



# Australian Realism and International Relations: John Anderson and Hedley Bull on Ethics, Religion and Society

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John Anderson, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Sydney from 1927 to 1958, is not conventionally viewed as having exerted a significant influence on the development of international relations in the 20th century. Indeed, his contributions to philosophical realism and public debate in Australian society have been more readily acknowledged as his major spheres of influence. However, Anderson must also be credited with having exerted a significant influence on the intellectual development of one of the most prominent international relations theorists of the 20th century, his student Hedley Bull. With this in mind, this article assesses the impact of Anderson's teachings on Bull's thought and argues that although Bull deviated from his earliest mentor's more extreme views about ethical inquiry, his general approach to the study of international relations, understanding of international society, and sceptical attitude towards religion can, in large part, be derived from Anderson's teachings.

*International Politics* (2008) 45, 52–71. doi:10.1057/palgrave.ip.8800219

**Keywords:** Hedley Bull; John Anderson; realism; ethics; religion; international society

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## Introduction

An Australian by birth and, in many ways character, Hedley Bull stands as one of the most prominent theorists of 20th century British international relations.<sup>1</sup> The author of the highly regarded 1977 work *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*, Bull is most commonly characterized as standing alongside Martin Wight as one of the most prominent members of the so-called 'English School' of international relations.<sup>2</sup> In particular, much has been made in recent scholarship of the extent to which Bull was influenced by Wight, Tim Dunne's history of the 'English School' noting that Bull not only stands in a pattern of intellectual lineage that extends from Wight to Bull's student R.J. Vincent, but 'thought about International Relations in quintessentially Wightean terms' (1998, 136).



In large part, this impression is derived from Bull's own assessment of his intellectual development. In particular, Bull is known to have attended Wight's famous lecture series as a junior academic at the London School of Economics in the mid-1950s and readily admitted that the experience exerted a 'profound impression' upon him. Bull even went so far as to write that he 'felt in the shadow of Martin Wight's thought — humbled by it, a constant borrower from it, always hoping to transcend it but never able to escape from it' (1991, ix). Similarly, the preface of his most famous work, *The Anarchical Society*, speaks of the 'profound debt' Bull felt he owed Wight for demonstrating to him 'that International Relations could be made a subject' (1977/1995, xiii).

However, alongside Wight, a number of other figures have also been credited with influencing Bull's intellectual development. Among the most prominent stand H.L.A. Hart (Almeida, 2003, 292), one of the most important legal theorists of the 20th century who taught Bull during his time at Oxford, and C.A.W. Manning, the figure responsible for appointing him to his first assistant lectureship at the LSE (Miller, 1990, 3; Suganami, 2001a, 95). What is somewhat surprising is that the influence of John Anderson, Bull's teacher at the University of Sydney, has not been afforded sustained consideration in much international relations scholarship. Indeed, although intellectual histories of Bull's thought occasionally mention in passing that Anderson must be considered one of his foremost influences, this association has not been afforded the attention it rightly warrants in thinking about the history of ideas in British international relations.<sup>3</sup> What makes this omission particularly surprising is Bull's explicit acknowledgement of Anderson's influence in the preface to *The Anarchical Society*:

My greatest intellectual debt is to John Anderson... a greater man than many who are more famous. He had little to say directly about the matters discussed in this book, but the impact of his mind and his example has been the deepest factor in shaping the outlook of many of us whom he taught. (1977/1995, xiv)

The Challis Chair of Philosophy at the University of Sydney from 1927 to 1958, John Anderson was, in David Armstrong's view, 'the most important philosopher who has worked in Australia' (2001). A Scot by birth and educated at the University of Glasgow, Anderson's move to Australia was, as John Passmore writes, 'the greatest piece of intellectual good fortune our country has ever experienced' (1977, 53). Although he only published one book during his lifetime, *Education and Politics* (1931) — three editions of collected articles and lectures, *Studies in Empirical Philosophy* (1962), *Education and Inquiry* (1980a), and *Art and Reality* (1982) have been published posthumously while his *Lecture Notes and Other Writings* have been made available on-line — his influence extended to a number of realms. In the field of philosophy, Anderson expounded the merits of what A.J. Baker has termed 'Australian realism', a form



of extreme philosophical realism, at a time when idealism was still the dominant mode of thought in Australian philosophy (1986, 10–11). A ‘theoretical advisor’ to the Communist Party of Australia and later associate of the United Front Against Fascism, Friends of the Soviet Union, and the Trotskyist Workers Party, Anderson was also well known for his socialist sentiments. In Australian society, Anderson is best remembered as a public controversialist who twice instigated censure motions in the New South Wales and Federal parliaments for his outspoken views on censorship, war memorials, sexual liberation and the role of religion in education (1930a). However, it was among his students that he exerted the greatest influence. Indeed, even critics among his former students acknowledge Anderson’s impact on their intellectual development. For example, David Stove once wrote that ‘[t]he influence Anderson exercised was purely, or as purely as a human influence can be, purely intellectual. I never felt anything like the force of his intellect’ (1977, 45).<sup>4</sup>

With this in mind, this article therefore seeks to assess precisely what the ‘intellectual debt’ Bull felt he owed to Anderson might be. It begins by further introducing the figure of John Anderson, focusing in particular on his teaching style and views on the role of the academic. The second section then goes on to outline what has become known in philosophical circles as ‘Australian realism’, Anderson’s particular mix of pluralism, empiricism and positivism, before considering the implications of his philosophical thought for his understandings of the nature of ethical inquiry, the role of religion in education and the functioning of human society. The second half of the article then turns to the thought of Hedley Bull and considers the influence of Anderson in three areas of Bull’s thought; his general approach to the study and teaching of international relations; his understanding of international society, in particular his pluralist outlook; and the scepticism with which he approached religious ideas and certain forms of moral thought. The article concludes by suggesting that although he deviates from Anderson’s more extreme criticisms of ethical inquiry, Bull’s general approach to the study of international relations, pluralist understanding of international society and, in particular, sceptical attitude towards religion were certainly consistent with the teachings of his earliest mentor. Interestingly, it is also with regard to these issues that Bull’s position was furthest from his more commonly acknowledged intellectual influence, Martin Wight.

### **John Anderson (1893–1962)**

Anderson’s style, it has often been noted, was both Socratic and authoritarian.<sup>5</sup> As Peter Shrubbs, one of Anderson’s former students, remarked in an article that appeared shortly after Anderson’s death:

Here, shivering, my Philosophy I class sat on the morning of March 20, 1945, waiting to hear its first lecture from Professor Anderson. This was the



introduction to a series on the Apology, Socrates' defence at his trial, and before it was half over I already had the bull by the foot; I was young and fodish, and I was not sure which was Socrates and which was John Anderson. One was short, strikingly ugly, and wore a sort of toga; the other was tall, strikingly handsome, and wore a blue suit. But these differences were superficial. They were great men, and men of the same kind. (1962)

Following in the Socratic style, Anderson maintained that '[t]he work of the academic, qua academic is criticism' (1980b, 214). In this vein, John Passmore has gone so far as to suggest that, with the exception of his writings on logic and, to some degree ethics, 'Anderson did not develop his views systematically but rather through a critique of the classical philosophers' (1997, 94). He was not, in Passmore's view, 'a scholar' of the classic texts, but relied on secondary interpretations, and focused on critique as the basis of his scholarship (1997, 94). Indeed, his ability to critique and 'powers of dismissal were simply boundless' (Stove, 1977, 21).

This critical focus was also reflected in Anderson's teaching style. 'Socratic education begins', he wrote in an early article, 'with the awakening of the mind to the need for criticism, to the uncertainty of the principles by which it supposed itself to be guided' (Anderson in Franklin, 2003, 22). That said, among the most often repeated criticisms of Anderson's scholarly style is that he could not tolerate being criticized himself. He was, as Armstrong notes, 'authoritarian in his own personality and intolerant of dissent from his own views among his staff and students' (Armstrong in Bogdan, 1984, 7). His greatest intellectual weakness was his overwhelming desire to acquire disciples, many of his former students noting that they were treated with suspicion by Anderson for not joining the inner circle of his followers (Armstrong in Franklin, 2003, 47).

Anderson's authoritarian nature was also reflected in his lecturing style; his lectures were dictated in what were 'by formal standards' the 'worst possible' manner (Passmore, 1997, 93). As tedious as it must have been for his students to endure this 'pedagogical passivity' (Armstrong, 2001), the distinct advantage of Anderson's method for contemporary scholars is that his lecture notes represent almost exactly what was conveyed to his students. It is thus from his lecture notes and other papers, particularly 'Realism and Some of its Critics' (1930b), that we can begin to discern precisely what Anderson's 'Australian realism' entailed.

## Australian Realism

In general terms, philosophical realism is comprised of three fundamental principles. Its first and central claim 'maintains the independence of the known from the knowing of it' (Grave, 1984, 31). That is, it is an ontological position



that claims that objects exist even if no one is conscious of them or experiences them. Secondly, philosophical realism maintains that what we know is known to us through observation. This ultimately means it is fundamentally opposed to rationalism and, in particular, knowledge derived through the process of deduction. Finally, and following from its epistemological standpoint, philosophical realism also claims that the only appropriate method according to which such knowledge is to be attained is that of empiricism.

In both its political and philosophical forms, realism emerged in response to the dominant mode of thought in both fields in the early 20th century, idealism. As John Passmore writes, during the time when Anderson studied there, the University of Glasgow ‘was still an outpost of Absolute Idealism’ (2001, ix). ‘Absolute’ Hegelian idealism had been established as the dominant mode of philosophical thought at Glasgow by Edward Caird whose influence stretched to the philosophy schools of Australia (Grave, 1984, 24).<sup>6</sup> Its central claim was that ‘ordinary things or “outside objects” (apart from other minds) depend for their existence on being known.’ That is, idealists claim that ‘reality is experience’ (Baker, 1986, 3–4). Thus objects, such as ‘tables, buildings, mountains and so on’ do not exist if no one is conscious of them or experiences them (Baker, 1986, 4). This, of course, is in direct opposition to the realist claim that whatever exists does so regardless of whether or not anyone is conscious of it.

Although he was not the first philosopher to oppose idealism in Australia — Bernard Muscio, the Challis Professor immediately prior to Anderson was a formidable critic of the approach (Grave, 1984, 37) — it was Anderson who finally turned the tide, at the University of Sydney at least. Indeed, as we will see shortly, Anderson’s realism cut directly to the heart of idealist thought, challenging its fundamental premise at the outset. Foremost among Anderson’s primary influences in this endeavour were the ‘modern realists’, G.E. Moore and Bertrand Russell, and the American ‘new realists’, W.T. Marvin, R.B. Perry and Samuel Alexander. In particular, Anthony Quinton writes that ‘[a] powerful influence was exerted on him by the Gifford Lectures delivered by Samuel Alexander, later published as *Time, Space and Deity* (1984, x). Significantly, in the preface to *The Anarchical Society*, Bull wrote: ‘When still an undergraduate I was very impressed (I now think too impressed) by the dictum of Samuel Alexander, the author of *Time, Space and Deity*...that “thinking is also research”’ (1995, xiii). As we will see shortly, Anderson’s understanding of philosophical realism was fundamentally based on Alexander’s doctrine of spatio-temporality (1958). However, as we will also see in the following section, where Anderson made his own contribution to realist philosophical thought was in the manner in which he developed its empirical approach into ‘a logical and propositional account of reality as a theory of discourse about events’ (Weblin, 2005, 84).



### *Empiricism, Pluralism and Positivism*

As Anderson wrote in 'Realism and Some of its Critics', although 'we cannot define Realism by what any particular realist says', it is possible to identify three principles, or sets of ideas that are constitutive of his particular brand of the approach (1930b, 4). In accordance with the general definition provided above, for Anderson realism was an empiricist doctrine that maintained, at its heart, that existence is 'the single way of being' (1927, 1). More specifically, Anderson maintained that '[e]verything that there is exists in time and space', a contention derived directly from Alexander's doctrine of spatio-temporality (Quinton, 1986, xii–xiii). Realism, for Anderson, was consequently concerned with 'being real' and by extension he argued that 'being real' 'should be unambiguous' so as to avoid all notions pertaining to 'orders' of reality (1930b, 24). That is, he argued that '*whatever exists...is real, that is to say it is a spatio and temporal situation or occurrence that is on the same level of reality as anything else that exists*' (Baker, 1986, 1). This position, often referred to as Anderson's 'ontological egalitarianism', stands in direct opposition to both idealism and rationalism and, in doing so, takes the general ontological claim made by philosophical realism to its logical extreme. Indeed, despite arguing with Hume and Mill that 'experience is the only guide to what is the case', in the final analysis Anderson rejected their positions as being ultimately 'rationalistic' (Passmore, 2001, x). Thus, Anderson went so far as to promulgate the extreme empiricist position that 'a realist can only be an empiricist' (1927, 1). In doing so, he thus fused the ontological claim that everything that exists does so regardless of whether anyone is conscious of it, with the epistemological claim that what we know is known to us through observation, and discussed them under the broad banner of empiricism.

The two remaining principles of 'Australian realism' follow from Anderson's extreme empiricist position. The first is the claim that realism is a pluralistic doctrine. This, as A.J. Baker writes, was to be defended in Anderson's view '*as a matter of fact*' (1986, 34). As Passmore explains, for Anderson, 'every fact (which includes every "object") is a complex situation: there are no simples, no atomic facts, no objects which cannot be, as it were, expanded into facts' (2001, xi). That is, Anderson 'affirm[ed] "the infinite complexity of things" and denie[d] that there is anything absolutely simple, anything less than a complex situation' (Baker, 1986, 34). As we will see shortly, this notion of complexity that was central to Anderson's understanding of pluralism was derived, at least in part, from his fascination with Heraclitus and also informed his social thought.

Finally, and also following from his extreme empiricism, Anderson maintained that realism is a 'positivist doctrine' (1930b, 39). However, by positivism he did not mean 'logical positivism' for this was, in his view,



‘thoroughly rationalistic’ in nature (Baker, 1986, 121). Rather, Anderson understood positivism as a methodological approach centered around the empirical observation of objects and events. This, somewhat curiously, also included ethical inquiry.

### *Ethics*

In accordance with his empiricist and positivist understanding of realism, for Anderson, ethics must necessarily be concerned with ‘facts’. As such, he maintained that ‘there are no “values” above facts’ (Passmore, 2001, xix). Rather, ethics must be treated in the same manner as any other social phenomena; that is to say, positively. This, of course, is in direct contradiction to the more common understanding of ethics as being concerned not simply with the principles of human conduct but with how human beings ought to act; that is, with the normative element of ethical inquiry. However, Anderson went so far as to suggest that ‘there is no such thing as a “normative” science’ (1943a, 1). According to Anderson, ‘[t]he most obstinate confusion obstructing the growth of ethical knowledge lies in the assumption that ethics teaches us how to live or what to live for, that it instructs us in our duty or in the approach to the moral end’ (1933, 4).

This view accords directly with Anderson’s understanding of what it is to be a ‘freethinker’.<sup>7</sup> As he wrote in ‘The Nature of Freethought’ (1950), the ‘freethinker’ is a ‘disinterested theorist’, not in the sense of being opposed to the interested theorist, but in the sense of maintaining ‘*that theory has nothing to do with betterment.*’ This, of course, rests on a fundamental distinction between ‘positive science’, one of the hallmarks of Anderson’s Freethought Society, and normative inquiry. However, Anderson also argued that the very distinction between ‘what is’ and ‘what ought to be’ that marks the positivist/normative divide is fundamentally illogical. Its illogicality, he argued, stems from ‘its conception of the different sorts of reality which attach to norms and to the things which come under these norms’ (1928, 2). That is, it stems from the ‘attempt to distinguish facts from values’. In accordance with Anderson’s empiricist and positivist understanding of realism however, ‘[i]f the statement that something “ought to be” has any meaning, it can only be that the thing *is*, positively obligatory; that this is a matter of fact’ (1928, 3). This, of course, is because Anderson did not believe that different levels of reality can be identified; rather, everything that exists is as real as everything else that exists. For Anderson then, ‘good is a matter of discoverable natural fact’ and does not have anything whatsoever to do with how an individual *ought* to behave or think or what *ought* to happen in a given situation.

It is possible to identify two immediate implications of this view. The first, which I will return to in the following discussion of Anderson’s views about





religion, is that he was outwardly hostile towards ‘moralism’. ‘Moralism’ was, in Anderson’s view, a ‘fraud’ because it brought with it a false sense of obligation (1928, 29). The second implication of Anderson’s positivist view of ethics is the claim that not only is there ‘is no such thing as the common good’ and no need to pursue moral or social progress, but that there is ‘perhaps no possibility of it’ occurring at all (Quinton, 1986, xvi). This has specific implications for Anderson’s understanding of both society and religion.

### *Religion*

Anderson’s hostility towards religion is almost legendary in Australian society and scholarship. Although he initially rejected religion on Comtean grounds, Anderson’s later criticisms of it were made on ‘both ethical and logical grounds’. In agreement with Nietzsche and in accordance ‘with his positive theory of ethics he regard[ed] Christianity...as essentially servile and philanthropic in its outlook and preoccupations...and so as quite opposed to what is intrinsically *good*’ (Baker, 1986, 116). Focusing his criticisms on Christianity in particular, he argued that ‘the Christian ethic, as an ethic of renunciation and consolation, as holding out to the lowly on earth in expectation of “elevation” in some unearthly sense, stands low in the scale of moralities’ (Anderson, 1943b). In particular, Christianity brings with it, he argued, an implicit and unsubstantiated claim to a higher form of morality (Anderson, 1955). Christianity is thus ‘a feudal attitude which is characterized by social helplessness’ and presents a ‘mere veneer of solidarity in its emphasis on acquiescence to oppression and its doctrine of personal salvation’ (Weblin, 2001). On logical grounds, Anderson also argued that ‘[t]heology (is) not only an ambiguous doctrine *of reality*, (it) is also an ambiguous position itself’. It cannot be, he maintained, treated as an aspect of science or even philosophy but can only be reduced to an aspect of social science, one of many facets of human history (1954, I).

However, Anderson’s complaint with religion was not simply a general one but was specifically directed towards the role of religion in education, the subject of one of the public controversies in which he found himself. Indeed, Anderson famously argued in his 1943 speech ‘Religion in Education’, ‘[a]s with the subject of snakes in Iceland there is no religion in education’. ‘Education’, he argued, ‘may be described as the development of inquiry, the setting up of habits of investigation.’ Religion, he continued, is thus ‘opposed to education’ because that which is ‘sacred’ is, by definition, immune to inquiry, examination and criticism. ‘[T]o call anything sacred’, he argued, ‘is to say, “Here inquiry must stop; this is not to be examined”’ (1943b).





### *Society*

Like his views on religion and ethics more generally, Anderson's social critique was fundamentally based on the empiricist and pluralist elements of his philosophical realism. In general terms, this meant that Anderson rejected what 'he regarded as fundamental misconceptions in social science; specifically the 'confused doctrines of *voluntarism*, *individualism* or *social atomism*, and *solidarism*' (Stavropoulos, 1992, 73). Indeed, the logically corollary of Anderson's argument against moralism discussed above was his rejection of solidarism, the view that society is a 'solid or harmonious thing, or a single whole' in which all 'members have a common set of interests' (Baker, 1986, 127). This, Anderson argued, is an illusion that is based on false notions of the common good and 'neglects the fact of social variety and social conflict, that is, the fact of social *pluralism*' (Baker, 1986, 127). However, this did not mean that Anderson disregarded all notions of 'co-operation and social cohesion' in his understanding of society, but rather maintained that 'these are not the dominant social facts as conflict and struggle are permanent important features of society and history' (Baker, 1986, 127). Indeed, conflict was central to Anderson's understanding of society and this was derived, at least in part from his interest in the pre-Socratic Greek philosopher, Heraclitus.

As, I.F. Helu argues, 'Anderson saw in Heraclitus's doctrine three basic ideas: *process*, *tension*, and *complexity*' (1992, 24). In particular, it was Heraclitus' specific notion of the 'complexity and permanence of conflict and change in any situation, natural or social' that most interested Anderson (Helu, 1992, 23–24). Indeed, as Heraclitus wrote, emphasizing the place of conflict in society; 'We must recognize that war is common and strife is justice, and all things happen according to strife and necessity' (DK22B80). Anderson's sympathetic view of Heraclitus is made evident in his 1960 paper 'Classicism':

Heraclitus, who was unremitting in his attack on subjectivist illusions, on the operation of desire or the imagining of things as we should like them to be, as opposed to the operation or understanding of the finding of things (including our own activities) as they positively are — his criticism was directed especially against the school of the Pythagoreans — against their distortion of their material from a desire for simplicity, for the tidy and complete solution. (1962, 194)

Thus, Anderson saw in Heraclitus a call to realism, positivism and complexity and a critique of normative aspirations.

However, Anderson's understanding of the inherently conflictual nature of society was also a function of his Marxism. In particular, along with following Marx's 'atheism, secularism and determinism', he also accepted 'his view of class struggle' and of the existence of 'irreconcilable antagonisms in society'



(Kennedy, 1992, 61). At the same time however, Anderson repudiated Marxism's 'monism, its teleological view of history and its utopianism' (Kennedy, 1992, 64). Indeed, despite the passion with which he adhered to Marx's ideas about society early in his career, by the 1940s Anderson had begun to argue that society is comprised not simply of class divisions but 'a diversity of movements such as Church, State and trade unions, which cannot be reduced to a class theory of society' (Weblin, 2001). In accordance with his pluralist outlook then, what underpinned Anderson's interest in such diverse social movements was the observation, not simply that a community of interests — such as that implied by the class theory of society — did not exist, but that it was not possible.

Despite his emphasis on divergent interests and conflict however, Anderson did leave some room for cooperation in his understanding of society. In particular, he argued that institutions ultimately mitigate the effects of pluralism. As John Passmore notes, Anderson believed that the question to be asked of any social institution was not 'What end or purpose does it serve?' but 'Of what conflicts is it the scene?' (1962, xxii). For Anderson then, institutions were conceived as '*forms of activity*' that represent '*specific interests*' and are bound together through the '*communication*' of their participants, this allowing them to find 'common ways of working' or common '*forms of activity*'. As such, social movements and institutions are ultimately 'communication centers' in Anderson's view (Helu, 1992, 25). Despite the existence of these 'common ways of working' however, Anderson maintained that neither the identification of a broader community of interests nor the recognition of universal values is possible. As we will see in the following section, this argument against universalism is also replicated in the work of Hedley Bull.

### **Hedley Bull (1932–1985)**

Hedley Bull graduated from the University of Sydney with a Bachelor of Arts with Honours in Philosophy in 1952 before heading to Oxford to study for a B.Phil. in Politics. As mentioned above, it was as a young academic at the London School of Economics that Bull came into contact with Martin Wight, the figure most often attributed with influencing his intellectual development. Despite Wight's impact on Bull however, it is also possible to identify a number of significant points of divergence between his thought and that of Bull, particularly related to questions of religion and ethics in international society. As Ian Hall notes, throughout his life Wight was 'a fervent and rather traditionalist Anglican' (2003, 393),<sup>8</sup> his religious faith exerting a significant impact upon his own treatment of international relations. This, however, was a source of great consternation for Bull who admitted in 'Martin Wight and the



Theory of International Relations' that he often 'felt uneasy about the extent to which Wight's view of International Relations derived from his religious beliefs' (1991, xxiii). As we will see shortly however, Bull's views on religion and ethics accorded well with those of his earliest mentor, John Anderson. In particular, Bull's time at the University of Sydney coincided with Anderson's 'religion in education' phase. Indeed, Bull is acknowledged, albeit for his misunderstanding of Anderson's position, in the 1950 lecture 'The Nature of Freethought':

Hedley Bull's 'defence' of me says that I give an initial training in logic which is NON-Christian (not anti-Christian) and then state my conclusions (which *are* anti-Christian) and the student may disagree and criticise. But I do not 'state', but *draw* conclusions. I show that what *follows* from premises I assume anyone will accept.

The influence of Anderson on Bull also extended to other aspects of Bull's thought and style. As Michael Howard has noted, '[i]t was from Anderson that [Bull] learned that a combination of open-mindedness in approach and rigour in analysis which was to distinguish him throughout his career and which he would in due time pass on to his own pupils' (1986, 395). Bull also shared with Anderson a sceptical mind and an 'abrasive and arrogant manner' (Howard, 1987, 276).

Like Anderson, Bull was also renowned for his Socratic style. As James Richardson wrote, '[a]mongst the qualities he prized most were the Socratic questioning of received opinion', adding later that '[i]n his commitment to the Socratic pursuit of the argument irrespective of where it might lead, his sharp eye for illusion and rationalization, his suspicion of orthodoxies, and his scorn for superficiality, Bull remained quintessentially Andersonian' (1990, 149, 175). Also following in Anderson's footsteps Bull was, as Don Markwell wrote, 'a master of demolition' (1987, 280). 'Remorseless in criticism' (Miller, 1990, 10), Bull believed that the 'enterprise of theoretical investigation is at its minimum one directed towards criticism' (Bull, 1972, 32). Unlike Anderson however, Bull was 'highly receptive to other people's impressions of his own work' (Miller, 1990, 10). Also deviating from Anderson, Bull's lecturing style was, as a former student wrote, 'impressive, even dazzling' (Markwell, 1987, 279).

Despite some differences in character and style however, Bull made many elements of Anderson's approach 'his own and applied it rigorously', O'Neill and Schwartz (1987, 3) going so far as to suggest that 'none could apply [Anderson's] precepts better than Bull'. In particular, Bull held firmly to the empiricism that Anderson had promulgated. As he explained in 'International Theory: The Case for the Classical Approach', this did not amount to a 'strict' empiricism of the sort adhered to by proponents of the 'scientific approach to international relations theory' (1966b, 362) but was rather understood in the



manner Anderson had intended. In particular, it is in the following statement that Bull's empiricism and general philosophical realism is evident:

Theoretical inquiry into an empirical subject normally proceeds by way of the assertion of general connections and distinctions between events in the real world. But it is the practice of many of these writers to cast their theories in the form of a deliberately simplified abstraction from reality, which they then turn over and examine this way and that before considering what modifications must be effected if it is to be applied to the real world. (1966b, 370)

Aside from the general criticisms he leveled at proponents of the 'scientific approach' for the extent to which their ideas were abstracted from reality, Bull was particularly concerned with the deductive reasoning central to the construction of models favoured by this approach. 'The virtue that is supposed to lie in models', he wrote, 'is that [of] liberating us from the restraint of constant reference to reality' (1966b, 370). However, as he continued:

The freedom of the model-builder from the discipline of looking at the world is what makes him dangerous; he slips easily into a dogmatism that empirical generalization does not allow, attributing to the model a connection with reality it does not have, and as often as not distorting the model itself by importing additional assumptions about the world in the guise of logical axioms. The very intellectual completeness and logical tidiness of the model-building operation lends it an air of authority which is often quite misleading as to its standing as a statement about the real world. (1966b, 371)

However, not only was Bull a philosophical realist and empiricist but, also in accordance with Anderson, a positivist. As Maurice Keens-Soper once remarked to Martin Wight regarding an argument he had had with Bull over the nature of historical facts: 'He, for goodness sake, turns out to be a positivist, at least in this matter. He maintained that historical facts were in principle no different from the 'facts' which our senses give us' (*Wight MSS* 233 6/9, 1971).

### *International Society*

Although the Marxist elements of Anderson's understanding of society did not accord well with Bull's thought, other aspects of his teachings appear in Bull's discussions of international society. International society, according to Bull, is defined in general terms as 'a group of states, conscious of common interests and common values, [who] 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 workings of common institutions'. States form an 'international society', he contended, 'because, recognizing certain common interests and perhaps some common values, they 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' (1977/1995, 13).

It is possible to identify two particularly Andersonian elements in this understanding of international society. First, although they all appear to be normative criteria for the formation of international society, the recognition of common interests and values and so on are actually positive in orientation. That is, states do not recognize that they *ought* to develop common interests and values, they recognize that they *do* have common interests and values and form institutions accordingly. What is more, Bull maintains that states 'should respect one another's claims to independence' and so on, not because it is an ideal aspiration for the future, but because these principles represent the conditions according to which international society *is* actually formed. In this, despite appearing on the surface to be presenting an explicitly normative understanding of international society, Bull actually came extremely close to presenting the sort of positivist conception that Anderson was in favour of.

Second, Bull's understanding of institutions, particularly when coupled with his view that international politics is fundamentally anarchical in nature, accords well with Anderson's discussions of social institutions. Thus, the recognition of common interests and values in Bull's definition of international society equates to the 'specific interests' of which Anderson spoke, while the manner in which states work together in common institutions and share certain rules in their dealings with one another represent two 'forms of activity' central to Anderson's understanding of institutions. In particular, the 'tension' that Stanley Hoffman notes in Bull's thought between 'his realism and his emphasis on the rules and institutions which dampen anarchy' (1990, 24) is reminiscent of Anderson's discussions of society. These things aside however, it was with his discussions of pluralism in international society that Bull veered even closer to Anderson's view.

In 'The Grotian Conception of International Society' Bull identified and distinguished between two approaches to the concept of international society, pluralism and solidarism. Recognizing the multiple conceptions of justice that operate in international relations, pluralism is 'a conception of international society founded upon the observation of the actual area of agreement between states and informed by a sense of the limitations within which this situation rules may be usefully be made rules of law' (Bull, 1966a, 71–72). In the work of João Marques de Almeida, the positivist focus of this understanding of pluralism is attributed to the influence of H.L.A. Hart, although it also accords



very well with the pluralist and positivist principles of Anderson's understanding of realism (2003, 292–293). Indeed, although it may also reflect the legal positivism of a 'minimal Hartian position', the claim that we must focus on the *actual* area of agreement between states, determined by observation, is distinctly Andersonian in sentiment. As we will see shortly, it is this approach to international society that Bull defended over the alternative he discussed, solidarism.

Contrary to pluralism, solidarism posits that international society is 'a society formed by states and sovereigns' whose position 'is secondary to that of the universal community of mankind'. The central assumption of solidarism is 'that of the solidarity, or potential solidarity, of most states in the world in upholding the collective will of the society of states against challenges to it' (Bull, 1966a, 68). It consequently stands in direct opposition to the pluralist view that states 'are capable of agreeing only for certain minimal purposes which fall short of the enforcement of the law' (Bull, 1995, 230). What is more, by entertaining pretensions to the 'potential solidarity' of states, solidarism moves away from the positivist orientation of pluralism towards a more normatively oriented focus.

It is in Bull's criticisms of the solidarist position and defence of pluralism that his proximity to Anderson's teachings on positivism, pluralism and empiricism are particularly apparent. Bull was critical of solidarism for two main reasons. The first was the claim that solidarism has exerted 'an influence positively detrimental to international order...by imposing upon international society a strain that it cannot bear'. This 'strain' has resulted from the imposition of what is actually a false sense of solidarity of interests that, far from strengthening international society 'has the effect of undermining those structures of the system which might otherwise be secure' (Bull, 1966a, 70). Here Bull seems to be echoing Anderson's arguments against the supposed solidarity of human societies.<sup>9</sup> However, the echo becomes much louder indeed when Bull launches his further attack on solidarism's notion of the common good in international ethics.

### *Ethics*

Bull's second complaint with the solidarist approach to international society was derived from his well-documented moral scepticism. As O'Neill and Schwartz (1987, 2–3) write, Bull's 'scepticism had been nurtured by...a renowned sceptic and iconoclast', John Anderson. Referring to the moral pluralism that coloured his view of international society, Stanley Hoffman has also noted that Bull was 'painfully aware of the multiplicity of moral perspectives' (1990, 21) and, as a result, viewed with immense scepticism the assertion that any form of common morality, implied by the central concepts of



the solidarist approach, can be identified in international relations. This scepticism is particularly displayed in his critique of E.B.F. Midgley's *The Natural Law Tradition and the Theory of International Relations*, which he described as 'dauntingly massive and impressively learned, if [an] avowedly dogmatic and profoundly reactionary attempt to rehabilitate the Thomist philosophy of natural law' (1979a, 171). Revealing his outward discomfort with the avowedly Christian elements of Midgley's work, Bull particularly criticized his 'reliance on Christian revelation, his statement that the fundamental principles of his work are confirmed by the authority of the Church and his view that natural law cannot effectively be upheld today except by theists' (1979a, 181). However, Bull's most substantial criticism of Midgley's work centered around his presentation of 'moral issues in terms of "antinomies and paradoxes"' (1979a, 179). In particular, he argued, in accordance with Anderson and contrary to Midgley that moral questions can only be answered 'by reference to moral rules whose validity we assume'; that is, according to empirically verifiable argument (1979a, 180). These views on religion, morality and natural law certainly put him at odds with his fellow members of the 'English School', in particular, Martin Wight.

Similarly, Bull's critical approach to notions of common morality was also displayed in his review article of Michael Walzer's *Just and Unjust Wars* (1977). In particular, Bull argued that, at heart, Walzer's work rested on the implicit assumption that his readers 'share[d] a common morality with him'. This, Bull argued, led Walzer to assume that he did not need to 'defend his basic moral principles' but that he could simply assert them (1979b, 591). However, as Bull pointed out later in the article, this was not the case for most of Walzer's arguments were, in his view, 'vulnerable' to attack from a variety of other positions (1979b, 597). Thus, while Bull praised Walzer's 'dismissal of relativist arguments' he also criticized his apparent 'subjectivity' (1979b, 596). For example, Bull maintained that Walzer's 'basic proposition that — as against General Sherman's doctrine that "war is hell" — the distinction between just and unjust war is of cardinal importance, would be disputed by absolute pacifists [sic], with whose position he makes no attempt to come to grips' (1979b, 597). The assumptions implicit in Walzer's argument did not amount simply to the endorsement of a notion of common morality in Bull's view, but represented the further claim that Western liberal values about the morality of war and the rights and duties of individual human beings are held universally. With Anderson, Bull disputed these very premises.

Despite Anderson's influence and the effort with which Bull criticized the solidarist approach in *The Anarchical Society* and 'The Grotian Conception of International Society', a distinct shift towards this position can be discerned in his later works. Nicholas Wheeler and Tim Dunne (1996) attempt to reconcile this move by characterizing Bull as harbouring a 'pluralism of the intellect and





solidarism of the will'. In particular, they argue that 'later Bull came to express increasing disillusionment with pluralism on the grounds that it could not provide for order among states and hence order among the wider society of humankind' (1996, 96). Evidence of this growing disillusionment first began to appear in the early 1980s and, in particular, the Hagey Lectures of 1983. Here, despite his previous arguments against the solidarist approach, Bull discussed the notion of a 'growing cosmopolitan awareness' in international relations (Bull in Wheeler and Dunne, 1996, 99). Furthermore, he also began to discuss the 'concept of a world common good' and argued that 'in the absence of a supranational world authority' the need existed 'for particular states to seek as wide a consensus as possible, and on this basis to act as local agents of a world common good'. However, reining himself back in, Bull did concede that 'states are notoriously self-serving in their policies, and rightly suspected when they purport to act on behalf of the international community as a whole' (1984, 14). Similarly, the posthumously published chapter 'The Importance of Grotius in the Study of International Relations' (1990) also includes hints that Bull was no longer as hostile towards the solidarist approach than he had been earlier in his career. However, it is difficult to determine what these apparent shifts in Bull's thinking mean, in large part because he passed away before having the opportunity to account for them in more detail.

## Conclusion

Despite the paucity of works that consider the influence of John Anderson on his student of international relations, Hedley Bull, the explication of Anderson's central ideas certainly takes us some way towards understanding many aspects of Bull's thought, particularly those that diverged most sharply from his more commonly acknowledged mentor, Martin Wight. Although similarities in Bull and Anderson's characters may be nothing more than a coincidence, it would be less plausible to suggest that Bull's emphasis on criticism as the basis of academic scholarship was not derived from a teacher who advocated this view so forcefully. Indeed, the centrality of the Socratic style to Bull's approach to both teaching and research, along with his penchant for somewhat brutal acts of demolition, render him an Andersonian of the highest order.

More significantly however, evident in both the teachings of Anderson and the works of Bull, is an inherent tension between conflict as a permanent feature of human society, and the mechanisms societies employ to mitigate its effects. In particular, both writers' discussions of social institutions constitute uneasy attempts to reconcile the apparently contradictory facts of human



conflict and cooperation. Indeed, this tension apparent in Bull's works has been the subject of significant debate in contemporary international relations scholarship. Scholars have long debated the real extent of Bull's supposed 'realism', some seeking to reconcile his understanding of realism with his views on international society, whilst others have argued that he can more accurately be characterized as a rationalist, albeit an unselfconscious one. However, two aspects of Anderson's thought help to elucidate Bull's position. The first is derived from the empiricism of philosophical realism and is simply the view that what ever can be observed is as real as anything else that can be observed. Thus, the facts of conflict and cooperation in international relations are as real as each other. This would seem to suggest that there is no real need to reconcile these two contradictory observations. However, the second aspect of Anderson's thought that is of use here follows from the first and, adding the Heraclitean principles discussed above, maintains that institutions and cooperative social movements must be viewed in terms of the conflict they are designed to mitigate. Critically, such institutions are not normatively oriented but positively constructed to reflect actual, as opposed to desired, areas of agreement.

However, although Bull shared with Anderson a sceptical view of solidarism, religion and notions of common morality, he also deviated significantly from Anderson in this area. Indeed, for Bull, ethics remained central to the study of international relations, and became increasingly so as his career progressed. Perhaps this can be interpreted as a move away from Anderson as Bull's proximity to the influence of his teaching subsided, or perhaps it simply represents one of those shifts that active minds make over time. Either way, what is clear is that in many of his most forcefully defended ideas on religion and society, and in his critical style, Hedley Bull was of the same mould as his earliest mentor, the Socratic controversialist, John Anderson.

## Notes

- 1 I thank Ian Hall for providing substantial comments on several earlier drafts of this article.
- 2 The existence and membership of what is known as the 'English School' of international relations is a somewhat contentious issue in contemporary scholarship. For contending views on who ought to be considered a member of the 'school' and whether or not it ought to be considered a school at all see Dunne (1998, 2001), Suganami (2000, 2001b, 2003) and Hall (2001). On this matter I am inclined to agree with Suganami's argument that 'it would be better to do away with the notion of the school altogether in this connection — because, however unintentionally, it tends to give the impression that a clear boundary could, or should, be found between those who are in and those who are out' (2001a, 100).
- 3 Among those who do mention Anderson's influence on Bull are Miller (1990, 2–3), Richardson (1990, 175–177), and O'Neill and Schwartz (1987, 2–3).
- 4 For more comprehensive biographical treatments of Anderson see Armstrong (2001), Baker (1986), Franklin (2003), Grave (1984), Passmore (1997), Quinton (1986) and Weblin (2001).



- 5 In a report of his 1941 address to the Freethought Society titled, 'Christianity, Faith and Credulity', Anderson is described as the 'local Socrates'.
- 6 The first person to hold that Challis Chair, Francis Anderson, had been Caird's assistant in Glasgow and, although not as fervent an exponent of idealist philosophy as Caird, was an idealist nonetheless.
- 7 As the founder of the Freethought Society at the University of Sydney, the notion of freethought was central to Anderson's approach.
- 8 For a more detailed consideration of Wight's religious views see Chapter 2, Ian Hall (2006).
- 9 Suganami also notes the possible influence of Manning on Bull's pluralism and critique of solidarism (2001a, 95)

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