

Order as Resilience-Governance of Sameness and Diversity

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The problem of world order is probably *the* most debated question in the international relations discipline. Yet, notwithstanding the many thousands of pages written about world order, “the answer” has for most of the history of the IR discipline been anchored in an essentialist Western outlook with little attention to whose order we are studying and how order is understood and constituted. I argue in this short essay that our understanding of the problem of world order is undermined by assumptions that are widely shared within a discipline where the language of power and interest dominates¹ and where a view of states as “like units” is assumed to be valid. I argue that our understanding of the problem of order would be enhanced if we paid more attention to values and visions of the good life, rather than maintaining an emphasis on power and interests, and if the ontological foundation of IR was shifted from the assumptions of sameness and like units to an assumption of diversity, or what Justin Rosenberg calls “the societal multiplicity of global life.”²

The essay starts by outlining how Hedley Bull advanced the understanding of the problem of order through a language that went beyond just power and interest³ but that still failed to address the problem of diversity, resting instead on an implicitly Western conception of order. The essay suggests a nonessentialist conception of order based on the understanding that all ordering domains have their own vision of the good life and their own specific patterns of power, principles, and practice;⁴ and that all societies seek resilience measured against their

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vision of the good life rather than against their capacity for maximizing power and interests. The challenge in a world of multiple, different, and interconnected societies is therefore how to manage relationships that are characterized by difference rather than sameness. I introduce “resilience-governance” to distinguish between resilience as a practice of self-governance taking place *within* ordering domains and resilience as a practice of “diversity-governance” taking place *between* ordering domains. The combination of the two allows for a bifocal view into how practices of resilience as self-governance may produce order *within* individual domains but suggests that this process—like the evolution of Darwin’s finches—inevitably increases diversity and difference, hence making the practices of resilience as diversity-governance *between* ordering domains increasingly challenging. Indeed, the current state of world disorder appears to be the result of such processes of diversification.

BULL AND THE PROBLEM OF VALUES

Bull certainly spoke a more complex language than his contemporaries in the IR discipline in that he included realism’s emphasis on power and states, liberalism’s emphasis on institutions and values, and what would later develop into constructivism’s emphasis on identity and values.⁵ Moreover, his seminal tome, *The Anarchical Society*, is not only a remarkable statement about order but, thanks to his concept of “international society” as the primary site where order is constituted, remains one of the greatest contributions to the theorization of order. Nevertheless, Bull’s work has been criticized for its highly West-centric and deeply essentialist perspective⁶ that does not sufficiently contemplate the influence of other, especially non-Western, conceptions of order. Bull was well aware of the difficulty of defining order and sought to escape it by describing “order” as a particular pattern of human activity taking place for a particular purpose.⁷ He was quite specific in his suggestion that order is constituted through rules-based patterns of behavior to ensure what he called the “fundamental goals of social life”—the safeguarding of life against violent death, ensuring that promises once made will be kept, and that agreements once entered will be respected—what he called the values of “life, truth, and property.”⁸ The goals were fundamental because no society is sustainable if its members do not have a reasonable expectation of security against violence, confidence in the sanctity of promises, and trust in the stability of the possession of property. However, ensuring the fundamental goals of

social life is not sufficient for producing what might be conceived of as a “good life.” A prison, for example, is a highly ordered social setting in which strict rules and tight controls are meant to ensure that the elementary goals of social life are achieved. Yet, as discussed by Ian Hurd in this roundtable, prison life is not what most would regard as a good life. Order, therefore, requires a deeper engagement with other values that are commonly regarded within a society to constitute a good life. Bull fully accepted that the fundamental goals of social life cannot be sufficient for maintaining order within international society. He emphasized the importance of what he referred to rather vaguely as “other values,” which he believed would act as the glue that holds a society together by reinforcing a sense of common interest and common obligations, thereby indicating the constitutive importance of values and at least hinting at the necessity for a shared societal conception of what makes a good life. In practice however, the other values that have received the most attention have been Western values, anchored in a Western reading of history and conceived from a culturally Western perspective.

The term “good life” can be a convenient way to overcome the inherently Western perspective in discussions about world order. The term is inspired by Aristotle in his writing on *eudaimonia* (“happiness,” or, more illuminatingly, “a humanly flourishing life” or simply “a good life”).⁹ Though, it is not very clear what Aristotle thought would contribute to a good life, he seemed to emphasize the importance of “goods of the soul,” such as friendship, family, fairness, self-esteem, honor, morality, and justice.¹⁰ My use of the term is more pragmatic than it is philosophical, providing a convenient way of including the many “softer” practical, cultural, and emotional aspects of life that are often left out of analyses because they are difficult to quantify and categorize and perhaps even appear inconsequential and commonsensical. The good life captures what Theodore Schatzki refers to as “teleo-affective structures,”¹¹ which emphasize normativity through a complex and continuously changing array of emotions and moods that together express understandings of what it makes sense to do to realize a shared vision for the future.¹² From this perspective, just like the values of life, truth, and property are fundamental for the survival of any kind of society, a sense of the good life is also required for the survival of a particular society because its long-term cohesion rests on shared ideas rooted in morality and a sense of justice and a shared vision for the future.¹³ This, of course, immediately raises the practical question about which vision of the good life is to be followed. As an abstract concept, however, the idea of the good life can add to our

understanding of order as consisting of both forms of values: on the one hand, order requires a minimum degree of security of life, truth, and property; on the other hand, all societies rest on a shared sense of the good life, which expresses the society's sense of purpose and provides an "ethical" context in which social meaning and expectations for appropriate behavior can be understood.

The concept of the good life is not foreign to English School thinking. Martin Wight referred to it in his distinction between political theory and international theory by arguing that while political theory involves "speculation about the state," international theory involves "speculation about the relations between states."¹⁴ And that whereas political theory puts forth "a theory of the good life," international theory puts forth "a theory of survival."¹⁵ In this usage, the concept of a good life was effectively a tool for line-drawing between the domestic and the international, suggesting that order according to a vision of a good life is only possible *within* a society (in Wight's view, states), whereas the management of relations *between* societies (or states) would not include considerations about visions of a good life. Although this distinction may be of merit if "the international" is understood as a system devoid of values,¹⁶ the distinction is less useful if the global and the international are also conceptualized as "societies." Arguably, Bull's main contribution is precisely the concept of international society, which has since been expanded to include a global version—global international society.¹⁷ Indeed, if "the global" is considered to be a global international society within which other societies (national or international) exist, a global-level sense of the good life is required.

I maintain Wight's distinction, not as line-drawing between domestic politics and international politics, but rather as a distinction between ordering taking place *within* a society and ordering taking place through relations *between* societies. This perspective ties in with Rosenberg's multiplicity thesis by acknowledging that all societies, regardless of their size, level, or composition, have their own distinctive vision of the good life.¹⁸ To be sure, the values and vision of the good life in inclusive and unbounded societies,¹⁹ such as global international society, are likely to be "thin" values, whereas more exclusive and bounded societies, such as states, clans, ethnic or religious societies, and even composite forms of societies such as the liberal international order, will be based on thicker forms of values. The point is that it is difficult to imagine any form of order without social relations and without these relations being based on, at a minimum, a thin notion

of shared values—including a (thin) shared vision of what constitutes the good life.

ORDERING AND RESILIENCE AS SELF-GOVERNANCE

The premise of the argument advanced in this essay rests on the assumption of the societal multiplicity of global life and the understanding that all societies are characterized by Bull's fundamental values of social life as well as by other more particularistic values anchored in a specific vision of the good life. However, the assumption of the multiplicity of global life necessarily leads to a level of complexity that can be analytically difficult to handle. I seek to counteract this complexity by conceptualizing all societies, from the local to the global level, as sites of ordering that can be thought of as ideal ordering domains. Each ideal ordering domain consists of four constitutive elements—three changeable elements (power, principles, and practice) and one relatively stable element, a shared vision of the good life. The latter must remain relatively stable, because a change in the vision of the good life would constitute a change of the essence of the society—effectively producing a new ordering domain. The power element refers to how relations within the society are managed, especially if the ordering domain is managed through consent or coercion; the principles element refers to the norms, rules, and values that define appropriate behavior within the ordering domain in a way that is in alignment with the vision of the good life; and the practice element refers to the practices that are performed through a range of formal and informal institutions to optimize the prospects for realizing the vision of the good life while maintaining the cohesion and functionality of the society.

Ordering domains can take many different forms, including small-scale social groups, such as family or professional associations; larger social entities, such as states or even global international society; and composite entities, such as international orders. The many different ordering domains comprising the multiplicity of global life coexist relationally in complex patterns of co-constitution between individual ordering domains and between levels of ordering ranging from the local to the global level. To fully unpack how the multiplicity of global life affects world order, it is useful to distinguish between two forms of ordering processes, “resilience as a practice of *self-governance*” and “resilience as a practice of *diversity-governance*.”²⁰ “Resilience as a practice of *self-governance*” encompasses processes involving reflection, alignment, and adaptation *within* ordering domains in

response to externally generated influences that lead to misalignment between the constitutive elements of the ordering domain that, if left unattended, will lead to its dysfunction and possible collapse. “Resilience as a practice of *diversity-governance*” involves a variety of relational processes *between* ordering domains within a complex adaptive system in which events and disruptive connectivities constantly require the ordering domains’ attention. The challenge is to manage diversity and difference to allow for cooperation between the ordering domains to meet common challenges, provide public goods, and ensure the resilience of the overall ordering domain.

All ordering domains are constantly bombarded with different forms of stimuli from what Emilian Kavalski calls “the around.”²¹ The complexity and dynamism of the around present the ever-present potential for destabilizing the constitutive elements of ordering domains or the shared knowledge about what constitutes the good life. All stimuli from the around, including contestation and support, events, and emergent change, as well as the intentional and unintentional consequences of one’s own actions and the actions of others, are likely to result in a temporary misalignment between the constitutive elements of the ordering domain. This continues until agents within the domain can undertake self-governance processes through adaptation to bring the constitutive elements back in alignment. Reactions to stimuli from the external environment are therefore a normal part of being, which require agents within ordering domains to reflect on their environment and, when necessary, take adaptive action to resolve any misalignments and tensions between the constitutive elements and between the idea of the good life and the power, principles, and practice elements of the social domain. Although misalignments can be caused by an infinite variety of stimuli, a few are of particular importance. These include, but are not limited to, changes in the salience of the shared ideas underpinning the sense of the good life, the failing legitimacy of power patterns, contestation against the principles of the domain, and outdated and dysfunctional practices that undermine the domain’s capacity to stay “fit for purpose.”

Ordering domains comprise an “inside” and an “outside” and are situated within a complex and dynamic context, meaning that order is constituted *within* ordering domains through practices of self-organization and *between* ordering domains through relational governance processes. Despite the similarity of the practices of resilience as self-governance taking place *within* ordering domains, their outcomes are likely to be characterized by difference because the processes

of resilience as self-governance are undertaken with reference to different conceptions of the good life, and through different patterns of power, principles, and practice. Resilient societies are thus similar to each other in that they are able to continuously change and adapt through their resilience-governance processes. However, since each resilient society will have a unique vision of the good life and particular patterns of power, principles, and practice, the responses from different resilient societies to similar influences (such as global crises or similar forms of contestations) will lead the ordering domains in very different directions. In times of change and transformation (such as we are currently undergoing), the constant need for realignment and self-governance to remain resilient is therefore likely to lead to accelerating the difference between the ordering domains, which will likely impair the prospects for cooperative relations.

ORDERING AND RESILIENCE AS DIVERSITY GOVERNANCE

Order is not just something that is achieved through practices *within* ordering domains; it is also a condition with an external quality that must be achieved in relations *between* ordering domains located in the around. However, whereas resilience as self-governance involves complicated—that is, multifaceted but predictable—processes of alignment and adaptation, resilience as diversity-governance involves complex—that is, multifaceted and unpredictable—patterns of relationality.²² The former is complicated because although it comprises many different actors and different forms of agency, the processes take place within a single, bounded ordering domain with one vision for the good life (albeit possibly contested and/or lacking salience) that has established patterns of power, principle, and practice. Resilience as diversity-governance, on the other hand, is complex because it involves multiple ordering domains, which each react to stimuli from the around according to their individual conditions and meaning-making processes. The result is complex processes of relational entanglements and dynamic adaptive interdependencies between multiple bounded ordering domains, which, in accordance with Darwin's theory of diversification, generate more rather than less complexity, produce divergencies rather than convergencies, and produce variation rather than resemblances.²³ The challenge for resilience as diversity-governance is therefore to find opportunities for constructive and, where possible, predictive interactions between ordering domains to reduce complexity, stimulate convergence, and identify possible “trading zones” in which dissimilar

groups can interact in nonconfrontational ways and find common ground while expressing their social distinctiveness and agree to disagree on their general outlook.²⁴

Diversity governance to maintain world order is conducted through relations between different ordering domains located within the same level of ordering. This can be between sovereign states—or between composite ordering domains in which sovereign states have formed multiple international orders.²⁵ When analyzing the current state of world order, it is important to distinguish between two distinct levels of ordering—the level of the “global, rules-based order” and the level where multiple international orders are located, such as the “liberal international order.” The global, rules-based order is an “unbounded” (nearly) universal ordering domain, while the liberal international order is a loosely “bounded” ordering domain open only to those who share its values. While there can be only one overall global order, several international orders can coexist, each with a specific value base that expresses a particular vision of the good life.²⁶ Today, it seems that the global, rules-based order is in transformation because new orders within it are in the making; most notably a Chinese order and a Russian order. Each of these has a vision of the good life that is very different from that of the liberal international order, and each is clearly in the process of consolidating its specific patterns of power, principles, and practice.²⁷ Therefore, although the global, rules-based order and the liberal international order are deeply intertwined, overlapping, and infused with liberal principles and practices, and constituted through centuries of liberal/Western power, they are analytically distinct phenomena. We are currently witnessing the transformation of the global, rules-based order, a crisis in the liberal international order, and the emergence of new international orders, each with distinctive visions of the good life and order-specific patterns of power, principles, and practice.

The perspective on world order presented here departs decisively from that of Bull in its view of change as not only inevitable but desirable, and in its framing of resilience as an ontology of adaptation and relationality²⁸ practiced through self-governance and diversity-governance. In the former, resilience is about practices of self-governance to remain “fit for purpose” in the context of pervasive change, and, in the latter, it is about dynamic interactions and adaptations for survival within a complex adaptive system.²⁹ From the latter perspective, resilience is always about embracing change through reflective governance strategies not only to mitigate any negative effects on the shared vision of the good life but

also to undertake adaptive behavior to bolster capacities for individual and collective survival within the context of the relentless bombardment of influences and stimuli from an increasingly volatile, uncertain, and complex external environment.³⁰ As suggested by David Chandler, this form of resilience thinking challenges framings of order that prioritize stability and linear conceptions of progress and opens up the possibility that “the uncertain, the uncontrollable and the unknown can be liberatory rather than oppressive or problematic.”³¹

THE PROBLEM OF WORLD ORDER IN A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE

Today, the problem with world order is that there seems to be very little of it. The sense of disorder and crisis are widely referred to among policy practitioners as a “polycrisis”³² and a shifting balance of power from the West to the rest, leading to a widely held belief that the world is returning to multipolarity.³³ However, although the view that the world is now multipolar is persuasive, seeing the world as multipolar rests on understandings that are anchored in the assumption of sameness and the language of power and interest. Instead, an analysis based on the considerations that have been outlined in this essay—recognizing the inevitability of difference—shows that rather than a return to multipolarity, we are witnessing the beginning of a new form of world order in which plurality is reflected in the emergence of several international orders, each based on its own individual vision of the good life and its own specific patterns of power, principles, and practice. In this view, the world is not multipolar, but multi-order.³⁴

In the multi-order world, states will cluster around a leading state—either willingly or under duress—to form different international orders, each with distinctive rules, principles, and order-specific institutions. Currently, the multi-order architecture looks set to consist of the American-led liberal international order, the Chinese-led Belt and Road order, and the Russian-led Eurasian order. Other orders, both international and transnational, may also be in the making—for example, the emergence of international orders in Africa or Latin America and different forms of transnational orders composed of a range of nonstate actors, including faith-based transnational orders such as the Islamic State, or issue-specific orders such as environmental stewardship or global climate action. In addition, the multi-order world will almost certainly include several nonaligned states such as India, Indonesia, Brazil, and South Africa (at least until alternative orders more fitting for these nonaligned states are established).

Although the difference between a multipolar and a multi-order world may be subtle, it is important, and only those who fully grasp it will be able to position themselves advantageously in the emerging global order in decades to come. By continuing to view the current transformation as a return to multipolarity and therefore as mainly being about shifting power, we overlook that a multi-order world order will be constituted against a backdrop of diversity through distinct visions for the good life and that ultimately world order will depend on how these differences can be managed. A view of the world as multipolar will not only be out of step with a long-overdue shift toward valuing non-Western forms of plurality but it could also lead to policies that will be detrimental to the West by accelerating difference and hampering cooperative global governance. This essay's suggested focus on the external aspect of resilience as a practice of diversity governance ideally enables us to grasp the big picture of relationality within a complex environment of multiple orders and levels of ordering. It emphasizes the need for seeing different visions of the good life as an inevitable condition of global life and therefore the need to refrain from treating plurality as a source of conflict and to instead see it as a challenge to find commonality within diversity. Therefore, the necessary outcome of the multiplicity thesis is that social distinctiveness must be celebrated and managed as the foundation for constructive relational encounters in the multi-order architecture of global life.

NOTES

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- ⁴ Trine Flockhart, "From 'Westlessness' to Renewal of the Liberal International Order: Whose Vision for the 'Good Life' Will Matter?," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 35, no. 2 (2022), pp. 176–93, [www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09557571.2021.1999212](https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2021.1999212).
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- ⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

- ⁹ John M. Cooper, "Aristotle on the Goods of Fortune," *Philosophical Review* 94, no. 2 (April 1985), pp. 173–86, at p. 173, www.jstor.org/stable/2185427?origin=crossref.
- ¹⁰ For an in-depth discussion on how to interpret Aristotle's concept of the good life and its connection to a life of virtue, see Cooper, 1985.
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- ¹² Christian Bueger and Frank Gadinger, *International Practice Theory*, 2nd ed. (New York: Springer, 2018).
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- ¹⁴ Martin Wight, "Why Is There No International Theory?," *International Relations* 2, no. 1 (1960), pp. 35–48; p. 35, journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/004711786000200104.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 33. See also Robert Jackson, "Martin Wight, Realism, and the Good Life," in *Classical and Modern Thought on International Relations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 39–50.
- ¹⁶ Bull famously distinguished between system and society. He defined the "international system" as one in which "two or more states have sufficient contact between them and have sufficient impact on one another's decisions to cause them to behave—at least in some measure—as parts of a whole" (p. 9). He defined an "international society," on the other hand, as one where "a group of states, conscious of certain common interests and common values, form a society in the sense that they conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another, and share in the working of common institutions" (p. 13). See Bull, *Anarchical Society*. It is, however, problematic to practically distinguish between system and society, and Alan James convincingly concluded that interaction without some degree of social content is if not impossible, of little importance. See Alan James, "System or Society?," *Review of International Studies* 19, no. 3 (July 1993), pp. 269–88, www.cambridge.org/core/journals/review-of-international-studies/article/abs/system-or-society/A17FB75C9821D2534D990CB09C67B449.
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- ¹⁸ Flockhart, "From 'Westlessness' to Renewal of the Liberal International Order."
- ¹⁹ John J. Mearsheimer, "Bound to Fail: The Rise and Fall of the Liberal International Order," *International Security* 43, no. 4 (Spring 2019), pp. 7–50, direct.mit.edu/isec/article/43/4/7/12221/Bound-to-Fail-The-Rise-and-Fall-of-the-Liberal.
- ²⁰ The term "resilience as diversity-governance" is inspired by Buzan and Schouenborg's differentiation approach to Global International Society and the discussions in Reus-Smit's 2018 book and in Phillips and Reus-Smit's edited collection about ordering through "diversity regimes." See Buzan and Schouenborg, *Global International Society*; Reus-Smit, *On Cultural Diversity*, ch. 6; and Andrew Phillips and Christian Reus-Smit, *Culture and Order in World Politics: Diversity and Its Discontents* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2020).
- ²¹ Emilian Kavalski, "Inside/Outside and Around: Complexity and the Relational Ethics of Global Life," *Global Society* 34, no. 4 (2020), pp. 467–86, www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13600826.2020.1745158.
- ²² I thank Oliver Gnad for drawing my attention to the difference between complicated and complex, which he described as the difference between, for example, a multifaceted production line (complicated but predictable) and a swarm of birds (complex and unpredictable).
- ²³ Jonathan Pugh and David Chandler, *Anthropocene Islands: Entangled Worlds* (London: University of Westminster Press, 2021).
- ²⁴ Peter Galison, "Trading Zone: Coordinating Action and Belief," in Mario Biagioli, ed., *The Science Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 137–60.
- ²⁵ Trine Flockhart, "The Coming Multi-Order World," *Contemporary Security Policy* 37, no. 1 (2016), pp. 3–30, www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13523260.2016.1150053.
- ²⁶ Flockhart, "From 'Westlessness' to Renewal of the Liberal International Order."
- ²⁷ Trine Flockhart and Elena A. Korosteleva, "War in Ukraine: Putin and the Multi-Order World," *Contemporary Security Policy* 43, no. 3 (2022), pp. 461–81, www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13523260.2022.2091591.
- ²⁸ Pugh and Chandler, *Anthropocene Islands*, p. 41.

- ²⁹ Ibid., p. 43.
- ³⁰ Mathew J. Burrows and Oliver Gnad, “Between ‘Muddling through’ and ‘Grand Design’: Regaining Political Initiative—the Role of Strategic Foresight,” *Futures* 97 (March 2018), pp. 6–17, www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0016328717300083?via%3Dihub.
- ³¹ David Chandler, “Decolonising Resilience: Reading Glissant’s *Poetics of Relation* in Central Eurasia,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 35, no. 2 (2022), pp. 158–75 at p. 165.
- ³² World Economic Forum, *Global Risks Report 2023*, 18th ed. (Cologny, Switzerland: World Economic Forum, 2023), www.weforum.org/reports/global-risks-report-2023/digest.
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Abstract: One of the problems with the problem of world order is that what makes for order *within* societies is often precisely what makes for disorderly relations *between* them. I argue in this short essay that many of the problems with the problem of world order arise from assumptions that are widely shared within a discipline where the language of power and interest dominates and where a view of states as “like units” permeates. With more emphasis on values and visions of the good life, and acceptance that the ontological foundation of IR is difference rather than sameness, the debates about the problem of world order would take on a different form. The essay adapts the work of Hedley Bull and introduces the concept of “resilience-governance” to distinguish between resilience as a practice of self-governance taking place *within* ordering domains and resilience as a practice of “diversity-governance” taking place *between* ordering domains. The combination of the two allows for a bifocal view into how practices of resilience as self-governance may produce order *within* individual domains but will at the same time increase diversity and difference *between* the ordering domains, hence making the practices of resilience as diversity-governance much more challenging.

Keywords: English School, the good life, liberal international order, global rules-based order, global international society, values, identity