

'The Anarchical Society and Climate Change'

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INTRODUCTION

Hedley Bull's *The Anarchical Society* is the first English School text that addresses, albeit briefly, international environmental politics. Bull's interest in environmental issues is motivated mainly by his desire to refute claims that 'the states system is an obstacle to the attainment of man's ecological objective of living in harmony with his environment' (1977, 283). The book does not discuss climate change as such. Published in 1977, five years after the first UN environment conference but two years before the first World Climate Conference, *The Anarchical Society* conceives of environmental issues as a set of distinct problems that require international scientific cooperation and environmental management. By contrast, climate change has emerged today as an all-encompassing global ecological threat that requires the wholesale de-carbonization of the global economy. It is, as Hoffmann suggests, 'perhaps *the* global challenge of modern times' (2013, 3). Had Bull lived to observe the rise of international climate politics since the 1990s, would he have arrived at a different assessment of the environmental agenda? Would he still view global environmental politics through the same pluralist, state-centric, lens that is at the heart of *The Anarchical Society*?

This essay offers a close reading of Bull's classic text in an effort to apply his theoretical perspective to the international politics of climate change. My objective is to

explore what contribution pluralist English School theory can make to our understanding of how international society can respond to global warming, and what its limitations are. After reviewing Bull's discussion of environmental issues in *The Anarchical Society*, which can be found in a brief passage on 'Man and the Environment' in chapter 12 and a few short comments that are dispersed throughout the book, I explore the core tenets of pluralist English School theory and how they apply to climate change. This is followed by a discussion of the possibility of a transition towards a solidarist response to environmental threats, which Bull briefly hints at but never fully explores, and a concluding assessment of Bull's overall argument.

BULL ON 'MAN AND THE ENVIRONMENT'

Man-made climate change, which is caused by emissions of CO₂ and other greenhouse gases (GHGs) such as methane and nitrous oxide, is one of the major environmental threats that the world faces today. The increase in GHG concentrations in the atmosphere has already led to an average warming of global temperatures of around 0.8°C since the late nineteenth century and, if emissions continue unabated, we are likely to experience a warming of at least 4°C or more over the course of this century. While global average temperatures have fluctuated in the past, the rapid increase in temperatures to a level that has likely not been seen for the last 10 million years will irrevocably change the human geography of the planet. Melting ice caps and glaciers, rising sea levels, shifts in weather patterns and precipitation, further desertification, acidification of oceans, and the destruction of entire ecosystems will bring about fundamental changes to the way human societies are organized and sustain themselves (Stern 2015, 3–32). Given the massive cost of adapting to a changing climate and the distributional conflicts that this will cause worldwide, climate change is emerging as a major disruptive force in international political and economic relations. Clearly, climate change is

no longer just a scientific or environmental issue. Increasingly, climate change ought to be an integral part of any study of the foundations for order in world politics.

Bull's *The Anarchical Society* does not mention climate change as a threat to international order. This is not surprising, given that Bull was working on the book at a time when climate change, although attracting growing scientific attention, had not yet been recognized by policymakers as a major threat. In the 1970s, the scientific community was still debating whether rising GHG emissions would lead to global cooling or warming, and the international environmental agenda was dominated by other environmental concerns, such as resource scarcity, marine pollution, and acid rain. Evidence of a warming climate was mounting during the second half of the 1970s, however, and by the time of the first World Climate Conference, convened in February 1979, global warming was beginning to emerge as an issue of global concern. Still, it took until the late 1980s for multilateral negotiations to commence on the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which was adopted in 1992.

Although failing to address climate change, Bull was the first English School theorist to write about international environmental politics. While the earliest efforts to create an international environmental agenda can be traced back to the time before the First World War, it was the UN environment conference in Stockholm in 1972 that formally established international society's responsibility to protect the global environment (Falkner 2012). Curiously, Bull does not mention the Stockholm conference or subsequent developments, such as the creation of the UN Environment Programme (1973) and various environmental treaties; nor is he interested in investigating the reasons behind the sudden emergence of global environmentalism. Instead, he takes it as given that environmental protection is one of the 'advanced or secondary goals that are a feature of an international society in which a

consensus has been reached about a wider range of objectives than mere coexistence' (1977, 70).

For Bull, the interesting point about environmentalism is that it gives rise to a discourse that challenges the existing international order. In a brief section of not more than three pages, which appears in chapter 12 on 'The Obsolescence of the States System' (1977, 293–5), Bull considers—and dismisses—the suggestion that the states system has become obsolete because of its inability to deal with global environmental threats (see also Linklater and Suganami 2006, 68–70; Paterson 2005, 164–7). The 1970s had seen the first wave of writings on environmental matters by International Relations scholars (for an overview, see Stevis 2014, 18–22), many of which viewed state-centric politics with scepticism and argued for an alternative world order. Such proposals either proceeded along cosmopolitan lines of empowering centralized international authorities, regional authorities and transnational actors (Falk 1971) or opted for more authoritarian solutions (Ophuls 1977). At the time, Richard Falk's book *This Endangered Planet* (1971) was particularly influential in shaping environmentalism's anti-statism, and it is this text that Bull uses as a foil to his own argument in defence of the state-centric international order.¹ Arguing against the then widespread notion of the 'spaceship earth' (Ward 1966) that requires 'global unity and global planning' (Bull 1977, 293) to steer it safely towards environmental sustainability, Bull makes three specific points.

¹ Bull knew Falk well and counted him as a friend. Although setting out to dismiss the core of Falk's argument, Bull was careful to acknowledge his friend in the preface to *The Anarchical Society*, referring to Falk's views as 'one of the most significant points of departure in the study of world politics today' before remarking that 'the attention I devote to refuting him should be taken as a compliment' (1977, ix).

His *first* point is the classic pluralist argument that humanity and the society of states are characterized by a profound diversity of values and interests, and that this prevents sustained international cooperation on global challenges, including ecological ones. In Bull's words, it is not the division of the world into sovereign states as such but 'human disagreement and conflict in the ecological realm' (1977, 293–4) that stands in the way of a common global approach. In a concession to Falk and other environmental writers, Bull goes on to acknowledge that human society may have to tolerate certain restrictions on population growth and resource consumption, to avert a universal 'tragedy of the commons' (1977, 294). This is the closest that Bull comes to accepting the then widespread, though controversial, theory that the global expansion of human societies and economic activity was close to breaching ecological boundaries (Meadows and Meadows 1972). But instead of thinking through the consequences of this neo-Malthusian logic, Bull merely notes that a system of sovereign states is indeed dysfunctional insofar as it could never impose such limitations—but neither could alternatives to international society, unless they were to curb human freedoms to stay within ecological constraints. Having seemingly accepted the need for certain limits to growth in the future, Bull's point is merely to argue that all global political responses, whether they are found through international society or an alternative world order, suffer from the same structural problem of value and interest plurality. Environmentalists are thus wrong to assume that an institutionally reorganized international system with a central authority could bring about the global unity and solidarity that is needed to address the ecological crisis.

In his *second* point, Bull develops the pluralist argument further by highlighting the importance of international order as a precondition for tackling ecological problems. A society of sovereign states can make a valuable contribution mainly because it creates stability and order against the background of normative pluralism: 'Without such a basis of

minimum order it is scarcely possible that common issues of the environmental can be faced at all' (1977, 294). Bull does not explore whether the pluralist logic of coexistence in international society alone could give rise to coordinated environmental action and how far this would go in meeting the global environmental challenge. He merely takes it as a given that states are the only actors capable of delivering an emergency response: 'It is undoubtedly the case that effective action in the short run to limit population growth, to control economic development . . . or to limit and justly apportion the consumption of resources, depends primarily on the action of states' (1977, 294). It is interesting to note that Bull qualifies his defence of state-centric international politics by referring only to 'effective action in the short run' (1977, 294), leaving open the question of the nation-state's long-term viability as an environmentally sustainable form of political organization. Environmentalists such as Falk may be right after all—but only in the long term.

The *third* argument takes Bull away from a strictly pluralist interpretation of global environmental politics and hints at a solidarist perspective. Bull concedes that '[i]n the long run it [is] unlikely that action at the purely state level will be sufficient to cope with environmental dangers' (1977, 294–5), before going on to suggest that in order for humanity to tackle environmental threats, there would need to be 'a greater sense of human cohesion than now exists' (1977, 295). Having so far defended pluralist international society against the vision of 'post-Westphalian' world politics, Bull now appears to suggest that the pluralist logic of coexistence may eventually have to give way to a solidarist project of creating greater political cohesion and human solidarity. But instead of explaining the implications of this concession, Bull returns to his initial starting point that it is the states system through which 'a greater sense of human solidarity in relation to environmental threats may emerge' (1977, 294) . Rather than consider a cohesive world society as an alternative to the current system of states, we should see its emergence as being dependent on the preservation and

development of international society itself. In short, world society-based solidarism can only ever grow out of a pluralist international society that gradually takes on more solidarist characteristics. For the time being, only international society can give adequate expression to the common interests and values that might lead to a more cohesive and globally coordinated response to the ecological crisis.

How do these arguments relate to the international politics of climate change, and what relevance does *The Anarchical Society* have in an age of runaway global warming? In the next section, I explore what insights Bull's analysis yields for the study of climate change politics and whether pluralism could give rise to an effective international response. The subsequent section then examines the possibility of a solidarist project of creating climate governance and explores whether Bull's state-centric perspective still provides an adequate framework for understanding the emergence of an ever-more complex system of global climate governance.

PLURALIST INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

As we have seen, it is the inherently pluralist nature of international society that leads Bull to reject environmentalists' arguments for a transformation of world politics. While Bull does not discuss the challenge of climate change as such, I will attempt to construct from his brief remarks on environmental matters a pluralist perspective on climate change. I am particularly interested in understanding what contribution English School pluralism can make to the study of international climate politics, but also what its shortcomings are. There are four aspects to Bull's pluralism that need to be considered in this context: the plurality of values and interests, which is said to prevent global solidarity in the battle against global warming; the pluralist logic of co-existence as the basis for (limited) international cooperation; the centrality of the state system and the role that states play in the search for an international

solution; and the special role played by great powers and the primary institution of great power management.

Value Pluralism and Conflict

Starting from the pluralist premise that conflict over individual and societal values is an inevitable condition of humanity, *The Anarchical Society* takes a sceptical stance on the possibility of deep international cooperation. Bull notes that only a minimal consensus exists across societies on the need to protect the common primary goals of international life: life, promises, and property (1977, 19). Beyond this, pluralists do not expect a deeper sense of global solidarity to emerge, let alone form the basis for sustained international cooperation. As was noted, Bull argues, contra Falk, that ‘what inhibits a common global plan for action in relation to the environment is not the existence of the system of states but the fact of human disagreement and conflict in the ecological realm itself’ (1977, 293–4). It is for this reason that ‘in the present condition of world politics ... ideas of cosmopolitan or world justice play very little part at all’ (1977, 85) and this applies to international environmental politics as much as to the realms of peace and economic justice.

Does Bull’s pluralist scepticism apply to climate change as well? Is not the threat of runaway global warming reason to believe that humanity would unite in a global effort to avert such a catastrophe? Average temperatures are set to rise by between 2°C and 4°C by the end of this century according to conservative scenarios, but could also reach much higher levels if certain ecological tipping points were reached. Would not the expected impacts—rising sea levels, more extreme weather patterns, acidification of oceans, and greater ecological stresses in arid regions—force a reorientation of societal values and interests towards greater global solidarity? If climate change were to threaten the survival of humanity, should we not expect the fight against climate change to become one of the primary goals of

social life on the planet—goals that Bull believes form part of international society’s value consensus?

It is telling that in his discussion of the rise of environmental politics, Bull treats environmental issues as discrete problems of international management, most of which concern

behaviour that is appropriate not to the elementary or primary goals of international life, but rather to those more advanced or secondary goals that are a feature of an international society in which a consensus has been reached about a wider range of objectives than mere coexistence. (1977, 70)

However, in one brief passage Bull hints at the possibility that, if the ecological crisis turns out to be more severe, then more drastic international restrictions would need to be imposed. Arguing in the context of the ‘limits to growth’ debate, Bull refers to human freedoms with regard to population growth and economic development that may need to be curbed in order for humanity to stay within its global ecological boundaries (1977, 294). When seen in the context of the contemporary debate on global warming, this passage can also be read as a concession that if ecological problems such as climate change pose an existential threat to humankind, then a business-as-usual response involving international cooperation in the pursuit of secondary goals will not suffice. The fact remains, though, as Bull notes, that the international states system offers the only realistic means for a collective response, and that no other global political system could provide a viable alternative (1977, 294). In other words, climate change could indeed become the globally unifying threat that brushes aside societal differences in values and interests, but international society would remain our best bet for organizing a global rescue.

How close has the world come to such a scenario? Despite the widespread expectation that a warming climate will harm humanity overall, specific climate impacts are, in fact,

unequally distributed around the world. Rising sea levels will inflict damage on coastal areas and may submerge low-lying island states, but not inland territories. Changes in weather patterns will lead to greater droughts in some regions, and more extreme rainfall in others, but increases in precipitation and a rise in land temperatures is already benefiting farming in Greenland and may lead to greater agricultural productivity in other countries too (e.g. Canada, Russia) ('Greenland reaps benefits of global warming', 2013). And even though the majority of countries will suffer adverse effects, the degree to which societies will perceive climate change as an existential threat is bound to vary considerably around the world. Furthermore, countries will also differ with regard to the value they attach to ensuring global climate stability through mitigation measures, as compared to pursuing other policies that either focus narrowly on economic growth or adaptation to a warming climate. In other words, even where climate change poses a common threat, the willingness to act against it will be unevenly distributed.

Bull's value pluralism thus remains an important starting point for thinking through an appropriate and realistic international climate strategy. Despite the growing perception of climate change as a universal threat to humankind, the difficulty of agreeing common principles for reducing emissions has not gone away. Indeed, Bull's pluralist scepticism towards the idea of global solidarity is borne out by the agonizingly slow progress that has been made in over two decades of multilateral negotiations under the auspices of the UNFCCC. Even after the 2015 Paris Agreement (Falkner 2016b), Bull would not be far off the mark with his claim that states have 'only the most rudimentary sense of the common good of the world as a whole' (1977, 81).

The Pluralist Logic of Coexistence

In Bull's conception of a pluralist international society, the behavior of states is primarily driven by a logic of coexistence (Jackson 2000, 178-82; Buzan 2004, 143). The rules of coexistence—limits to violence, establishment of property rights, and sanctity of agreements—provide a basic set of constraints that allow sovereign states to live together in relative harmony while pursuing their self-interest. But does such a pluralist society of states have the capacity to deal with as complex a problem as climate change? Can a pluralist logic of coexistence on its own give rise to an internationally coordinated response to global warming?

As we have seen, Bull sees the rise in international environmental rule-making primarily as part of the creation of rules of cooperation, on issues that go beyond the primary goals of coexistence. International environmental governance signifies the expansion of regulatory international law (1977, 153) and involves largely solutions to 'a technical problem of maximizing the interests of the human species rather than as a problem of reconciling different interests' (1977, 177). What if ecological problems posed an existential threat to states and the maintenance of international order? Bull did not consider such a scenario, but runaway global warming could pose a direct threat to national sovereignty, e.g. where it threatens the existence of low-lying island states or coastal regions. It could also pose an indirect threat to international security, e.g. where global warming acts as a threat multiplier by exacerbating distributional conflicts over scarce resources, undermining weak or failing states and setting off trans-boundary migration flows (German Advisory Council on Global Change 2008; Gemenne et al. 2014). Irreversible global warming could thus undermine the peaceful coexistence of sovereign states, making it increasingly difficult for international society to guarantee the 'limitation of violence resulting in death or bodily harm, the keeping of promises and the stabilization of possession by rules of property' (1977, 19).

Would a pluralist international society be able to achieve the level of cooperation that is required to avert such a threat?

As Buzan argues, there is nothing in the pluralist logic of coexistence to prevent states from establishing some minimal level of international cooperation on environmental issues (2004, 145). Particularly where core state interests are at stake and effective measures to deal with the ecological problem are available, states may choose to act collectively to prevent global environmental danger. This was the case with international cooperation to protect the ozone layer, and major GHG emitters could conceivably be compelled to take similar action to protect themselves and international society against runaway global warming. In this view, Bull's pluralist stance would be entirely consistent with a modicum of international environmental cooperation to tackle dangerous climate change.

But despite recent moves to view climate change as a security threat (Busby 2008; Scheffran and Battaglini 2011), securitization has not changed the underlying logic of international climate politics. This is partly because climate change will play out over a long period and does not pose an imminent threat. Its impacts will vary around the world, with the heaviest burden falling on poorer and weaker developing countries. By comparison, the major powers face only weak or uncertain security threats, with some potentially benefiting from rising temperatures. Given that the costs of mitigating climate change are also unequally distributed, it is unlikely that the great powers will arrive at similar cost-benefit calculations that would compel them to act together to reduce future global warming. Given the high upfront costs of taking action, uncertainty about future impacts and pervasive free-riding incentives (Keohane and Victor 2011), it is far more likely that the pluralist logic of coexistence will prevent deep forms of international cooperation and will drive great powers towards predominantly national response strategies, mainly in the form of adaptation to climate change. And even if mitigation was in the interest of some great powers, they may

find it preferable to take unilateral action, e.g. geo-engineering (Victor, et al. 2009), rather than contribute to a collective mitigation effort. Either way, it is reasonable to conclude that if states follow a pluralist logic it is unlikely that they will produce the comprehensive and timely response that is needed to prevent dangerous climate change.

State-centrism

A further implication of Bull's pluralist stance is his insistence that any global response to climate change will need to be channelled through the society of states. Bull is adamant that the nation-state is the sole legitimate representative of individual societies, and the states system is the only viable form of global political organization that can resolve differences in interests and values between societies. It is this unequivocal state-centrism that is perhaps Bull's most widely noted contribution to the study of international environmental politics (Paterson 2005; see also Hurrell and Kingsbury 1992, 5). Indeed, as was noted earlier, Bull set up the debate on environmental issues as one between two diametrically opposed camps: environmentalists who advocate the creation of supranational authorities or a world government and representatives of the state-centric international society tradition. Bull makes two arguments contra the supra-nationalists: first, the states system is a necessary condition for organizing a global ecological response, and second, even if it becomes necessary to achieve a 'greater sense of human cohesion' as the basis for international environmental cooperation, the path towards such a solidarist future runs through the state-centric system (1977, 295). In other words, the states system already performs vital functions in the pursuit of global environmental goals, and any improvement on this would have to build on, rather than replace, international society.

The history of international climate politics lends some support to Bull's position. For over two decades, the multilateral regime of the UNFCCC has been the central forum for

negotiating international climate policy, hosting annual Conferences of Parties (COPs) that have also become a magnet for climate activists and lobbyists (Hjerpe and Linner 2010). It has spawned a number of innovative climate governance mechanisms (e.g. Clean Development Mechanism, emissions trading) that engage a wide range of actors, including business and NGOs. Despite efforts to replace it by smaller minilateral forums, the UNFCCC remains the only international forum that commands universal legitimacy, including among all major polluters (Falkner 2016a). If anything, the successful outcome of the Paris climate summit in 2015 has allowed the UNFCCC to reassert its role as the central platform for coordinating national policies.

At the same time, however, the limitations of Bull's state-centric approach come into focus when we consider the changing nature of global climate governance. For one, although the UNFCCC regime has retained its central role, it has little to show for in terms of creating an effective response. The climate regime is undergoing a process of fragmentation as new sites of authority are emerging and various non-state actors pursue their own strategies (Biermann et al, 2009). The growth of a multilevel and multi-actor network of transnational climate governance is indeed one of the most remarkable developments in recent years (Bulkeley et al. 2014; Hoffmann 2011). Rather than rely solely on the regulatory authority of the nation-state, more and more municipal authorities, cities, regional governments, businesses and NGOs are taking the initiative in setting climate norms, disseminating low-carbon solutions, and establishing private governance mechanisms. The field of climate governance has become crowded, with state and non-state actors engaged in a dense web of interactions, reinforcing each other's efforts but also acting independently from each other. As will be discussed below, Bull's state-centric perspective, held back by a simplistic binary distinction between the realms of international society and world society, offers little

analytical purchase when it comes to advancing our understanding of this growing transnationalization of climate governance beyond the intergovernmental regime.

Great Powers and Great Power Management

Although Bull's state-centric perspective no longer captures the transnationalization of global climate governance, his notion of great power management has, if anything, gained prominence in international climate politics. This may appear to be an unlikely outcome given the climate regime's strong multilateral tradition that has tended to deny great powers a privileged position in the negotiations. Decisions in the UNFCCC's annual COPs are taken by consensus, and the negotiation process has been highly inclusive even by multilateral standards, allowing smaller powers to play an unusually influential role. Most significantly, when agreeing the UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol, the Western powers accepted an unprecedented level of differentiation that completely exempted developing countries from the regime's emission reduction targets. This has begun to change more recently, however. While the UNFCCC continues to apply the consensus principle as an implicit procedural norm, the Kyoto-style burden-sharing arrangement has been successfully challenged, first by the United States and later also by other industrialized countries. Ever since the Copenhagen conference in 2009, Western powers have put pressure on emerging powers to take on a climate change mitigation burden that is proportionate with their fast rising emissions and emerging great power status (Hurrell and Sengupta 2012). This process of rewriting great power responsibilities came to head in the Paris Agreement of 2015, which includes for the first time mitigation pledges made by all major emitters.

The great powers are also more strongly in control of the negotiation process itself. At the 2009 Copenhagen summit, after diplomats tried but ultimately failed to create a post-Kyoto successor treaty, a select group of influential heads of state convened informally at the

end of the conference to forge a short political agreement (Falkner, Stephan, et al. 2010). The so-called Copenhagen Accord was eventually rejected at the COP plenary in Copenhagen, but its principles were later integrated into the Cancun COP agreements in 2010, thus laying the foundations for the shift in the regulatory approach that underpins the Paris Agreement. Ever since, the major powers have taken a more proactive role, agreeing the broad outlines of mitigation burden-sharing among themselves as part of the overall multilateral agreement. Both the EU and US engaged in bilateral talks with China and India on how to promote low-carbon technologies in emerging economies (Torney 2015), and in a sign of the gradual convergence of US and Chinese positions the two powers signed a bilateral agreement in November 2014 that established the mitigation pledges that both countries made as part of the Paris Agreement (Vogler 2016, 127–8).

Bull's account of the primary institution of great power management offers a useful starting point for investigating the changing role of great powers in international climate politics. Great powers are a simple fact of international life that 'cannot be wished away' (Bull 1977, 298), and Bull would expect them to have a decisive influence over outcomes in international climate politics. Somewhat counter-intuitively, this was not the case in the early phase of the international climate regime, when the G77 succeeded in exempting developing countries from mitigation obligations. Tony Brenton, a British negotiator at the 1992 Rio Summit, is not alone in noting that 'it is difficult not to be struck by the imbalance in these commitments between the developed countries and the developing countries' (Brenton 1994, 195). Concerned with healing the North–South rift, many Western powers were willing to make this concession in order to get universal support for the UNFCCC. As the political salience of climate change increased in subsequent years, however, the United States and other Western powers gradually rolled back earlier commitments and eventually forced a reinterpretation of the UNFCCC's common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR) norm.

At least since the 2009 Copenhagen conference, great power politics has returned to leave its mark on the climate change regime (Brenton 2013).

However, Bull's understanding of great powers adds an important dimension that sets it apart from standard realist interpretations. For Bull, great powers are as much a social construction as they are the result of material power asymmetry. Great powers perform certain functions in international society—maintaining the balance of power, forcing cooperative solutions—and in doing so they assert not only their power but also aspire to a privileged position that is legitimate. Great powers often act against the immediate interests of smaller powers, but their role can be considered legitimate where they pursue the collective interest in maintaining international order. As agents of a collective hegemony, great powers are 'recognised by others to have, and conceived by their own leaders and peoples to have, certain special rights and duties' (1977, 202). Legitimacy and hegemony are thus closely intertwined in Bull's and the English School's notion of power asymmetry and international hierarchy (Clark 2011). In this sense, the need to gain and retain international legitimacy constrains great powers. Bull is unequivocal that 'when the great powers appear to be undermining order as well as denying justice, the legitimacy of their position is eroded' (1977, 229).

Bull's approach highlights two central issues in the way the great powers have engaged with the global climate challenge. First, by sheer size of their economic might and emissions profile, great powers are inevitably at the heart of the global warming problem. As major polluters, they are largely responsible for climate change and also possess *de facto* veto power in international climate politics. Any regime that is to produce viable solutions needs to reflect the reality of power asymmetry and accommodate the special interests of the great powers. At the same time, great powers themselves need to be concerned about the wider legitimacy of their international role and the outcome they promote within the multilateral

regime (Eckersley 2007; Bukovansky et al. 2012). For great power management to operate as an institutional feature of climate politics, great powers need to promote collective solutions that do not ignore the demands for international justice made by smaller powers. Thus, despite experimenting with potentially more effective minilateral solutions, none of the great powers have as yet walked away from the multilateral regime. The return of the United States to the multilateral effort under President Obama and the growing acceptance of mitigation responsibilities by the emerging powers of Asia suggests that, as Bull asserts in *The Anarchical Society*, great powers' 'freedom of manoeuvre is circumscribed by "responsibility"' (1977, 229). But Bull would have warned against exuberant expectations when it comes to great powers' concern for the global common good. The fact that they proclaim to be acting in the global interest does not turn them into 'great responsables' or 'great indispensables' (1977, 51), and the election of US president Trump who has called global warming a 'hoax' underlines the fickle nature of great power support for global environmental protection. The need for legitimacy exerts some pressure on the largest emitters to contribute to the collective mitigation effort, but we are still far from effective great power management in the interest of a stable global climate.

TOWARDS A SOLIDARIST RESPONSE TO GLOBAL WARMING?

As we have seen, there are good reasons to suggest that the pluralist logic of coexistence alone cannot generate the kind of internationally coordinated response that could prevent dangerous levels of global warming. It is unsurprising, therefore, that analysts and policymakers have focused on how a solidarist response to climate change, built on strong international institutions and redistributive policies, can be constructed. *The Anarchical Society* implicitly acknowledges the possibility that the transition from a pluralist to a

solidarist form of international cooperation might be necessary (1977, 294–5).² Bull is not interested in thinking through how this transformation could come about, beyond noting that the states system is the means through which this can happen. But it is clear that Bull opens the door to a solidarist transformation of international society. To achieve the ‘greater sense of human cohesion’, states would need to ‘extend the sense of common interests, common rules and common institutions that have moderated their conflicts in the past’, and this concerns not only matters of peace and justice, but also ‘environmental management’ (1977, 295). This brief passage is the closest that Bull comes to endorsing a solidarist answer to the global ecological crisis, even if he does not believe that this can be realized in the short run.

How could a solidarist solution for climate change be found? As we have seen, Bull notes at various points that international society has already expanded the scope for international cooperation on environmental matters, through the creation of legal rules that advance ‘secondary goals’ based on an international consensus on international objectives that go beyond ‘mere coexistence’ (1977, 70). But the expansion of the scope of international law has not led to a strengthening of the rule of law in international relations (1977, 153). International environmental law exists within a state-centric system based on the rule of consent, i.e. the sovereign right of states to accept or reject international environmental regulations, and the unavoidable logic of pluralism holds back an expansion of international law beyond its state-centric limitations.

Bull’s expectation that solidarism would be built through state-centric means certainly corresponds with the early phase of international climate politics in the 1990s. The underlying approach of the UNFCCC negotiations closely resembled the putative transition

² Later in life, Bull became more disillusioned with the pluralist perspective on international order,

hinting more strongly at the need for solidarist solutions, especially in the context of North–South justice (see Dunne 1998b, 146–52).

from a pluralist to a solidarist logic of cooperation. Starting out with establishing a broad consensus on the threat of global warming (UNFCCC), subsequent negotiations would then agree specific regulatory commitments and instruments that would move the world closer to a low-carbon future. In this sense, the 1997 Kyoto Protocol can be considered the high point of state solidarism in climate politics. The first and only treaty with quantitative and legally binding targets for emission reductions, it also contains strong elements of interstate justice, with developing countries exempted from legally binding emission reductions and entitled to benefit from new redistributive instruments.

Despite these achievements, subsequent efforts to implement and build on Kyoto have not lived up to solidarist expectations. The US never ratified the treaty, Canada withdrew from it, and other major industrialized countries declared they would not be bound by it beyond the first compliance period. At the same time, the emerging emitters of the developing world resisted pressure to accept Kyoto-style emissions restrictions for themselves. The result of this impasse, clearly visible in Copenhagen in 2009, was the unravelling of the Protocol's top-down regulatory approach. Instead, Copenhagen paved the way for the Paris Agreement's new approach that turned legally binding commitments into voluntary, nationally determined, contributions. Paris thus marks the completion of the shift from the top-down and centralized regime of the past and to a more de-centralized, bottom-up logic of national pledges. Viewed through the lens of Bull's pluralist perspective the Paris Agreement demonstrates both the persistence of deep rooted differences between the great powers and their reluctance to subject themselves to a solidarist framework of mandatory emissions reductions that are framed in a legal context. The great powers may have collectively acknowledged their special responsibility for climate change but they have retained a high degree of flexibility in how they intend to discharge this responsibility. In this

sense, the Paris Agreement marks the persistence of pluralism in international climate politics.

What is missing in Bull's account is the possibility of a different kind of solidarist response, one that is rooted in cosmopolitan thinking and that builds on greater involvement of world society actors. Bull's state-centric framework offers little analytical purchase on transnational climate governance, which has gained in prominence more recently. Bull was certainly aware of the possibility of such a development. Indeed, he acknowledges that environmental discourses in the 1970s were infused with cosmopolitan ideas of planetary justice. Environmentalists, he noted, appeal 'to the solidarity of all human beings in facing certain ecological or environmental challenges that face them as human beings' (1977, 85). But he is quick to dismiss the possibility of a political project that builds on cosmopolitan solidarism, merely noting that such ideas 'play very little part at all' in present conditions (1977, 85). No agent exists to bring about this cosmopolitan vision. The self-appointed spokesmen of 'spaceship earth' have no representational legitimacy, just as environmental NGOs do not have the authority to define the interests of humankind (1977, 85–6). It thus falls upon states to find a consensus on the pursuit of environmental objectives as the only hope for developing a deeper level of cooperation on environmental matters.

What if states were not the only actors to build global climate governance? What if the intergovernmental process was an important, but no longer the central, driving force behind current efforts to de-carbonize the global economy? A great deal of recent environmental scholarship has focused on precisely this question, highlighting the growing transnationalization of climate governance, with a variety of nonstate actors experimenting with novel forms of climate governance (Hoffmann 2011) and filling governance gaps that state authorities have left (Bulkeley et al. 2014). It is this remarkable shift in climate politics

that Bull's pluralist perspective, with its focus on the centrality of the states system, fails to anticipate or account for.

To be sure, the nature of this complex climate governance field, as well as its relationship with international society, remains contested. The transnationalization trend can be seen to signal that the problem of climate change exceeds the problem-solving capacity of an international political system based on national sovereignty and non-intervention. In this perspective, the climate change challenge lays bare the dysfunctional nature of state-centric international regulation, as Falk had argued in the 1970s. But it should be noted that the case for the emergence of a cosmopolitan solidarism is less clear-cut. States continue to play an important role in encouraging and steering transnational climate governance. At a minimum, international society actors are 'orchestrators' of transnational climate governance, and non-state actors continue to orient their activities on the signals and incentives that the intergovernmental regime sets (Hale and Roger 2014). Private environmental governance is, therefore, never entirely 'private' (Falkner 2003).

Still, it remains the case that *The Anarchical Society* has little to say about these trends. This is of course partly a reflection of the fact that transnational governance only became a more widely noted phenomenon from the 1990s onwards. Transnationalism may have been discussed since the late 1960s (Keohane and Nye 1971), but its analytical significance was only fully grasped once scholars had moved from depicting the phenomenon to accounting for its impact on policy outcomes (Risse-Kappen 1995). But Bull's account in *The Anarchical Society* also suffers from the binary logic that he unhelpfully imposes on the relationship between states and non-state actors. Rather than conceiving of transnationalism as an evolutionary force that can change the terms of engagement between international and world society, Bull casts transnational actors narrowly as disruptive forces that pose a direct challenge to the state-centric international order. Environmental activists are either 'private

individuals' whose views 'are not the outcome of any political process of the assertion and reconciliation of interest' (1977, 85) and thus have no authority in international relations (1977, 86), or they are 'inherently revolutionary' (1977, 88) due to their demands for global justice which requires a complete transformation of the international order. Having set up the discussion in these terms, Bull cannot but fail to recognize how political interventions originating in world society serve to complement and expand international governance, and how they end up redefining rather than undermining the legitimacy of nation-states in an era complex global governance. Not least for this reason, Bull's pluralist vision is a poor guide to the complex reality of global governance that has grown around the UNFCCC regime, and that is likely to gain in significance.

CONCLUSIONS

After over two decades of UNFCCC negotiations, the world is still awaiting an effective international response to the threat of global warming. If he were with us today, Bull would not be surprised at the meagre results of climate multilateralism. As he had argued in *The Anarchical Society*, the plurality of values and interests is holding back international society from developing a sense of common purpose in the fight against global ecological dangers. Climate change may be posing an ever-greater threat to the wellbeing, and even survival, of humankind, but it is unlikely to induce the kind of global solidarity that would push aside distributional conflicts and normative differences between nations. As Bull stated in his last chapter, there are no easy 'solutions' for 'the way ahead' (1977, 318–20).

Bull's pluralist scepticism provides a powerful antidote to the exuberant expectations of an imminent transformation of world politics in the face of the global ecological crisis. The division of the world into sovereign states, blamed by environmentalists for preventing a collective response to global warming, is the unavoidable context in which global

environmental policies have to be agreed. In the absence of a viable alternative to the ‘Westphalian’ states system, intergovernmental negotiations remain the only means with which interest conflicts in environmental protection can be resolved. Bull would have expected the great powers to play a leading role in forging a global response to climate change. Given their economic clout and leading contribution to the global warming effect, they are both effective veto powers and potentially legitimate leaders in international climate politics. When claiming special rights and responsibilities, great powers may be trampling over the interests of weaker states and violating principles of international justice. However, as long as they collectively maintain international order and pursue global objectives, their dominant role in climate politics may have to be tolerated to get the world closer to a viable climate solution.

Although setting out to defend a state-centric international system characterized by power inequality, Bull was not blind to international society’s limitations. As he acknowledges in *The Anarchical Society*, the society of states may have started to create international regulatory mechanisms, but it remains woefully weak when it comes to imposing constraints on population growth, resource consumption and industrial pollution. Bull hinted at the need to move towards a solidarist form of international environmental cooperation, although he did not explore how this could come about. Nor did he have much faith in humanity’s ability to move in this direction. To some extent, the Kyoto Protocol can be seen as an experiment in creating a solidarist response, based on the UNFCCC’s climate protection norm, strong global equity principles and legally binding emission reductions. However, state-centric solidarism did not get very far in climate politics. The Kyoto Protocol’s top-down regulatory approach has been replaced by the Paris Agreement’s more decentralized system of nationally determined pledges. Bull would most likely agree with

Buzan in his assessment that ‘environmentalism still represent[s] the aspirational more than the empirical side of solidarism’ (Buzan 2004, 150).

But Bull’s pluralist and state-centric perspective is less convincing when it comes to the transnationalization of global climate politics. As the states system has struggled to find an appropriate response to global warming, other actors that are operating across scales, sectors, and boundaries are adding their own contributions to an increasingly diverse and complex field of climate governance. With civil society, business and sub-national state actors increasingly performing governance functions that no longer fit into established state-centric notions of authority and power, Bull’s binary distinction between inter-state and world society fails to capture the transformative potential of the new climate transnationalism. Of course, Bull would rightly warn against taking the state and pluralism out of the equation—after all, states continue to perform an important role by initiating, supporting and steering private governance, and even world society is characterized by deep-seated conflicts over values and interests (Hurrell 2007, 307). But by framing transnationalism as a revolutionary force that seeks to overcome the state-centric system, he misses out on the subtler changes in international environmental politics that are redefining, rather than undermining, national sovereignty and international authority.

Still, it is unclear whether transnational solidarism can succeed where state-centric solidarism has failed. Despite the remarkable growth in transnational governance networks, the UN climate regime remains an important anchor for developing private climate initiatives and setting non-state actors’ expectations. Given the severity of the global climate challenge that the world faces today, both international society and world society have been found wanting as sites of global governance. If Bull were to comment on the recent history of climate politics, he would therefore have good reason to feel vindicated in his view that ‘the

spaceship earth' still lacks a voice that can speak with legitimate authority in international politics and that 'human unity or solidarity' is in short supply (1977, 85 and 295).³

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