly emerged out of from Woodrow Wilson's efforts to enact a new set of ordering principles in 1919, it probably also represented an attenuated order.

DISORDER

In addition to exploring the dimensions of order, it is also important to detail the components of the concept's negative pole, disorder.⁸⁵ Recall that earlier we preliminarily defined disorder as a lack of convention-induced constraint on a system's units, resulting in un-patterned behavior and outcomes that might not perpetuate the system's equilibrium. Applying this definition to the our conceptualization, order can be said to be not just weak but actually non-existent when there is no consensus on any of either type of ordering principles, resulting in the observance of no common rules. More specifically, a system is characterized as *disordered* when heterogeneous unit structures/characteristics rule and disagreements about inter-unit rules abound.

Perhaps the most definitive example of a disordered international system was Europe during its transition from the medieval to the early modern period.⁸⁶ At points between the fall of the Roman Empire and the 'Thirty Years' War, order as it has been conceptualized here was nonexistent on the European continent. Especially during the so-called 'Dark Ages' (~476~800 AD), there was no uniform type of social organization or any concrete delineation of boundaries—territorial or political—between units, and what John Ruggie calls 'heteronomous' unit structures characterized

⁸⁵ As Goertz argues, "it is always useful to ask about the negative pole and the degree to which it is different from 'not' the positive pole. Asking this question can often result in a sharpening of the analysis of the positive pole. If the negative pole is taken to be the negative of the positive then this should at least be a conscious decision." *Social Science Concepts*, pp. 32-33.

⁸⁶ For further examples, see Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, pp. 41-42.

the system.⁸⁷ It was not until between the 15th and 17th centuries that the sovereign state was accepted as the most legitimate of a number of competing unit structure types. The end of the Thirty Years' War and the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 thus serve as important (if also imprecise and imperfect) benchmarks for the advent of order in the modern international system. As Ruggie puts it,

The very concept of the modern state was made possible only when a new rule for differentiating the constituent units within medieval Christendom replaced the constitutive rule of heteronomy (interwoven and overlapping jurisdictions, moral and political). And the modern system of states became conceivable only when the constitutive rule of reciprocal sovereignty took hold.⁸⁸

While all competitors to the state had not been eliminated by that time (and indeed would not be for centuries) it is still fair to say that Westphalia consecrated the legitimacy of the sovereign state as the definitive unit structure of the European and eventually international order. From this perspective, some basic aspects of the international system have remained ordered since 1648.⁸⁹

3.3 Whose Rules Rule? Alternative Rules-Based Accounts

This is certainly not the first attempt to conceptualize the substance of international order as rules. While similar in some respects to the strand of constructivism dominant in the United States, my conceptualization actually draws more from the English School of IR theory than from

⁸⁷ See John Gerard Ruggie, "Continuity and Transformation in the World Polity: Toward a Neorealist Synthesis," in Robert O. Keohane, ed., *Neorealism and Its Critics* (Columbia University Press, 1986); "Territoriality and Beyond: Problematizing Modernity in International Relations," *International Organization*, Vol. 47 (1993). In the early Middle Ages, both the Holy Roman Empire and the Catholic Church claimed universal control over Christians within much of the former Roman Empire, yet neither exercised significant hierarchical control nor advocated exclusive territorial boundaries. And in the (many) areas where these imperial apparatuses did not reach (and even in many where they did), local claims to land that we now know as feudalism, perhaps the very antithesis of the sovereign state, predominated. During the later Middle Ages, centralized social organizations began to compete with and replace these decentralized spheres of influence, and the sovereign state was born. Yet as Hendrik Spruyt has shown, between the 11th and 15th centuries, the state competed for legitimacy with other forms of social organization, namely city-leagues and city-states. See *The Sovereign State and Its Competitors*. Finally, as English School theorists have argued, while there is no logical reason why a system of unlike units couldn't form an order over at least common inter-unit rules (what they call 'neomedievalism' or 'neomedieval international societies'), this is much harder to do the more heteronomous the units. See Buzan, "From International System to International Society," pp. 335-336.

⁸⁸ Ruggie, "What Makes the World Hang Together," p. 872.

⁸⁹ As Bull has similarly concluded, "The element of international society has always been present in the modern international system because at no stage can it be said that the conception of the common interests of states, of common rules and common institutions worked by them, has ceased to exert an influence," *The Anarchical Society*, p. 40. And that this is true is further evidence that order does not imply peacefulness and disorder violence, since the most destructive wars in history have happened after international order had been established.

American constructivism.⁹⁰ English School scholars such as Hedley Bull, Martin Wight and Adam Watson are perhaps best known for promoting the view that units exist not just in an anarchic international system but within a more complex 'international society.'⁹¹ A 'society'—the English School's version of 'order'—constitutes "a group of states (or, more generally, a group of independent political communities) which not merely form a system...but also have established by dialogue and consent common rules and institutions for the conduct of their relations, and recognize their common interest in maintaining these arrangements."⁹² In short, rules are as foundational to an English School understanding of order as they are in my conceptualization.

My approach differs from the dominant constructivist conception of order in a number of ways that reveal its closer affinity to the English School. First, in constructivist accounts the 'shared' aspect of shared ideas usually refers to *implicit* ideas. In the alternative framework detailed here, by contrast, observed rules *can* refer to implicit ideas but also often refer to concrete regulations consecrated in international constitutions, treaties or regimes. More specifically, observed rules have tangible implications for actors and their behaviors. As Daniel Philpott has argued in his English School-inspired account of changing rules over sovereignty, "the authority that the norms prescribe must correspond to actual practice...With the criterion of practice, we can eliminate...rules that are

⁹⁰ On the differences between American constructivism and English School theory, see Christian Reus-Smit, "Imagining Society: Constructivism and the English School," *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 4, No. 3 (2002).

⁹¹ See Bull, *The Anarchical Society*; Martin Wight, *Systems of States* (New Jersey: Leicester University, 1977); Adam Watson, *The Evolution of International Society: A Comparative Historical Analysis* (New York: Routledge, 1992); as well as R.J. Vincent, *Nonintervention and International Order* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974). Jeffrey W. Legro also largely adopts the English School conception of international order/society, but focuses not on explaining order but instead on accounting for when and why great powers decide to turn towards or away from that order/society in world politics. See his *Rethinking the World: Great Power Strategies and International Order* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), Ch. 1.

⁹² Hedley Bull and Adam Watson, eds. *The Expansion of International Society* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 1. As Buzan elaborates, "just as human beings as individuals live in societies which they both shape and are shaped by, so also states live in an international society which they shape and are shaped by. This social element has to be put alongside realism's raw logic of anarchy if one is to get a meaningful picture of how states operate," "The English School: An Underexploited Resource," *Review of International Studies* 27 (2001), p. 477. On the interaction of these different forces, see also Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, pp. 23-26.

bare paper provisions.”⁹³ The ideas behind rules may very well begin in individual actors’ heads, but eventually they must become manifest in recognized and practiced ways across the system to count as ‘ordering principles.’

Second, focusing on rules rather than shared ideas allows the analyst to remain agnostic over *why* actors observe such rules. We therefore do not need to adjudicate between strictly material and strictly ideational conceptions of order. Instead, we can admit that while both forces are always present to some extent, what matters is which becomes more dominant in certain periods of time.⁹⁴ Similarly, English School theorists accept that society/order can emerge not just from norm internalization emphasized by constructivists, but also from rational and strategic calculations.⁹⁵ “A minimal desire for order begins to emerge,” writes Barry Buzan, “when leaders realize the disadvantages of permanent chaos if interstate relations remain wholly unregulated.”⁹⁶ From such a perspective, it remains entirely possible that the units of any given order do not truly agree with or accept as legitimate a set of ordering rules, but nonetheless observe them for other reasons. Actors may obey rules for any number of reasons—out of fear of coercion for example—that are not necessarily tied to agreement over their normative ‘rightness.’⁹⁷ Such an approach is more likely to capture the varying nature of international orders empirically than mainstream constructivist

⁹³ Daniel Philpott, *Revolutions in Sovereignty: How Ideas Shaped Modern International Relations* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 23.

⁹⁴ See Buzan, “The English School: An Underexploited Resource,” pp. 475-476; and Reus-Smit, “Imagined Society,” pp. 497-498.

⁹⁵ Bull explicitly states as much: “no account of the reasons why men are capable of orderly social coexistence within a modern state can be complete which does not give due weight to factors such as reciprocal interest, a sense of community or general will, and habit or inertia,” *The Anarchical Society*, p. 46.

⁹⁶ “From International System to International Society,” p. 334. As he notes in theoretically tracing the possible transition from an international system to a society, “Unless one unit is able to dominate the system, the pressures of life in the anarchy virtually force development of at least a few basic elements of international society. This would be true even if each of the units contained its own language and culture group, with little or no common culture among them...,” p. 343.

⁹⁷ Says Bull on this issue, “[i]nternational politics, in the Grotian understanding, expresses neither complete conflict of interest between states nor complete identity of interest; it resembles a game that is partly distributive but also partly productive.” Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, p. 25.

conceptions. Actors need not internalize rules they observe. As a result, a focus on observed rules better enables the analyst to remain ontologically neutral about the *causes* of order.

Finally, conceiving of order as observed rules helps emphasize an investigation of the *content* of order's characteristics in a way that the shared ideas in constructivist accounts does not. As I argued earlier, constructivists have often been so preoccupied with emphasizing the consensus-driven nature of ordering ideas that they fail to explore the content of that consensus. By focusing on the processes through which actors develop shared understandings, they neglect the actual meaning of the standards themselves. By contrast, my approach analytically differentiates an order's content from its scope and strength of influence, allowing us to spotlight the substantive meaning of ordering principles independent of other dimensions.

Yet in spite of an affinity between my approach and that of the English School, there are also significant differences. We can observe some of these differences by comparing two prominent English School accounts to the rules-based conception of order detailed in this paper. The most prominent is Hedley Bull's *The Anarchical Society*. Like me, Bull argues that actors either explicitly or implicitly “regard themselves as bound by certain rules in their dealings with one another, such as that they should respect one another's claims to independence, that they should honour agreements into which they enter, and that they should be subject to certain limitations in exercising force against one another.”⁹⁸ The main difference between our accounts is in the way we divide rules. Rather than merely separating them into different type categories as I do, Bull argues for three ranked classes of rules (listed here from lowest to highest ranked in the importance unit ascribe to them): rules that regulate cooperation among units; rules for minimum coexistence among units; and, most importantly, rules that establish what he calls the ‘fundamental normative principle of

⁹⁸ *The Anarchical Society*, p. 13.

world politics.⁹⁹ I disagree with Bull here on two fronts. First, I do not find it useful to rank general classes of rules based on their importance to actors. Actors *do* no doubt prioritize some rules over others within their particular circumstances, but attempts to generalize about which types of rules will be most important across different orders seems likely to prove futile. Second, I have already argued for why I see little need for more specific categories for rules beyond inter-unit and membership rules.¹⁰⁰

More generally, and for all the advancements he made for the study of international order, Bull is simply not clear on a number of important issues. He often claims, for instance, that ‘order’ must be purposive, that it cannot just spontaneously come about. Yet he contradicts this claim, arguing elsewhere that primitive, stateless societies still “clearly exhibit order in the sense that conduct within them conforms to elementary goals of social coexistence...Rules...arise out of the practice of lineage or locality groups in their relations with one another, [and] become embodied in ‘custom’ and are confirmed by moral and religious belief.”¹⁰¹ He muddies and sometimes contradicts himself on whether violence or major war is evidence of disorder or not.¹⁰² While he often argues that order is not dependent on an underlying cultural bond, he implies the opposite at other times.¹⁰³ And after treating rules as fundamental to order, he later claims to “believe that order in social life can exist in principle without rules.”¹⁰⁴ Some of these difficulties may come from his conflation of the concept of ‘society’ with that of ‘order’. While he often treats society as a step beyond order, he just as often uses the terms synonymously. The overall effect is to muddy the waters of what international order really means.

⁹⁹ Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, pp. 64-68.

¹⁰⁰ The need to differentiate rules regulating cooperation and rules for coexistence, for example, escapes me. And aside from whether it is empirically true that orders rest on one foundational principle above all others, I do not understand why this cannot be subsumed into the more simple categories I have delineated.

¹⁰¹ *The Anarchical Society*, pp. 57-58.

¹⁰² *The Anarchical Society*, pp. 40-41

¹⁰³ See *The Anarchical Society*, pp. 60-63.

¹⁰⁴ *The Anarchical Society*, p. 7.

Second, in *The States System of Europe* Andreas Osiander conceptualizes rules as ‘structural principles.’¹⁰⁵ In theory, these are similar to my ordering principles. “Structural principles,” he writes, “are assumptions that influence the three basic aspects of the structure of the international system: the identity of the international actors, their relative status, and the distribution of territories and populations between them.”¹⁰⁶ In practice, his rules differ from mine in two important ways: First, empirically Osiander focuses much more on behavioral (inter-unit) rules than on constitutive (membership) ones. Second, the inter-unit rules he focuses on tend to be abstract principles with less clear implications for unit behavior. For instance, in his analysis of the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 he identifies the principles of ‘loyalty’ and ‘structural inviolability’ as dominant themes of the settlement. As he subsequently demonstrates, however, both had vague and at times contradictory prescriptions for what unit behaviors were to follow from them. By contrast, I focus only upon rules that prescribe or proscribe specific patterns of behavior.¹⁰⁷

IV. Conclusion

This paper has examined both the ways in which order has been conceptualized as well as the ways it *should* be conceptualized. I have adopted a conception that centers on rules observed by the units of a system and have attempted to justify it relative to the available alternatives. I have also argued that orders can be categorized broadly along three dimensions: the *content* of the ordering

¹⁰⁵ Specifically, he defines order as “a situation of general acceptance by the international actors of a consensus agenda...[that] they will be eager...to justify their actions in terms of the notions that make up the agenda.” Andreas Osiander, *The States System of Europe, 1640-1990: Peacemaking and the Conditions of International Stability* (Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 10.

¹⁰⁶ *The States System of Europe*, p. 5.

¹⁰⁷ Moreover, Osiander highlights only those principles that achieved some notable level of consensus. Yet as I have already argued (particularly in regards to constructivist accounts), such an approach might miss the presence of rules that were unpopular yet nonetheless important and widely observed.

principles (that is, the specific inter-unit and membership rules), the *depth* of the principles (that is, whether they include rules of membership), and the *breadth* of consensus over them.

There are no doubt weaknesses in this conceptualization and numerous ways to improve upon it, and this study should be treated only as a tentative first step. Yet the laborious task of concept formation must be considered a serious and crucial part of the process for conducting thoughtful and credible social science research. Otherwise, and without consistently defining, defending and if need be destroying our concepts, scholars will increasingly talk past one another, muddying rather than illuminating the important debates of our time.

Table 1. Order Conceptualizations and Causes in IR Theory

	Conceptualization	Causes
Realism	Equilibrium produced by Material Environment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Distribution of material capabilities 2. Distribution and nature of technology
Institutionalism	Equilibrium produced by Institutionalization/Institutional Environment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Degree of interdependence/common interests 2. Distribution of regime types/ideologies across the system
Constructivism	Equilibrium produced by Common Ideas/Ideational Environment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Forged consensus 2. Bottom-up processes/changes within polities 3. Developing of transnational “witness”
Relationalism	Equilibrium produced by Authority/Hierarchy	[not theorized]

Table 2. Major Hegemonic Attempts to Reorder the International System¹⁰⁸

Year	Preponderant State(s)	(Proposed) Inter-Unit Rules Changes	(Proposed) Membership Rules Changes
1648	France, Sweden	Establishment of fixed autonomy for principality/state rulers within their borders (implicit rejection for universalist authority claims over historically autonomous political entities)	X
1713	Great Britain	1- Termination of transnational territorial claims through dynastic ties; 2- State attempts to achieve territorial <i>preponderance</i> of power across Europe no longer acceptable; instead, new legitimate state goal to uphold a <i>balance</i> of power	X
1815	Britain, Russia, Austria	1- Great Powers (GPs) designated special status and rights; 2- System maintenance and territorial revisions allowed only through GP multilateral action	To <i>Anti-Liberal</i> , Monarchical Governments (Opposing Revolutionary/ Liberal Regimes)
1919	United States, Britain, France	1- Surrender some sovereignty to a supranational body in exchange for multilateral dispute resolution mechanisms; 2- Outlawing of <i>any</i> initiation of interstate military force; 3- Orderly transition from imperial system to mandates system under which the 'self-determination' of nations is given greater consideration	To <i>Orderly Democratic</i> Governments (Opposing Revolutionary and Autocratic-Imperialist Regimes)
1945*	United States *(western order only)	1- Collective Security through threat of institutionalized multilateral retaliation; 2- GPs once again designated special status and rights regarding both use of force and territorial revisions; 3- Open global capitalist system terminating closed economic and political spheres of influence	To <i>Capitalist-Democratic</i> Governments (Opposing Communist- Autocratic Regimes)
~2001	United States	1- Unilateral actions permitted at hegemon's discretion; 2- State sovereignty more conditional upon upholding particular threshold of internal order and respect for human rights	To <i>Competent and Anti-Extremist</i> Governments (Opposing Rogue/Weak Regimes that enable or support extremism)

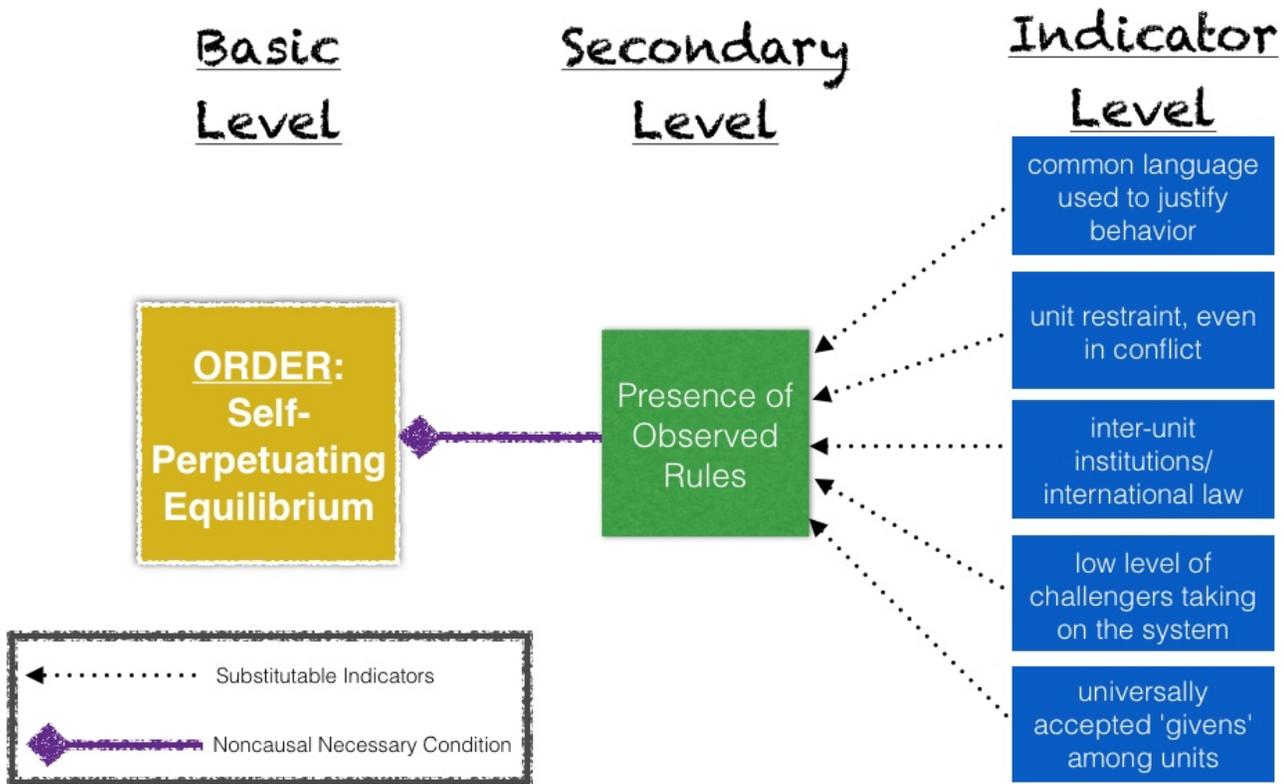
¹⁰⁸ In the larger project, I look to the origins of ordering principles in the preferences of hegemonic actors. While I ultimately seek to explain both preferences for enacting major changes and preferences for order continuity, Table 2 only details the former.

Figure A¹⁰⁹

Figure A.

Order

A Three-Level Conceptualization



¹⁰⁹ Modeled after Goertz, *Social Science Concepts*, Ch. 2.

Figure B. Two Types of Observed Rules

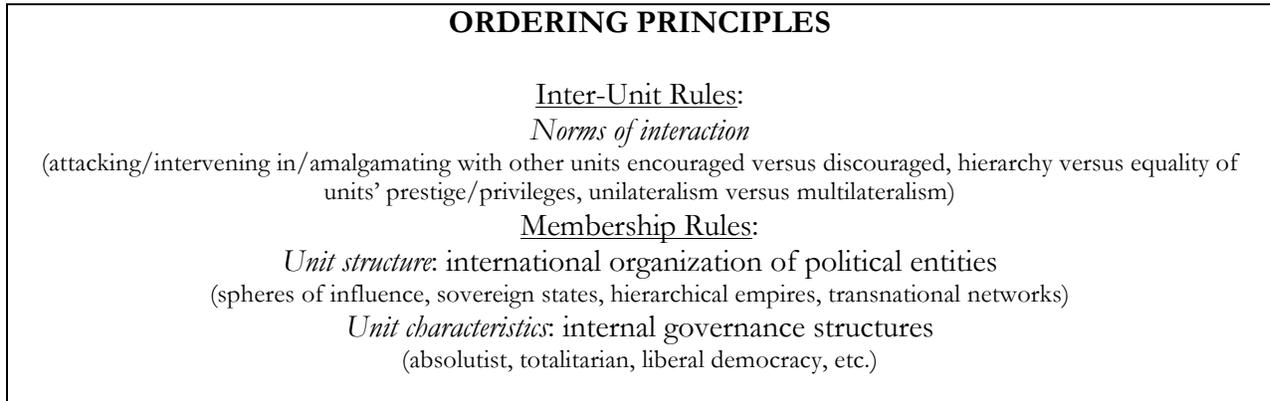


Figure C. A Typology of International Order

