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# Anarchy and International Relations theory: A reconsideration

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## Abstract

In this introduction to the Special Issue, we undertake a little ground clearing in order to make room in International Relations for thinking differently about anarchy and world politics. Anarchy's roots in, and association with, social contract theory and the state of nature has unduly narrowed how we might understand the concept and its potential in International Relations. Indeed, such is the consensus in this regard that anarchy is remarkably uncontested, considering its centrality to the field. Looking around, both inside and outside International Relations, for alternative accounts, we find ample materials for helping us think anew about the nature of and possibilities for politics in anarchy. In the second part of the introduction, we show how our contributors develop and expand on these resources and what we hope the Special Issue brings to International Relations.

## Keywords

Anarchy, history of International Relations theory, International Relations theory, Waltz

## Introduction

What is anarchy? Despite its centrality to the self-image of the discipline of International Relations (IR), few have critically enquired into the essence of this concept. Most still deploy textbook definitions, namely, that anarchy is the absence of rulers, of a centralised authority

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or a system of self-help. This basic understanding of anarchy is largely uncontested. However, by contrast, the study of the purported causal effects of anarchy, rather than the meaning of the concept itself, has arguably shaped the evolution of the discipline over the last 50 years at least. Debates between classical and neo-realists (Waltz, 1979), and between neo-realists and neo-liberals (Powell, 1994), revolved around understanding ‘order without an orderer and organizational effects where formal organisation is lacking’ (Waltz, 1979: 89).

The rejection of the terms of these two debates, including a rejection of anarchy, was central to the evolution of normative and critical IR theory (Beitz, 1979; Linklater, 1998). Anarchy was synonymous with statism, with the absence of morality, and what Jo Freeman (1972) called, in a different context, ‘the tyranny of structurelessness’ where hierarchies and domination proliferated in the absence of formal institutions. Elsewhere, the analytical virtue of anarchy was itself questioned, such that to focus on anarchy was itself a problematic collusion with the gendered and Eurocentric legacies of modernity (Hobson, 2014; Sjöberg, 2012). Barry Buzan and Richard Little (2001) argued that IR’s failure to speak beyond the confines of our own academic and intellectual silos was primarily a function of the discipline’s ‘anarchophilia’. IR has had little influence, they argued, because our core concept has had such little traction outside the neo-neo debates that have shaped so much of the discipline but little else.

Yet despite this extensive debate, few have taken the time to interrogate the concept’s plural meanings, to see what the consequences might be if anarchy itself were defined differently (exceptions include Alker, 1996; Prichard, 2016). This paucity of critical conceptual analysis is surely a function of how uncontested the meaning of this concept has been, despite its centrality to the field (cf. Gallie, 1955). Indeed, Jack Donnelly (2015) has argued that we are probably best served by abandoning the concept altogether. With the exception of Lechner (2017), Donnelly’s position has yet to generate much response, which is itself quite telling.

But to accept Donnelly’s position would be to signal a rather anti-climactic end to what was once a central debate in the field and to cede the definition of anarchy to the mainstream of the discipline too. This Special Issue puffs at the glowing embers of this debate. Our aim is to take stock of, examine and reconsider the concept of anarchy and its place in the study and practice of IR. We contest mainstream conceptualisations of anarchy by drawing on original research in political philosophy, medieval history, pluralist theory, history of political thought and, of course, IR theory. The aim is to investigate how differing conceptions of anarchy can advance the study of world politics. Our conclusion is that there are a range of ways in which anarchy can be defined, deployed and perhaps even appropriated by IR theorists and that ‘the anarchy problématique’ (Ashley, 1988) has plenty of life in it yet.

In this introductory article, we map out how anarchy has been used in twentieth-century IR, to make space for the important and original articles collected in this issue, which we then survey. We explore some possible avenues for future research in the conclusion.

## Mapping anarchy

Anarchy has become a toxic concept in IR theory, routinely associated with conservative and retrograde politics. For the last 100 years, from Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson (1916)

to Jack Donnelly (2015), the absence of a central authority in world politics has been viewed as pathological, and appeals to the pressures of self-help in anarchy have been seen as an ideological skein to camouflage the otherwise naked egoism of the powerful.

But there is little consensus on what anarchy is. As Jack Donnelly (2015) has pointed out, 'IR uses "anarchy" in multiple, shifting senses' (2015: 394) and that it is indeed 'regularly and systematically used in shifting (and substantively biased) senses' (2015: 413). Donnelly (2015) is also right that the "'naturalization" of anarchy – its unthinking acceptance as an obvious and essential feature of international relations' (2015: 411) is hugely problematic. Similarly, there is little agreement on whether anarchy necessitates self-help or balancing, whether it is a transhistorical fact of life among armed groups or what precisely is meant by the term itself. This 'confusion at the conceptual core of the discipline' has been 'blithely ignore[d]' (Donnelly, 2015: 411). Given this, and that anarchy is a very recent, and now redundant addition to the discipline's lexicon, and we would be better off using the more generic term 'disorder' (Donnelly, 2015: 20).

To abandon anarchy for disorder would be to close this debate down somewhat prematurely. To see only confusion and bias would also be to overlook the substantive consensus that underpins much theorisation of anarchy in IR and foreclose on the attempt to re-theorise it. The discipline's use of the term 'anarchy' remains wedded primarily to the social contract tradition of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and mid-twentieth-century micro-economic theories of the marketplace (Prichard, 2016). On the first account, anarchy is an *a priori*, pre-social condition of lawlessness from which political community evolves. On the latter, anarchy is the product of a set of assumptions about the utility maximising proclivities of individuals in a condition of material scarcity. In both, it is pathological but productive because of this.

This dual framing is deeply problematic for two reasons. First, the social contract tradition is not a description of the world, but a moral argument for how it ought to be institutionalised (Jahn, 2000). Similarly, *homo economicus* is an assumption at the heart of modelling behaviours, not a description of the world itself. Furthermore, the latter is designed to overcome the normative implications of the former through appeals to science and objectivity, but in so doing, micro-economic modelling compounds this problem. Identifying anarchy with the lawless pursuit of rational self-interest, and modelling social interactions therein, relies on a parochial western artefact of the state of nature, the underpinning of the very social contract tradition that this nominally positivist social theory disavows.

When we examine the ways in which this simple summary works out in the writings of specific individuals, we see that most are using the word to refer to different types of things entirely. Hedley Bull (1977) understood international anarchy to be a deeply social construct, replete with enduring legal and political norms that structured state interaction. Following H.L.A. Hart, for Bull, the presence or absence of a state was not central to understanding the function of rules and norms, hence the persistence of the imperial commonwealth. Rather, the prior rules and norms themselves are what help us understand the social form in which we find them. Taking this starting point, Bull rejected the 'domestic analogy' which framed the solution to the problems of global order in terms of the resolution of the state of nature by a powerful central power, even if he accepted the necessity of sovereignty in relation to particular communities.

Following Burke and finding value in the anarchical society stands in stark contrast to the Rousseauian tradition in IR, that is, scholars who like Rousseau saw the establishment of the republican state as the compromised fulfilment of our political natures. This move from anarchy of the Old Regime to law, or from slavery to freedom, as the primary normative transformation of modernity, but it remains unfulfilled for as long as the displaced anarchy 'out there' threatens the normative order within. We see corresponding accounts in liberal institutionalism (Ikenberry, 2009) or thicker cosmopolitan post-statism (Held, 1995) or Marxist accounts of parochial nature of capitalist modernity (Rosenberg, 1994): anarchy between states was the lawless domain of egoism and self-interest, and progress was defined by how far we move from it in philosophical-historical time.

For Jim George (1995), the egoism/anarchy thematic so common to critical and conservative framings of the field was a discursive trope constitutive of modernity. Writers who followed this line of thinking dismissed the idea that anarchy referred to anything tangibly 'out there' at all. For R.B.J. Walker (1993), our disciplinary constructions of anarchy were themselves more compelling objects of study, precisely for what they can tell us about our modern condition. Anarchy is an inescapably normative concept, one which implies much about what we think we understand about politics. It is not a thing that can be studied objectively because it is itself, as a central concept, part of the discursive framing for who we are as modern subjects. Evoking anarchy is a uniquely particular, even parochial way of representing political life.

Even historical accounts of the emergence of the state show how we routinely replicate this mistake of universalising the parochialism of modernity. The 'myth of 1648' (Teschke, 2003) is that sovereign states emerged out of the treaties of Westphalia or that modernity was a quintessentially European invention (De Carvalho et al., 2011). But the implication of a medieval or non-European state of nature transcended by the modern nation state looms large in our understanding of philosophical time.

While IR's understanding of international anarchy has not gained much traction outside the field, anarchy and its synonyms is used more frequently to conceptualise social processes in decidedly non-pejorative ways. Usually, however, synonyms such as self-organisation, self-management, horizontalism and others are used. In cybernetic theory and management studies (Swann and Stoborod, 2014; Wachhaus, 2012), speculative realism (Bryant, 2013; Harman, 2013), political theory (Rancière, 2006), neo-pluralist theory (Hirst, 1997), economics (Leeson, 2014; Ostrom, 1990), chaos and complexity theory (Chesters and Welsh, 2005) and elsewhere, theorising order without an orderer is increasingly common. These literatures, some of which are discussed in the articles that follow, have yet to be fully explored by IR scholars wishing to expand their conceptual horizons.

One of the exceptions is Keohane and Ostrom's (1995) joint project, which sought to assess what could be learnt from the distinctions between self-organising systems at community and international level of social life, assessing how collective action problems (free riding, etc.) can be overcome without a central organising institution. Keohane and Ostrom (1995) replicate the standard IR distinction between internal and external dynamics, and the levels of analysis problem, assuming there to be qualitatively distinct dynamics at play in the upper echelons and in non-state societies, for example, much of Nepal (1995: 11). Problematic as these prior assumptions are, their conclusions are that neither the scale of the horizontal relationships nor the heterogeneity of the

actors necessarily precludes order emerging between them, indeed radical plurality may facilitate emergent modes of cooperation that precludes the necessity of formal state-like institutions (Keohane and Ostrom, 1995: 23).

Much more work is needed to expand the conceptual and political repertoire of work like this, and our hope is that the papers that follow facilitate this. In order to do this, we probably ought to stop viewing anarchy in terms of the state of nature, something from which modern politics will deliver us, and start to understand it as an empirical feature of world politics. To do this, we will need to rethink the normative baggage associated with the concept. While it is widely accepted in IR that, for better or worse, international anarchy is highly ordered and remarkably stable despite the absence of a central command structure, anarchy does not preclude cooperation, law, ethics and so on either. The fact that this is an anomaly for IR at all is somewhat surprising from the perspective of the history of ideas. As Heyward Alker (1996) pointed out, anarchists have been making this argument for nearly two centuries (1996: 362, 371) and that none have ventured here is an indication of the sedimentation of a narrow set of shared ideas of what anarchy might be.

Contemporary anarchist political philosophy has re-emerged in a range of disciplines, in organisation studies (Wachhaus, 2012), to law (Allain, 2014; Chartier, 2012; Halling, 2009) and political economy (Wigger, 2016; Wigger and Buch-Hansen, 2013). In political theory, post-Marxists such as Jacques Rancière (2006) are deploying the concept to understand the ontological equality between political subjects and the technocratic institutions that undermine that. The anthropologists David Graeber (2004, 2011) and James C. Scott (2009, 2012), pioneers in anarchist methods and insights, are making inroads into IR and Political Science (Krasner, 2011). And then of course, there is the work of Noam Chomsky, who has been conducting foreign policy analysis with an anarchist intent since he was a young teen dissecting the partisan politics of non-intervention during the Spanish Civil War (Herring and Robinson, 2003; Osborn, 2009). In short, there has been an explosion of interest in anarchism, too broad to summarise here (for a good bibliographic resource, see Kinna, 2012), but which runs deeper in left-wing social movements than it does in the academy.

Linking this set of writings with IR's conception of anarchy is a difficult work in progress. Notable is a forum on 'Anarchism and World Politics' in *Millennium* in 2010, and important contributions subsequently by Cudworth and Hobden (2011), Newman (2012), Kazmi (2012) and Prichard (2013). But the earliest invocations of the anarchist approach to IR include some of the best-known names in the field: Thomas Weiss (1975), Richard Falk (1978, 2010) and Ken Booth (1991) have all set out the merits of the political philosophy of anarchism for thinking about world order, though both Weiss and Booth have subsequently become advocates of a world state, abandoning their youthful enthusiasm.

Part of the reason for the enduring pull of statism in IR is surely the legacy of the 'Hobbesian' world view, that global insecurity demands some form of centralised power (cf. Christov, 2017). The empirical basis for the argument that Hobbes held this view, or that it is historically or contemporaneously self-evident that such an order needs to exist, is widely rejected, not only by those surveyed thus far but also increasingly by realists. Writing about James C. Scott's *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland South East Asia*, Steven Krasner (2011) stated the following: '*The Art of Not Being Governed* changed how I have thought about [this...] and much else in political

life, something that I can say about only very few books that I have read. James C. Scott is the un-Hobbes' (2011: 79). What Krasner (2011) takes from Scott is that

The whole idea of the social contract is based upon the false premise that there was an incentive to move from statelessness to the state [...] Life was nasty and brutish, and probably shorter, within the state than outside it. Hobbes was wrong. (2011: 82)

Yet Krasner remains convinced that the brightest future for human life remains within states rather than without them, harking back to Tocqueville and Locke for support. This is quite telling.

In short, then, the problem of anarchy cannot be divorced from how we understand the problem of epistemology, ontology, politics and conceptions of the good. The relative merits of internal hierarchy and external anarchy rest on definitions of both but also how these relate to these four features of political analysis. Similarly, IR scholars have been too quick to isolate the international as the *sui generis* domain of anarchy. Finally, and related to this, plural anarchical societies are remarkably well ordered, and cooperation in anarchy persists across plural scales, despite the heterogeneity of actors and competing visions of the good. Contributions to this Special Issue push at these three broad themes: anarchy/hierarchy, anarchy as structure and anarchy and plurality. The contributors are not all anarchists. In fact, there is a good degree of plurality of views articulated here. However, each contributor finds specific articulations of anarchy to be unsatisfactory in important ways.

## Insights from the Special Issue

Perhaps unsurprisingly, this three-part distinction between anarchy/hierarchy, anarchy as structure and the problem of plurality corresponds with Waltz's (1979) well-known formulation. First, Waltz produced a conceptual binary of anarchy outside, and hierarchy within states, that has shaped much scholarly debate in IR theory. Second, his insistence that anarchy is a structure that shapes the behaviour of states and determines how they act and interact was also a key feature of his theory of order in world politics. Third, Waltz's insisted that because of the nature of anarchy as a self-help system, all of the units are compelled to become and act in the same way: the emergence of states is inevitable and so is the security dilemma. The latter is the unique domain of the professional study of IR. This question of functional plurality is subsumed within the prior two elements. We have to assume that the only units of analytical virtue for the study of world politics are states, such that the anarchy/hierarchy and anarchy-as-structure sets of logics gain their meaning. But in exploring the question of plurality afresh, as most contributors do in different ways, the problems of inside/outside and political structure are radically problematised too.

## Contesting the hierarchy/anarchy binary

Since Waltz hierarchy and anarchy have been treated in a binary relationship. In *Theory of International Relations*, Waltz (1979) argues that every type of political order can be considered as either a hierarchy or anarchy (1979: chapter 6). This binary categorisation of

political orders was then linked with sovereignty to argue that domestic political orders are hierarchical, whereas the international political order is anarchic. Since formulating IR in this way, the binary inside/outside hierarchy/anarchy understanding of IR has been criticised on multiple fronts. Early post-structural theorists, drawing on Derrida and other currents of French theory, critiqued the reductive ontological assumptions that informed Waltz's binary (Ashley, 1988; Havercroft, 2011; Walker, 1993). More recent scholarship has sought to reject Waltzian anarchy by insisting that the international system is fundamentally hierarchical (Mattern and Zarakol, 2016). While engaging with both of these literatures, some of the contributors to this volume propose to rethink the anarchy/hierarchy binary to propose alternative ways of thinking about the international system.

Peter Haldén's 'Heteronymous politics beyond anarchy and hierarchy: The multiplication of forms of rule 750–1300' argues that hierarchy/anarchy cannot describe nor explain political life for most of Western history. IR scholars have interpreted medieval politics alternatively as taking place in an 'anarchy' or as being characterised by a hierarchy with the Emperor and the Pope at the apex. Haldén argues that neither concept describes the structure of European politics well. Rather, given the sheer plurality of forms of rule at this time, and the persistence of many different principles of differentiation that existed simultaneously, anarchy was structured into the medieval system. The situation was closer to anarchy as understood as the absence of overarching principles of order, rather than as 'anarchy' in the IR sense of absence of ruler. Yet, by studying a long period, c. 700–c. 1300, Haldén demonstrates that Europe became more heteronymous as time went by, not less, challenging the thesis that the emergence of states was inevitable.

In a more contemporary vein, Athina Karatzogianni and Andrew Robinson critically engage with Mattern and Zarakol (2016) on international hierarchy in order to rethink securitisation discourse as a form of micro-fascism. They investigate the role of 'anarchy' in state securitisation, in order to discuss the struggle to impose hierarchy as a productive political structure (Mattern and Zarakol, 2016: 623). By explaining state hierarchies' struggle with active and reactive anarchic networks, they theorise a state in existential crisis, which exploits anti-anarchist discourses to respond to network threats. They then explore how the use of fear of anarchy is productive of structures of securitisation. As an 'antiproduction assemblage', the state treats logics stemming from the 'social principle' as a repressed real, the exclusion of which underpins its own functioning. The securitisation discourse of 'new threats' is a statist response to the uncertainty and fear brought on by the proliferation of opposing network forms of organisation, a new form of pluralisation against which the state routinely reacts. This response is a statist form of terror attempting to fix network flows in place. The scarcity and fear resulting from state terror ensures responses to this structural violence by reactive networks, while paradoxically also exacerbating reactive tendencies within social movements, creating a spiral of terror, and the very situation of global civil war which Hobbesian/Realist IR theory – reliant on the schema of states struggling for power in an anarchic international system – attempts to ward off.

What Haldén and Karatzogianni and Robinson show us, then, is that political language is constitutive and causal, shaping contemporary political practices through reference to a mythic past or the spectre of a Hobbesian present. A third contributor to this volume problematises this tendency of IR scholars to invoke Hobbes as the founding

theorist of international anarchy. Theo Christov, in his article 'The Invention of Hobbesian Anarchy' argues that the divide between the disciplines of political theory and IR has produced a false image of how Hobbes conceived international anarchy. Most IR scholars take Hobbes' (1996) famous description of the state of war in *Leviathan* as 'solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short' (1996: 89) as analogous to Waltzian accounts of the international system. Christov challenges this linking of Hobbes to contemporary accounts of international anarchy on two grounds. First, he argues that the discourse of international anarchy that equates Hobbes' state of nature with the international realm is a result of scholarship since the early twentieth century, rather than a claim that Hobbes made himself (cf. Havercroft, 2012). Second, Christov reconstructs Hobbes' account of international politics to argue that Hobbes actually admonished the militarism of states and argued that because states were not analogous to individuals, relations between states would not be as violent and disorderly as relations between individuals in a state of nature. What this means is that Hobbes is a surprising source for theorising a form of international anarchy in which warfare is not structurally predetermined, and for theorising ways of escaping the anarchy problematique without resorting to a global leviathan, themes picked up by anarchists, ironically enough.

All three of these pieces propose alternative ways of conceiving the international realm that are neither strictly hierarchy nor anarchy. Christov offers the provocative claim that the theorist of anarchy par excellence – Thomas Hobbes – actually argued that relations between states were fundamentally different from Hobbes' hypothetical war of all against all that exists in the state of nature. Karatzogianni and Robinson also reject the image of Waltzian anarchy and instead argue that a turn the Deleuzian concept of the assemblage offers a more productive way of thinking about state formation and behaviour in the era of new threats such as cyberwarfare and transnational terrorist movements. Finally, Haldén, through his reading of medieval European politics, proposes heteronomy as a third way of conceptualising the international system of this era. All three papers, through their agonistic readings Waltzian anarchy, offer productive alternative ways of conceiving the international that are neither anarchy nor hierarchy but which take plurality as primary. Future scholars can draw on these concepts to enrich their analyses of the international.

### *Anarchy as structure*

Waltz felt that his major contribution in *Theory of International Relations* was to shift the analysis of international politics away from a focus on the behaviour of states towards a structural theory of the international system. For Waltz (1986), '[t]he structure of a system acts as a constraining and disposing force, and because it does so systems theories explain and predict continuity within a system' (1986: 57). For Waltz (1986), the structure of the international system is anarchy, which he defines as 'relations of coordination among a systems units, and that implies their sameness' (1986: 87). While Waltz proceeds to argue that the structure of anarchy compels states to pursue a self-help strategy, three contributors to this volume propose to rethink what anarchy as structure entails.

First, Lucian Ashworth finds an alternative understanding of anarchy in a surprising location: the theoretical writings of David Mitrany, a key intellectual architect of the

post-war European order. Although David Mitrany's international thought is not usually associated with the concept of the international anarchy, Ashworth argues that Mitrany's analysis actually compares two forms of anarchical order. The first form is the order associated with the relations between states, while the second is his functional alternative to this order. The functional approach, comprising the constitutive functional plurality of politics, is anarchical in the sense that it remains an order without an orderer. In first analysing the dynamics and failings of the inter-state order, and then suggesting pragmatic process-orientated solutions to those failings, Ashworth argue that Mitrany follows a similar approach to his classical realist contemporaries. Again, here, the functional plurality of world order generates similar yet contrasting insights about the possibility of an equation between anarchy and an alternative politics.

In her article 'The Invisible Structures of Anarchy: Gender, Orders, and Global Politics', Laura Sjoberg critiques Waltz's theory of anarchy for its blindness to its own invisible structures. Because of our tendency to follow this narrow reading, Sjoberg argues that anarchy is undertheorised in IR and that the undertheorisation of the concept of anarchy in IR is rooted in the idea that the lack of exogenous authority is not just *a* feature of the international political system but *the* salient feature. Sjoberg recognises that the international system is anarchical but looks to theorise its contours – to see the invisible structures that are overlaid within international anarchy and then to consider what those structures mean for theorising anarchy itself. She uses, as an example, the plural (invisible) ways that gender orders global political relations, to suggest that anarchy in the international arena is a place of multiple anarchic *orders* rather than of disorder, including the way gender *orders* global politics in various ways.

Silviya Lechner, in her article 'Why Anarchy Still Matters for International Relations: On Theories and Things' critiques recent anarchy rejectionists, such as Jack Donnelly (2015), by exploring how anarchy is theorised in the structuralist accounts of Waltz and Bull. She contends that Donnelly's critique of anarchy targets not just concepts of anarchy but theories of anarchy and thereby expresses an anti-theory ethos tacitly accepted in the discipline. As a form of conceptual atomism, this ethos is hostile to structuralist and normative theories. Lechner calls for reinstating theoretical holism against conceptual atomism and defending the enduring relevance of theories of international anarchy for IR.

She does this by revisiting two classic structuralist accounts of international anarchy articulated in Kenneth Waltz's *Theory of International Politics* (scientific structuralism) and Hedley Bull's *Anarchical Society* (normative structuralism). Both represent coherent theoretical 'wholes', which reveal a more complex relationship between anarchy and hierarchy than supposed by critics and which recognise the important connection between the structure of international anarchy (whose key players are states) and the possibility of collective freedom, an aspect Donnelly's account cannot see.

The crucial difference between the three scholars in this section and the scholars in section 'Contesting the hierarchy/anarchy binary' is that Ashworth, Sjoberg and Lechner all want to keep the Waltzian anarchy problematique central to IR analysis but modify it slightly. So, in the case of Ashworth, we find an interesting reading of Mitrany that presents functionalism as an anarchistic resolution to the anarchy problematique. Sjoberg also retains the centrality of anarchy but argues that by including a gendered analysis of

Waltzian anarchy, scholars can see the ways in which an international system is deeply ordered along patriarchal lines. Finally, Lechner wants to preserve Waltzian anarchy for normative reasons. Namely, that an international system structured on anarchy actually preserves freedom in the international system, especially during an era when transnational processes and institutions increasingly try to govern state behaviour without the consent of the citizenry of those states. What these three papers offer, then, is an invitation to revisit some of the hidden virtues of Waltzian anarchy, that many more critically oriented IR scholars have been too quick to dismiss in the years since *Theory of International Politics* was published.

### *Pluralist anarchy*

While the first two thematics in this Special Issue grapple with conventional accounts of anarchy within IR scholarship, and deal with plurality only tangentially, the final two pieces make the explicit case for rethinking anarchy on pluralist terms. A crucial feature of Waltzian anarchy is the way ‘sameness’ of the units in the structure is coordinated on the basis of self-organisation (Waltz, 1986: 87). The final two pieces in this issue consider what happens to anarchy when we keep the idea of an order without an orderer, but acknowledge that more than one kind of unit can be part of this system, and ask what this pluralism implies for ordering.

In ‘Bringing groups back in: Collective intentionality, complex pluralism and the problem of anarchy’, Alex Prichard argues that in order to rethink order on pluralist lines in world politics, we must first abandon the tendency to personify the state. By developing and applying a realist theory of collective intentionality to all social groups, a picture of social pluralism emerges that poses problems for our standard theory of anarchy. For Waltz, anarchy is an analytical category, rather than a reflection of reality per se, which he contrasts with hierarchy. In positing the ontological reality of the constitutive plurality of social life, and political orders contingent ‘constellations’, anarchy can be understood as ontologically, conceptually and analytically prior to all social order. What of all the other collectively intentional groups in modern political life? Lost in this debate is the constitutive role of all social groups in any political ontology. This pluralisation also has significant effects on our ability to posit an isolated international domain, but it creates room for thinking about anarchy as central to politics as such.

In a similar vein, Cerny and Prichard use advances in globalisation theory to articulate the contours of a ‘new anarchy’ in world politics. Turning to the plural and intersecting processes that structure and dissolve the global economy, Cerny and Prichard show how modern IR theory has consistently underestimated the depth of the problem of anarchy in world politics. Contemporary theories of globalisation bring this into bold relief. From this perspective, the complexity of transboundary networks and hierarchies, economic sectors, ethnic and religious ties, civil and cross-border wars and internally disaggregated and transnationally connected state actors leads to a complex and multidimensional restructuring of the global, the local and the uneven connections in between. If we accept that states are becoming disaggregated and hollowed out, and that multiple group actors are emerging in importance in global politics, the global order is becoming radically more anarchic, understood as both disordered and lacking fewer legitimate and

final points of authority. As Keohane and Ostrom have argued (above), there is no *prima facie* reason to assume the latter.

These last two papers represent a third path forward. Rather than developing alternative conceptions to anarchy (section 'Contesting the hierarchy/anarchy binary') or recovering the hidden virtues of anarchy (section 'Anarchy as structure'), Prichard and Cerny and Prichard examine what happens when we include different types of units in the international system but accept the Waltzian premise that the system is self-organising. The result from this third approach is an invitation to reimagine international anarchy as plurality rather than disorder. In this perspective, Waltz's understanding of international anarchy as a self-help system gives way to a more democratic conceptualisation of an ordered international system that lacks a central orderer. This conceptualisation, then, creates a space for anarchist, pluralist and republican understandings of the international system as self-organised and collaborative, rather than the classical realist formulation as disorganised and inherently hostile.

## **Conclusion**

As our review of the conceptualisation of anarchy in much IR theory has shown, scholars have in the main used two strategies to handle anarchy. They have accepted the Waltzian conception of anarchy as a self-help system, or they have altogether rejected the salience of anarchy for thinking through the nature of global politics. The curious consequence of these two mutually reinforcing strategies is that the nature of anarchy ends up being untheorised. Our goal in this issue is focus on the question of what anarchy is and might be, so as to open up a broader conversation about the international system, or world politics, that takes the idea of an order without an orderer seriously and without rehearsing the realist assumption that such a conception of anarchy necessarily leads to an inevitably tragic conception of international politics.

The contributors to this volume help us see anarchy differently and thereby draw our attention to alternative conceptions of self-order – be it Deleuzian assemblages or medieval heteronomy. They draw our attention to alternative readings of anarchy in significant international political theorists such as Thomas Hobbes and David Mitrany. They draw our attention to the gendered and normative dimensions of anarchy. And they propose ways in which we can reimagine international anarchy as international pluralism. While there are significant tensions between the different approaches to anarchy undertaken in this issue, the one thing they all do is take anarchy seriously and, in so doing, provide IR scholars numerous avenues for investigating one of its foundational concepts.

We began this introduction by asking what anarchy is. While this volume does not offer a single uncontested definition of anarchy, by placing the analysis of anarchy at its centre, we believe that two important avenues for future research have been opened up. The first is that the definition of anarchy is actually a surprisingly undertheorised realm for IR. This is surprising since so much scholarship takes anarchy as its starting point, and so much scholarship uses Waltz and his formulation of anarchy as its foil. But by focusing so narrowly on Waltzian anarchy, the discipline has lost sight of numerous other ways of thinking about self-organising systems that do not begin or end with the same set of assumptions. Much more work could be done to explore how self-organising orders work,

how they replicate, how they might be mimicked or hybridised and how they might be deployed to respond to problems of planetary scale and plural conceptions of the good.

Second, by drawing on alternative traditions of thinking about anarchy from outside of the narrow IR canon, we can see alternative ways of conceptualising self-organising systems that can offer new insights in light of current global crises over such diverse problems as transnational terrorism, global financial crises, the untangling of the post-World War II (or at least post-Cold War) American order and ecological collapse. With processes of global centralisation and homogenisation pulling against pluralising and fragmenting tendencies, more needs to be done to theorise and evaluate the relative merits of different modes of governance, government and more anarchistic varieties of self-rule.

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