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The English School meets the Chicago School: The Case for a

Grounded Theory of International Institutions[1]

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Abstract

The concept of primary international institutions is a core idea of the English School and central to those scholars from Bull to Buzan who have sought to take it in a more sociological direction. Yet the English School has traditionally found it difficult to define and identify with consistency the institutions of international society. A group of scholars, here called the 'new institutionalists', have recently sought to address this problem by devising tighter definitions and applying them more rigorously. But different understandings and lists of institutions continue to proliferate. The source of the problem is the reliance on 'stipulative' definitions, drawn from an increasingly abstract theoretical literature. The problem is compounded by the new institutionalists' employment of social structural and other 'outsider' methods of social research. This article argues that it is only possible to empirically ground institutions, a task on which all agree, by returning to the interpretive 'insider' approach traditionally associated with the school—but employing it in a much more rigorous way. To this end it makes the case for a 'grounded theory' of international institutions inspired by Chicago School sociology.

The English School (ES) concept of primary international institutions, having lain dormant for several decades, has recently been picked up by a number of theorists (e.g. Buzan, 2004; Holsti, 2004; Navari, 2011; Schouenborg, 2011; Clark, 2011) and deemed a highly promising tool for empirical analysis and theoretical development in International Relations (IR). Primary institutions, to provide a preliminary definition, are not formal organizations such as the EU, NATO or the UN, but 'set[s] of habits and practices shaped towards the realization of common goals' (Bull, 1977: 74). They are more diffuse and fundamental than international institutions in the 'organizations', and in ES parlance, 'secondary' sense. When it is claimed (e.g. Suganami, 1983; Suganami, 2003: 253-4; Buzan, 2004: 161, 166; Dunne, 2001a: 69-80) that

1

concern for the institutional structure of inter-state relations is a defining feature of the ES, or that 'Bull … worked in conjunction with a group of theorists and practitioners, now identified as the founding fathers of the English school of international relations, who stressed the importance of the institutional foundations of state behaviour' (Little and Williams, 2006: 1), it is institutions in the primary sense to which reference is being made. According to Buzan (2005b: 190) the concept of primary institutions is the 'core idea' of the ES. In Clark's view (2011: 46) it is its 'central insight'. According to Schouenborg (2011: 27) it is its 'central concept'.

Given this it is perhaps surprising that there is little agreement within the ES about the number and identity of international society's primary institutions. Various lists have been drawn up with some containing as few as three institutions and one containing as many as 26. Initially the problem was considered to be definitional. Pioneers of the concept such as Hedley Bull put forward definitions that were vague and/or had a tendency to shift and/or were not applied with sufficient rigour. If a tighter definition could be devised, it was believed, and applied more consistently, agreement would soon ensue. On this definitional front some progress has been made. But a more fundamental problem remains. While definitions of institutions in ES writing have got tighter they remain 'stipulative', i.e. they are conjured up by the researcher with no reference to the language and understandings of the practitioner (more on this below). No end of work on the definitional problem will lead to a more satisfactory and objective list of institutions as long as definitions remain stipulative. In this article I argue, firstly, that the fundamental problem is the

failure to ground institutions empirically, and by 'grounding institutions empirically' I mean empirically determine not only their identity but how we should conceive them. Secondly, I argue that the only way this problem can be effectively combated is by constructing a grounded theory (GT) of international institutions inspired by Chicago School sociology. No amount of social structural or other 'outsider' theorising (e.g. Buzan and Albert, 2010) can provide the material needed to properly ground primary institutions (and, as we shall see, related concepts such as 'practices'). The 'insider' approach of GT provides our best, perhaps our only, hope.

The Classic English School

Agreement among members of what has been termed the 'classic' English school (Navari, 2009b: 1; Wilson, 2009: 167) on the institutions of international society was not great despite the considerable mutual influence among them. In one place (see Table 1), Wight lists the institutions of international society as diplomacy, alliances, guarantees, war and neutrality (Wight, 1978: 111). In another place they are messengers, conferences and international institutions (meaning organizations), a diplomatic language, and trade (Wight, 1977: 29-33). In a celebrated introduction to Wight's thought, Bull lists Wight's institutions as alliances, diplomacy and war (Bull in Wight, 1977: 6; see Table 2). Yet some pages later he offers a different list: international law, resident embassies, great powers, and the balance of power (Bull in Wight, 1977, 17; see also Wight, 1978: 12; Hall, 2006: 123-6). In Wight's celebrated lectures on International Theory they are listed as

3

diplomacy, alliances, the balance of power, guarantees, arbitration and war (Wight, 1991: 141).

Table 1: Institutions of International Society: Wight (see end of document)

Table 2: Institutions of International Society: Wight according to Bull (see end of document)

Wight was first and foremost a historian, not a theorist. He put thinking about the institutional structure of the society of states (and historical societies of states) on the map, but conceptual analysis was not his forte. It might be said, therefore, that it is to the more sociologically orientated Bull that we should turn for a definition and more rigorously determined list. Indeed, it is Bull to whom IR theorists sympathetic to the ES project almost invariably turn when thinking about the institutions of international society. In *The Anarchical Society* he established the benchmark institutional list—the P5, we might say, of international theory: the balance of power, international law, diplomacy, war, and the concert of Great Powers (Bull, 1977: Part II; see Table 3). In one place, however, he suggests that 'states themselves…are the principal institutions of the society of states' (Bull, 1977: 71; see also Bull, 1972: 34); and in one of his last works Bull unaccountably abandons war as one of his institutions, putting in its place international organizations (Bull, 1990: 90; see also Bull and Watson, 1984: 118).

4

Table 3: Institutions of International Society: Bull (see end of document)

The difficulties of including war as an institution of international society have been much commented upon (see e.g. Suganami, 1983: 2379; Jones, 2006: 162; Holsti, 2004: 275-99) and there is no need to discuss them here. Suffice it to say there are far-reaching ethical, legal and theoretical problems with an undifferentiated concept of war that no doubt prompted Bull to think again about his elevation of it to institutional status. Yet the lack of an explanation for his change of mind is not the main problem. The main problem is the lack of a precise and stable definition. To his initial definition, cited above, of institutions as 'set[s] of habits and practices', Bull adds for example 'a common diplomatic language' and 'shared beliefs' (see Little, 2006: 107). In one place he talks not of 'habits and practices shaped towards the realization of common goals' but, even more generally, of 'a settled pattern of behaviour' (Bull, 1977: 184). In a major work in which the notion of institutions in the primary sense receives wide iteration there is no attempt to define it at all (Bull and Watson, 1984). In fact Wight does rather better than Bull on the definitional front. He says that by 'institutions' he does not mean 'determinate organizations housed in determinate buildings such as the League of Nations in the Palais des Nations or the United Nations in the East River building', but 'recognised and established usages governing the relations between individuals or groups' such as marriage or property; or, alternatively, 'enduring, complex, integrated, organized behaviour pattern[s] through which social control is exerted and by means of which the fundamental social

5

desires or needs are met' (Wight, 1991: 140-1, quoting sociologist Morris Ginsberg). However, while this attempt to root his understanding in the sociological literature is to be welcomed there is little evidence that Wight applied it at all rigorously. We have the definitions and we have the lists but nowhere is there an attempt to systematically link the two.

The variation and uncertainty about which 'sets of habits and practices', 'recognised and established usages', or 'organized behaviour patterns' that are to count as international institutions has persisted among those directly influenced by Wight and Bull. In an admirable assessment of the prospects for international progress at the millennium, James Mayall declares that 'the framework that I have adopted describes the context of international relations in terms of a set of institutions—law, diplomacy, the balance of power etc.—and principles' (Mayall, 2000: 149-50). In the latter category ('principles') he includes sovereignty, territorial integrity, non-intervention, self-determination, non-discrimination, and respect for human rights (see Table 4). Earlier in the book, however, he implies that sovereignty is an institution, along with diplomacy and international law, with the balance of power, the special role of the Great Powers, and war occupying an ambiguous position as quasi- or contested institutions (Mayall, 2000:11-12; see also 41-2, 83, 132). Yet he also refers to the balance of power as a principle, and moreover one of 'such convenient plasticity that it could be advanced in defence of almost any conceivable policy' (Mayall, 2000: 12)—an assertion that somewhat undercuts the idea that it is one of international society's institutions.

6

Table 4: Institutions and Principles of International Society: Mayall (see end of document)

As with Wight (though less so Bull) there is, therefore, a good deal of ambivalence in Mayall on the nature and identity of international society's primary institutions. The same could be said of other notable members of the school (cf. Bull and Watson 1984: 24-5; Watson 1992: 202-13). Taken as a whole it is evident that the only institution on which classic ES thinkers agree is diplomacy. Yet even here there are complexities. For Wight diplomacy was the 'master institution' of international society (1978: 113). For Bull, however, the most fundamental institution was the balance of power (Bull, 1977: 106-7; Alderson and Hurrell, 2000: 5; Little, 2007: 128-9). Interestingly those successors of Bull and Wight who have given most attention to the role of diplomacy in international society have not made much of its institutional character. For James (1993a: 94-6, 100) diplomacy is fundamental to the existence of international society, but he has reservations about the virtue of designating it as an institution. Watson (1983) accepts the designation but does little with it, not delving into its theoretical implications. In the most detailed recent exploration of diplomacy from an ES perspective, Paul Sharp accepts Wight's view of its master institutional status but also suggests (echoing James) that in a very specific sense it is pre-social; not an institution of international society but a precondition of its existence. According to Sharp (2009: 11) it is 'diplomacy which constitutes, and diplomats (in the sense of those who act diplomatically) who produce, the international societies which

7

put relations between separate groups on a more stable and peaceful footing than they otherwise would be'. It is diplomacy that enables international society to emerge from a mere system.[2]

The New Institutionalists

Noting some of these difficulties, in particular the failure of Bull *et al* to define in sharper detail what they understand by 'the institutions of international society', several scholars have recently sought to pin down the concept and/or put ES use of it on firmer methodological ground. In this section I focus on the efforts of, respectively, Buzan, Holsti, and Schouenborg, who together might be regarded as the *avant garde* of what the latter author has termed a 'new institutionalism'.

Buzan begins by relating ES uses of 'institutions' to those of other schools, notably neo-liberalism and regime theory. As well as an attempt to find common ground and build a transatlantic bridge between these prominent bodies of theory[3], Buzan uses comparative analysis to tease out their relative strengths and weaknesses. The aim is to forge a much more robust, theoretically self-conscious, and analytically inclusive concept. Building on the work of Keohane, Searle, Mayall, Wight, Bull, and Holsti among others, he arrives at a much expanded list of institutions which he subdivides into primary and secondary institutions, with primary institutions also subdivided between master and derivative. Derivative institutions are subordinate to and generated by master institutions (Buzan, 2004: 161-204; see Table 5).

8

Table 5: Primary Institutions of International Society: Buzan [4] (see end of document)

Buzan (2004: 165, 169) contends that the ES has been far more interested in primary than secondary institutions. Secondary institutions are conceived as formal bodies and organisations founded for a specific purpose, with the capacity for purposive action. Yet they can also consist of 'related complexes of rules and norms, identifiable in time and place' (Keohane quoted in Buzan, 2004: 164-5), or 'relatively stable collection[s] of practices and rules defining appropriate behaviour for specific groups of actors in specific situations' (March and Olson quoted in Buzan, 2004: 165)— definitions akin to conventional understandings of 'regimes'. Primary institutions, on the other hand, are 'more fundamental practices' (Keohane quoted in Buzan, 2004: 165), rules, and constraints which may be 'embedded in structures of meaning and schemes of interpretation that explain and legitimise particular identities and the practices and rules associated with them' (Meyer, Boli and Thomas quoted in Buzan, 2004: 165). Such practices and rules are evolved more than designed, and they are 'constitutive of actors and their patterns of legitimate activity in relation to each other' (Buzan, 2004: 167). In contrast to secondary institutions (the focus of regime theorists) which are 'for the most part consciously designed by states', primary institutions (the focus of the ES) are 'constitutive of both states and international society in that they define the basic character and purpose of any such society' (Buzan, 2004: 166). They are 'durable and recognised patterns of shared practices rooted in values held commonly by the members of interstate societies, and

9

embodying a mix of norms, rules and principles' (Buzan, 2004: 181). In a later

article, Buzan helpfully simplifies this attempt to distil from several quite

diverse bodies of literature a definition of both primary and secondary

institutions. He defines secondary institutions as 'designed, instrumental

arrangements and organizations', and primary institutions as 'deeper, more

organic, evolved social practices that constitute both the actors and the

"game" of international society' (Buzan, 2006: 366). With regard to their

relationship, primary institutions are the 'enduring fundamental practices

which shape and constrain the formation, evolution, and demise of secondary

institutions' (Buzan 2005a: 120).

At the same time that Buzan was seeking to strengthen the foundations

of the ES's approach to international institutions another book appeared

(Holsti: 2004) which had the notion of primary institutions at its core. While its

principal object was not to identify these institutions and further the theoretical

debate about them, it is arguably the most systematic study to date of the

nature and role of institutions in international society. Moreover it is one that

uses Bull's work as a staring point and draws on Bull's insights at many points

in the argument. It might be considered a work of the ES in all but name.[5]

For Holsti, institutions are the 'context within which the games of

international politics are played. They represent patterned (typical) actions

and interactions of states, the norms, rules, and principles which guide (or fail

to guide) them, and the major ideas and beliefs of a historical era' (Holsti,

2004: 18). In adopting this broad approach Holsti explicitly follows Bull. He

acknowledges that there is no consensus on the meaning of institutions in the IR literature, and declares that his preference for Bull's understanding is based on its reference to ideas, practices, and beliefs of state-actors as well as the rules and standards which comprise, for example, Keohane's understanding (Holsti, 2004: 21, fn. 5). He also subscribes to the understanding of Wendt and Duval (1989) who assert that the ES's notion of institutions (meaning, it should be noted, Hedley Bull's understanding) is similar to the notion of *gemeinschaft*. It entails shared intersubjective understandings and practices which constitute and are constituted by state interaction (Holsti, 2004: 21, fn. 5).

So how do we know what institutions exist internationally? Holsti posits three criteria. International institutions consist of: (i) patterned practices; (ii) 'coherent sets of *ideas and/or beliefs* that describe the needs for the common practices and point out how certain goals can be achieved through them' (Holsti, 2004: 21); and (iii) rules and etiquette which prescribe and proscribe certain kinds of behaviour. These rules and this etiquette reflect norms which are 'shared expectations about appropriate behaviour' (Finnemore, quoted in Holsti, 2004: 22). Alternatively they are stipulations of the 'parameters of acceptable collective behaviour' (Jean-Louis Durand, quoted in Holsti, 2004: 22). The three major components of international institutions are thus: (i) patterned practices; (ii) ideas and beliefs; (iii) rules and norms. Holsti then distinguishes between two types of institutions. Foundational institutions, on the one hand, define and give privileged status to certain actors. They stipulate the fundamental principles, norms, and rules upon which their mutual

11

relations are based. The foundational institutions of international society, for example, distinguish the states-system/international society (Holsti uses these terms by and large interchangeably) from other modes of world political organisation. The foundational institutions of the Westphalian international system 'include sovereignty, territoriality, and the fundamental rules of international law' (Holsti, 2004: 25). Procedural institutions, on the other hand, comprise 'repetitive practices, ideas and norms that underlie and regulate interactions and transactions between the separate actors' (Holsti, 2004: 25). They are principally concerned with setting the boundaries of legitimate conduct. The procedural institutions of the Westphalian syste 'include diplomacy, trade, colonialism, and war' (Holsti, 2004: 27; see Table 6).

Table 6: Institutions of International Society: Holsti (see end of document)

Armed with these conceptual tools Holsti sets about identifying logically and transparently the institutions of international society—something that Bull, as he rightly says, failed to do. Holsti rejects two of Bull's institutions: great power concert, and the balance of power. The activities of the great powers, he argues, do not meet the criterion of patterned practices, except perhaps for the period of the Concert of Europe, 1815-54.[6] It is generally believed that the status of great power carries with it certain responsibilities—for managing the system, providing stability, ensuring international peace and security. But individual great powers from the time the concept was first specified (in the Treaty of Châtillon, 1814) have acted to undermine these responsibilities as much as to discharge them. Similarly, it is hard to identify a consistent pattern

12

of behaviour with regard to the balance of power. States have balanced, bandwagoned, and retreated to isolation with seemingly equal frequency. The idea of the balance of power may be a strong one in international politics, but there are no concomitantly strong or settled rules and norms that stem from it.[7]

In contrast to Buzan and Holsti, Schouenborg sets out not to identify the primary institutions of international society as such but to provide a structural functional method equipped for that purpose. He accepts Buzan's definition of primary institutions as 'durable and recognised patterns of shared practices' (as cited above) and proposes a number of 'functional categories' as lenses through which these institutions (the 'key objects' of a properly sociological and scientific analysis) can be identified and differentiated. By 'differentiated' he means the separation of different *kinds* of primary institutions from each other. The general idea, although Schouenborg does not make this explicit, is that all societies attempt in one way or another to perform these functions and therefore we can most effectively get at and understand the institutions that societies generate in relation to them (Schouenborg, 2001: 28-31; see also Buzan and Albert, 2010: 318). Schouenborg's functional categories are derived from five proposed but not developed by Buzan: (i) membership; (ii) authoritative communication; (iii) limits to the use of force; (iv) allocation of property rights; an (v) sanctity of agreements; and six proposed by Donnelly (2006): (i) communicating and interacting; (ii) regulating the use of force; (iii) regulating ownership and exchange; (iv) making rules; (v) aggregating interests and power; and (vi) regulating conflicts. Schouenborg welcomes these categories as an important

step forward but finds them inadequate in several respects. In particular he finds them too closely tied to a modern, Westphalian conception of the international system and therefore unsuited to analysis of a more ambitious 'genuine historical-sociological' (Schouenborg, 2011: 31) kind. Buzan's categories, for example, privilege the state, and both Buzan's and Donnelly's categories put undue emphasis on another largely 'modern' phenomenon, the attempt to limit morally and legally the resort to force. Under what he calls the 'constitutive functional category' of 'legitimacy and membership'[8] Schouenborg places 'polities' rather than the state (the state being the dominant modern form of polity); and he broadens the 'regulative functional category' that relates to constraints on the use of force to 'regulating conflicts'. In brief, Schouenborg's putative transhistorical and transcultural scheme contains five functional categories, divided into two types of functional categories, constitutive and regulative, with 10 institutions listed as possible candidates in the former and 12 in the latter (see Tables 7 and 8).

Table 7: Schouenborg's constitutive functional category and institutions (see end of document)

Table 8: Schouenborg's regulative functional categories and institutions (see end of document)

Problems with the New Institutionalism

These three authors have made a valiant attempt to grapple with a difficult matter. But problems remain. While the ground on which we are to build a

14

theory of primary institutions has been usefully surveyed it remains worryingly

unstable. On a first reading the 'institutional density' (Onuf, 2002: 218) that

Buzan imputes to international society is not implausible. It incorporates a

number of potential candidates for institutional status—notably sovereignty,

the market, nationalism, and human rights—that Bull and others failed to

consider. The messiness of the list conforms better to what many professional

IR students feel about the normative and/or regulatory architecture of the

international scene. Bull's scheme seems just too neat.[9] However, Buzan's list

of institutions reads like an enumeration of all the significant general

developments, ideas, policies, principles, practices, and goals that have

attained a degree of international permanence over the last few hundred

years. While the definitions Buzan puts forward certainly do not bar these

items from consideration, one wonders where to draw the line. If the market,

for example, can be viewed as a master institution (with trade liberalization,

financial liberalization, and hegemonic stability as their derivatives), why not

capitalism (with free trade, capital mobility, labour mobility, privatisation, and

currency convertibility as derivatives)? If equality of peoples can be viewed as

a master institution (with human rights and humanitarian intervention as

derivatives), why not peaceful settlement of disputes (with arbitration,

mediation and adjudication as derivatives)? If non-intervention and

international law can be considered derivative institutions of sovereignty, why

not territoriality and boundaries, given the sovereign state is a constitutionally

independent *territorial* entity?[10] Could not democracy be regarded with equal

logic as a derivative institution of equality of people *vis à vis* nationalism? If

environmental stewardship can be regarded as a primary institution why not

15

protection and promotion of human rights, international peace and security, and sustainable development (all of them being established aspirations of the international community which have brought into being a complex body of rules, practices, and secondary institutions)? The possibilities seem almost endless. The problem will not, however, be solved by tighter or more complex definitions as all the definitions produced so far leave plenty of room for observer subjectivity. In other words, even if we could agree on a common definition of primary institutions there is no reason to believe that our application of it would lead to our lists and taxonomies of institutions significantly converging. With regard to types of primary institution, Buzan's division of master/derivative is no better or no worse than Holsti's foundational/procedural or, for that matter, Reus-Smit's (1997) division between 'constitutional structures' and 'fundamental institutions'. They are three among many possible ways of differentiating between types of institutions. They are logical on the abstract plane but empirically entirely ungrounded.

Holsti's analysis, as with Buzan's, contains a number of plus points. It demonstrates why, for example, contrary to the claims of the ES pioneers, we should be sceptical about the attribution of institutional status to the balance of power and great power concert. Yet the subjective element in Holsti is still strong. With regard to foundational institutions he concedes, firstly, that 'sovereignty' and 'territoriality' might be conceived as part of a single institution of sovereignty, but as they refer to 'rather unique aspects' he chooses 'to separate them for analytical reasons' (Holsti, 2004: 26). When it

16

comes to determining the institutions of international society, however, should this choice depend on analytical utility? Holsti generally writes as if his institutions have ontological status i.e. they exist in some sense in the real-world regardless of the analyst's cognition of them. How else, if they do not have this status, could they be deemed (as Holsti does) markers of real-world international change? But if such status is granted they cannot be chopped and changed for analytical convenience. Secondly, while the state or statehood meet his criteria of institutions, he dismisses them on the ground that they are agents whereas his other institutions 'are not agents, but structures of norms, rules, and ideas that influence the behaviour of agents' (Holsti, 2004: 27) In the concluding chapter, however, Holsti repeatedly refers to the state as one of his 'eight institutions' and his 'four foundational institutions' (see Table 6). This inconsistency aside, inclusion of the state results in the curious conceptualisation of the state, sovereignty and territoriality as separate institutions.[11] Thirdly, Holsti concedes that his list of procedural institutions is not exhaustive. The market, the international monetary system, or foreign aid might also be thought of as institutions. If so, it might be added, why not the protection and promotion of human rights, economic development, self-determination, hegemony (see Clark, 2009, 2011), or—a prime candidate that everyone seems to overlook—summitry?[12] Finally, he says that some institutions might be conceived as subcategories of broader institutions e.g. trade + international monetary regulation = the market. This is a suggestion akin to Buzan's (2004: 182) notion of 'nesting'. But we are furnished with no criteria to determine which 'institutions' should be nested with which.

17

After holding out the promise of a more cogent list of institutions than Bull's, therefore, Holsti leaves us with a list no less subjective. Since his main concern is to systematically investigate change in the international system, he declares that it is 'not necessary to discuss every conceivable institution'—with the implication that a good many institutions might be conceived. Rather he uses the seven institutions selected as markers of change—and in the substantive chapters that follow he does indeed provide a an account of the nature and extent of change internationally over the last three centuries that constitutes a major contribution to the literature. But the relevant point for our purposes is that, appearances to the contrary, Holsti goes no further than Bull (and indeed Buzan) in providing a definitive, or at least methodologically well-grounded, list of the institutions of international society.

Schouenborg's is the most explicit attempt yet to take the ES study of primary institutions in a structural functionalist direction. But while he makes a number of telling criticisms of the current ES literature (especially regarding its eurocentrism), he fails to make a strong case why we should go in this direction at all. He asserts (2011: 35) that his functional categories will enable us to 'get a handle on empirical reality'. But he does not say how. He claims (2011: 27) that his categories 'should be able to encompass all the institutions identified by English School scholars throughout history'. But why would one want to do this? Broadening the historical scope of the analytical scheme is in principle fine, but attempting to encompass all the institutions identified by the ES seems a misplaced ambition. It concedes too much to past ES

scholarship. The first thing we need to get a handle on is which of the many institutions posited by the ES can be empirically verified. The empirical question is the elephant in the room in Schouenborg's analysis. He declares (2011: 28) that '[h]ere I will not go into the problem of how to empirically observe primary institutions, but merely offer some potential solutions to the problem of differentiating between them'. Is it possible, however, to make any progress in differentiating institutions without any empirical observation of them? The problem of empirically observing primary institutions is exactly the problem that needs to be resolved if the institutional project *à la* ES is to get off the ground. What we need is data. Until we have data about what institutions exist internationally our speculations about them will remain just that, speculations; and our taxonomies and theories about them will remain rootless, subjective and abstract. This is clear from the list of institutions that Schouenberg, with all due tentativeness, suggests. He does not provide any guidance as to why the list of ideas, ideologies, notions and principles he puts in his 'constitutive functional category' of 'legitimacy and membership' (see Table 7) should be deemed 'institutions'. They all pertain to which actors and/or states can take their rightful place as members of international society, but the logic of classifying them as institutions is not clear.

The Diagnosis

Why have these recent attempts to put institutions on firmer conceptual and methodological ground failed? Why, despite such valiant efforts, has the problem of varying and conflicting lists and taxonomies of primary institutions persisted? My diagnosis is that ES analysis has moved too far away from

what one of its pioneers called 'diplomatics' (Manning, 1962: 1-10, 56-8, 182-4; Wilson, 2004: 759-60). Too far way, that is, from the understandings, assumptions, and expectations that constitute the 'psychomilieu' (Harold and Margaret Sprout, cited in Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff, 1981: 69-70) of those professionally engaged in inter-state (or more broadly inter-polity) relations. As Tim Dunne has argued (2005: 163), 'it must be doubted how far an elaborate conceptual design favoured by Buzan can actually reveal the "reality" of international society' in the absence of a strong 'hermeneutic' dimension. In my view this applies especially to the concept of institutions (though it is also not without significance that in this article Dunne himself in uses the term 'institutions' in a non-specified and non-hermeneutic way). Fashioned in the abstract, without reference to actor perceptions and understandings, lists of international institutions will always be in the eye of the beholder, and taxonomies of them similarly groundless.

The Importance of Interpretation

All three of our new institutionalists claim or assume that primary institutions have ontological status, i.e. they are not merely analytical tools but have real world existence independent of the consciousness of the observer, and that therefore their identification is an empirical matter (see e.g. Schouenborg, 2011: 27-8; Buzan, 2004: 190; Holsti: 1-27) In asserting this they do not depart in any shape or form from the epistemology of the ES which is empiricist. Eschewing metaphysics, and distrustful of abstract theory (certainly as a starting point for analysis), members of the ES have been careful not to push their ideas and theories beyond what can be confirmed by observation

and experience (Mayall, 2009: 210). Even their normative theories need to be anchored in the 'real, lived, normative world' of the people they are studying, not derived from abstract moral principles or imported from extraneous normative discourses (Jackson, 2009: 28-30, 34). While they are empiricists, however, they are not positivists. They have been sceptical about general causal statements about human behaviour and especially the possibility of arriving at universalizable laws. They pursue 'insider' rather than 'outsider' accounts of social reality. Their focus has been on the self-understandings, shared meanings, value orientations, and codes of conduct of the actors, the sources of which are speeches, statements, resolutions, communiques, declarations, press releases, memoirs and interviews (Jackson, 2009: 37; Navari, 2009c: 39-42). According to Navari (2009c: 47) their approach is 'agent centred' and 'practitioner orientated'. Their goal in studying international politics is to provide a plausible and coherent interpretation, and general theoretical account, of the political practitioner's world (Jackson, 2009: 24-26). They are not concerned with objective facts about the international environment so much as what the relevant actors in any given situation deem or assume to be the objective facts. They have tended to conceive the balance of power, for example, as a conscious policy rather than a mechanism or objective feature of international life. Unlike realists of various hues they have spent little time analysing the components of material power or its distribution since it is the perception of power that is deemed to have the explanatory efficacy 'and perceptions are revealed by quizzing the actor, not the environment' (Navari, 2009b: 9).

The methodological approach of the ES has been characterised by some (e.g. Suganami, 1983: 2364-66; Dunne, 1998: 7-9; Linklater and Suganami, 2006: 97-108) as *verstehen*—the Weberian notion of understanding involving interpretation of the meanings that social actors themselves give to their actions. Allied to this the ES stresses imaginative identification with and reconstruction of the roles, choices, outlooks, and predicaments of statespersons (Keens-Soper, 1978: 25-6; Suganami, 1983: 2364-65; Alderson and Hurrell, 2000: 25-28; Linklater and Suganami, 2006: 109; Jackson, 2009: 29, 32; see also Butterfield, 1965: 90-96). It stresses, in other words, the importance of putting oneself in statespersons and other significant actors' shoes and trying to see things as they see them, even though their outlook may be very different to that of our own.[13] In sociological parlance the school's methodological stance is 'participant standpoint'. This involves playing 'close attention to the language of the actors and the way they explain and justify their actions' (Navari, 2009c: 42; see also Epp, 1998). But this does not mean that analysts must restrict themselves in their explanation and assessment of these actions to the language and mental categories of the participants/actors. Rather they use terms that would be recognised by the participants/actors, or would at least be comprehensible to them. If a more theoretical language needs to be employed, for example to connect with past scholarship or to facilitate academic communication, it should be derived from the ordinary language of the subject, losing as little as possible from the original meaning of that language (Jackson, 2009: 35-6). In this way interpretivist scholars seek to get 'inside' reality without surrendering to that reality i.e. 'surrendering to the beliefs, values and prejudices of the

people under study' (Jackson, 2000: 58; see also Dunne, 2001b: 235-7). As Bevir and Rhodes (2004: 130) argue '[i]nterpretive approaches start with the insight that to understand actions, practices and institutions, we need to grasp the relevant meanings, beliefs and preferences of the people involved'. This does not mean that these meanings, beliefs and preferences are holy writ and should be accepted uncritically (see e.g. Dowding, 2004). All data needs to be interpreted in light of all the relevant data that the analyst has the means, time and skill to gather. It does mean, however, that such interpretative data is essential to a rich, textured, and nuanced explanation of the studied human world.

As well as employing language close to the actual language of international politics, the ES has traditionally employed definitions that are rooted in everyday discourse. As Robert Jackson (2000: 95) argues:

Our theoretical language should … avoid stipulative definitions that have no reference to ordinary language. A stipulated definition is one that is made up by the researcher. Such definitions are arbitrary from the point of view of their subject. They are rejections of the language of experience and practice. They cut us off from the people and activities we are trying to learn more about. They have the unfortunate effect of alienating the world of political science from the world of politics.

James (1993b: 270) crystallises the point: '[c]lose regard must be paid to the relevant practitioner usage.' A good example of a stipulative definition can be found in Keohane's seminal article (1988: 382-6). Keohane defines institutions

as 'persistent and connected sets of rules (formal or informal) that prescribe behavioural roles, constrain activity, and shape expectations'. They can take the form of relatively permanent 'general patterns of activity' which arise by and large spontaneously, or specific, human designed, arrangements 'identifiable in space and time'. He then declares that 'it is difficult to work analytically' with such a broad concept and offers in its place a hybrid understanding of institutions as 'related complexes of rules and norms, identifiable in space and time'. This enables him to occlude consideration of 'general behavioural patterns' and 'general norms' and concentrate on 'specific institutions' and 'practices'. Why the latter two should be privileged is not explained (nor the boundaries between 'institutions' and 'practices' demarcated), but the point here is that Keohane's working definition is arrived at through a survey of usages of the term within mainstream IR. No connection is made with practitioner usage. The same applies to John Mearsheimer's definition (1994/95: 8-9), which also has the hybrid quality of combing a general understanding (a set of prescriptive and proscriptive behavioural rules) with a more specific (as 'typically formalized in international agreements, and … embodied in organizations'). Notwithstanding their more 'insider' methodological orientation, constructivists have been just as attracted as neo-liberals and neo-realists to the charms of the stipulative definition. A recent example is the definition of practices of Adler and Pouliot (2011: 4-5):

> '…socially meaningful patterns of action, which, in being performed
> more or less competently, simultaneously embody, act out, and
> possibly reify background knowledge and discourse in and on the

material world. [They are] … not merely descriptive 'arrows' that connect structure to agency and back, but rather the dynamic material and ideational processes that enable structures to be stable or to evolve, and agents to reproduce or transform structures'.

Few practitioners would be able to comprehend a definition so abstract and locked in the specialist academic literature such as this.

It is in these respects that the new institutionalism marks a departure from the traditional approach of the ES. It is a departure not in epistemology but in method. While members of the ES have traditionally, if not always systematically or rigorously, pursued insider accounts of social reality, the new institutionalists pursue an outsider account.[14] They have left behind the language of practice and the assumptions and perceptions of practitioners, employed stipulative definitions and, with respect to Buzan and Schouenborg at least, attempted to identify the primary institutions of international society through the application of abstract analytical categories. The result, as we have seen, has been a failure to make progress in arriving at a less speculative list of institutions around which the important job of theory-building can begin. There is nothing intrinsically wrong, of course, in departing methodologically from a traditional way of doing things. The argument I am making is not about methodological authenticity. Rather I am arguing that the new institutionalists have embarked on a course which is unlikely to lead to the desired destination. Rather than adopting an outsider/structuralist approach, the best hope of reaching this destination resides in reverting back

to the insider/interpretivist approach traditionally associated with the ES but, with the aid of Sociology, employing it much more rigorously.

Grounded Theory

The affinity between GT and the approach to IR of the ES has recently been noted by Navari (2009c: 42). Yet the potential for using this qualitative research method, first developed in Sociology, in qualitative approaches to IR such as the ES has gone surprisingly unexplored. GT could be applied to a wide variety of subject matters of central concern to the ES e.g. the role of international law and the place of human rights in international society. But it could also be applied to the stubborn problem of the meaning and identity of international society's institutions. GT has the potential to provide the missing hermeneutic or 'insider' dimension to ES thinking on international institutions. The 'diplomatics' of the international institutional landscape have been neglected for too long, and GT had the potential to uncover them in a systematic, rigorous way. Uncovering the diplomatics, however, can lead not only to a more empirically grounded list of international institutions but also more compelling explanations of the role and significance of institutions in international society. There are certainly problems in applying a method mostly used in the sociology of chronic illness, nursing, education and the family[15] to a much more complex social environment such as the society of states. International society, it should be remembered, is not a real society, a society comprised of 'flesh and blood' human beings. Rather it is what Manning called a quasi-society (Manning, 1962: 21-22, 27-31; Wilson, 2004: 759-60), or a second-order society 'where the members are not individual

human beings but durable collectivities of humans possessed of identities and actor qualities that are more than the sum of their parts' (Buzan, 2004: 24-5, 188-90). We cannot ask the members of this society about the institutional complexion of their lives. The only people we can ask are the representatives of those members and those in prominent and influential positions in the activity of world politics. This means we have to adapt GT to our specific needs. But one of the strengths of GT is its flexibility. It consists of a systematic yet flexible set of procedures for theory-building. In this section I set out the principles of GT research[16] and provide some hypothetical examples of what the elements in a GT research programme on the institutions of international society might look like. In the next section I explore further the complementarity of the two approaches. In the final section I spell out the mutual advantages of bringing together GT and the ES before concluding on the next step to be taken to get an ES-inspired grounded theory of institutions up and running.

At its origin GT was an attempt to blend the sociological methods of Columbia School positivism and Chicago School pragmatism. Its classic text is Glaser and Strauss (2008 [1967]). As with much ES theory of the time the starting point for GT was scepticism about the assumptions underlying quantitative social science such as the possibility of 'reducing qualities of human experience to quantifiable variables' (Charmaz, 1995: 29), the possibility of scientific objectivity, and the goals of establishing causal relationships and deriving universalizable propositions about social behaviour. From the Columbia School it took the need to be systematic in analysis,

explicit about research procedures, and generative of abstract theory. From the Chicago School, for some the senior partner (hence the tendency to equate GT with it in the literature) it took the emphasis on agency, the assumption that process was more important than structure (the latter being created by humans engaging in processes), the stress on subjective and inter-subjective understandings, and its focus on the intimate relationship between language, meaning and action. Essentially Glaser and Strauss sought to put qualitative research on a much more systematic footing, in order to counter claims from the quantitative researchers that such work was impressionistic and unscientific (see e.g. Glaser and Strauss, 2008 [1967]: 10-18, 223, 259-62). They contended that the 'logico-deductive' approach, increasingly dominant in the social sciences, of testing hypotheses derived from existing theory risked 'forcing the data' (see e.g. Glaser and Strauss, 2008 [1967]: 98, 142-4, 261-2). This could only be avoided by taking a more inductive approach in which theory emerged from the data. The strategies they proposed involved simultaneous data collection and analysis, deriving 'codes' (essentially analytical categories) from data rather than from extant theory, and developing theory at each stage of the data collection and analysis. Through *inter alia* interviews and participant observation researchers immerse themselves in the lived lives of their subjects, but with the object of going beyond the description of classic ethnography and generating an abstract, conceptual understanding of the studied phenomenon. While GT might be considered a form of ethnography in its desire to obtain a non-judgmental, dense, textured, 'insider' understanding of the life or a particular group, unlike classic ethnography it is not concerned to record every

dimension of that life, only those dimensions which have pertinence to the emerging theory. While classic ethnography and GT both amass data, the latter is more focussed and selective and avoids the accumulation of 'mountains of unconnected data' (Charmaz, 2006: 23). In sum, while the approach of GT is empirical and non-positivist, its object is eminently theoretical. Glaser and Strauss (2008 [1967]: 2) define it as 'the discovery of theory from data systematically obtained from social research'.

A typical GT is constructed in five stages: data gathering; coding; memo-writing; theoretical sampling; and theory drafting. These stages, in practice, are rarely discrete. Questions arising in one stage frequently require returning to an earlier stage of the process. The first stage involves the gathering of 'rich data'. This is the data that enables the researcher to see the world from the research participants' point of view. The grounded researcher employs a variety of data collection methods including participant observation, interviews, questionnaires, and textual analysis of records and reports. The object of the exercise is to reveal the participants' views, feelings, experiences, intentions, actions, as well the contexts and structure of the aspect of their lives under scrutiny. From this first stage GT pursues a flexible approach. Methods of collection employed vary according to the research problem. Sometimes issues arising from the very process of data gathering require them to be modified. The initial course of study will be shaped by certain background assumptions and perspectives, including disciplinary perspectives. Indeed it is neither possible nor desirable for the researcher, no matter how skilled, to come to the data cold. The researcher needs certain

'background interests' or 'sensitizing concepts' in order to begin the process of thinking analytically about the data (Charmaz, 1995: 32, 49; Glaser and Strauss, 2008 [1967]: 3, 46). For the ES the relationship between 'principles', 'practices', 'institutions' and international behaviour could constitute such interests and concepts. But the skilled and/or experienced grounded researcher would recognise these as valuable but not limiting points of departure. He or she strives to be as open as possible to changes in direction, and guard against locking the process into original conceptual frameworks, and forcing preconceived ideas and theories onto the data. One sense in which the stages of research should not be regarded as discrete is that in GT research data and concepts exist in constant tension and mutual relation. Unlike classic ethnography there is no separation between data collection and analysis. The two occur simultaneously. The object is not description but theoretical interpretation. The grounded researcher moves backwards and forwards from theory to data. In this way the theoretical framework becomes progressively refined. With regard to participant interviews, for example, the grounded researcher prefers a semi-structured or an unstructured approach. This enables interesting ideas and issues to be explored as soon as they arise. These ideas and issues, in turn, may influence the shape and content of subsequent interviews. In this way the data collection not only becomes more focussed but intimately connected with the emerging theory.

The next step in GT is known as 'coding'. It involves giving segments of data a label that categorises and summarises that data. This is the first formal step in providing a conceptual understanding of the data. In the words of one

leading proponent, '[c]oding is the pivotal link between collecting data and developing an emergent theory to explain these data' (Charmaz, 2006: 46). Codes 'are elements of a nascent theory that explains the data and informs further data gathering' (Charmaz, 2006: 46). They capture and condense often complex meanings and actions. The researcher constantly revises and refines his/her codes in the light of new data. 'Initial' codes, highly specific and detailed, give way to 'focussed' codes, more conceptual and synthetic, as the theoretical direction of the study takes shape. Some grounded researchers utilise *in vivo* codes. This is the use of 'telling phrases', 'activity specific terminology', or 'insider shorthand' as a code. Such language is characteristic of many social activities ('going native', being 'on/off message', 'speaking truth to power', and 'frank exchange of views' being examples from politics and diplomacy). The advantage of such codes is that they anchor the analysis in participants' worlds and provide texture that *ex vivo* codes no matter how accurate a representation of the data are unable to do.

Coding enables a leap to be taken, but not in any predetermined way, from the specific and concrete to the general and abstract. The process is taken further with memo-writing. Memos are informal and provisional analytic notes written whenever codes prompt broader ideas. These ideas may relate, for example, to commonalities in the data where participants relate common views and experiences. Memos expedite the identification of themes and patterns, and help to direct and fine-tune future data-gathering and coding. They identify ways in which codes can be 'clustered' and subsequently framed as analytical 'categories', which are construed as the principal

conceptual elements in the emerging theory. One could envisage, for

example, different understandings of 'institutions' among diplomats as such

categories in an emergent theory of the institutional structure of international

society (e.g. 'institution as organization', 'institution as regime', 'institution as

practice'). Categories might consist of *in vivo* codes taken directly from the

discourse of participants or the researcher's own comprehension and

summation of what is happening in the data.

The purpose of theoretical sampling, the fourth 'stage' in GT research,

is to refine and strengthen analytical categories. This is achieved by returning

to the data to gauge the extent to which conjectures or hypotheses contained

within any given category (e.g. 'the balance of power understood as a set of

assumptions and expectations is a major factor in the determination of state

behaviour') stand up. If they are found to insufficiently capture participants'

views and experiences they will need to be elaborated or refined (e.g. 'the

balance of power understood as a set of assumptions and expectations is an

ever-present background factor in the determination of state behaviour but

becomes a foreground factor at times of instability and tension'). At this point

additional data may be required to test the new category. But it is important to

note that the burden of this task is now lighter due to the sharper focus of the

study. In addition, unlike positivist and deductive research programmes, all

the hypotheses and conjectures tested emerge from the data. The researcher

avoids as much as possible the insertion of extant theory. The intimate

connection between data and emergent theory is maintained at every stage of

the process. As well as refining and strengthening categories, sampling helps

the researcher to identify gaps, where the categories do not accommodate the full range of relevant participant experiences. It also helps the researcher to know when to stop data gathering. This happens when the categories are 'saturated' i.e. when fresh data-gathering no longer generates new theoretical insights.

The flexibility of GT is maintained in the final, drafting, stage. Grounded theorists take a critical stance towards conventional formats for the presentation of academic research. They tend to conduct a literature review, for example, towards the end of the drafting process, not the beginning, so as not to be unduly influenced by received theory. They sometimes include more raw data in their texts, e.g. excerpts from interviews, than is usual in order 'to keep the human story in the forefront of the reader's mind and to make the conceptual analysis more accessible to a wider audience' (Charmaz, 1995: 47; Glaser and Strauss, 2008 [1967]: 228-9). The accessibility issue is important to grounded theorists. They contend that good theory as well as being empirically robust, accurate, logical, parsimonious, should be useful i.e. helpful not only for other social scientists but students and practitioners. It is vital therefore that it is understandable to these audiences, and free of unnecessary jargon (see e.g. Glaser and Strauss, 2008 [1967]: 1, 3, 76, 98, 237). In the spirit of science they also argue that it should be free of sentimentality. But while advocating the adoption of a neutral tone they nonetheless acknowledge they are engaged in an act of persuasion, that theorising is an argumentative practice, that while their theory may be richly informed by the data no research process is perfect, and that their search for

accuracy and objectivity will always be to some extent deficient. It is at the drafting stage that the individual skill of the researcher is most in evidence. But the skill and judgment of the researcher is a major factor in all stages of the process, GT being a set of flexible research procedures and a craft rather than a set of rigid prescriptions.

Common Ground

It might be said that GT and the ES share the same general starting point and goal but GT has made much greater progress in identifying a rigorous method for getting from one to the other. The goal is straightforward: a general, conceptual understanding of the studied phenomena. This is what the ES hopes to achieve through its concepts *inter alia* of international society and primary institutions. The starting point is a shared epistemology in empiricism. But it would be wrong to think proponents of GT and the ES are naïve empiricists. While they maintain that knowledge claims must not extend beyond what can be observed or experienced they accept that observation and experience are far from unproblematic. At the outset of his classic study of world order, for example, Bull (1977: xv) declared that no investigation of the social and political world can be value-free. Social and political analysis is always derived from certain premises. All the analyst can do is subject these premises to investigation and criticism, and resist the temptation (strong in a politically highly-charged subject such as IR) of partisanship (Jackson, 2009: 24-6). In this way it is possible to achieve a higher degree of scholarly detachment than would otherwise be the case. GT occupies exactly this ground. While it places great stress on the role of data, it does not view data

as lying idly on the wayside waiting to be discovered. Data does not objectively exist but is constructed through the interaction of observer and observed. The premises and preconceptions of the observer are an eradicable part of the equation. All the researcher can hope to do is reduce this element through self-reflexivity, i.e. by consistently reflecting on his or her premises and preconceptions and how they might affect their collection and interpretation of the data. In sum, both the ES and GT reject scientific neutrality but they aspire through what might be termed self-reflexive empiricism to *relatively* objective knowledge.

There are two other important areas of common ground between GT and the ES that need to be highlighted. First, both schools pay close attention to language. As we have seen the ES, if not the new institutionalism, has been concerned to keep the language of theory and practice close together. The way practitioners speak has been seen as a vital window into the way they think, and the way they think an indispensable guide for making sense of the actions and activities of the collective bodies they represent.[17] Similarly, grounded theorists stress the importance of recording the views and experiences of research participants in their own terms, paying close attention to words and phrases that may carry special meaning. In doing so researchers may be able to enter implicit worlds of meaning otherwise closed to them. This does not mean they are barred, once the data has been collected, coded, and categorised, from using the language of their disciplines or wider 'external' discourses to relate the bigger story. But they are alert to the danger of casting this story in 'a lifeless language that better fits *our*

academic and bureaucratic worlds than those of our participants' (Charmaz, 2006: 69). Paying close attention to participants' language helps the researcher bridge the gap between the lived experience of the former and the sometimes blinkered disciplinarity of the latter. It also helps them to enter the normative worlds of their participants and discern the standards of value that guide their conduct. Having an insight into such standards is an essential ingredient of any humanistic as opposed to purely physical or mechanical study (Jackson, 2009: 21-32).

Secondly, both schools are united in their conviction that methods alone do not guarantee good research. According to Jackson (2009: 33) the attainment of a high level of academic knowledge 'is not merely a question of good methodology. It is far more a question of academic virtue'. The academic virtues involved in the study of human affairs include intellectual honesty, impartiality, imagination, and love of learning. According to Charmaz (2006: 15) '[a] method provides *a* tool to enhance seeing but does not provide automatic insight'. There are no foolproof methods. The skill of the researcher is always an essential ingredient. Researchers continuously exercise judgments, and the quality of these judgments will always be a function of their individual capabilities and experience. This is the 'craft' element that proponents of both GT and ES are keen to emphasise (Charmaz, 2006: 10-12; Jackson, 2000: 91-6; Jackson, 2009). While GT has developed a widely accepted and practiced set of research procedures there is no litany to be faithfully reproduced regardless of circumstance. As in the ES tradition, a large degree of latitude is given to the judgment and imagination of

researchers to frame their study as they see fit given their purposes and the resources available to them. What is sacrosanct is that the theory should emerge from the data, not forced upon it, and that researchers should be prepared to reframe their study if the accumulating data calls into question the original design.

Towards a Grounded Theory

The common ground between the ES and GT is too fertile not to be exploited. The ES provides GT with a new area—international society—in which to extend and test its research strategy. In the view of Charmaz (1995: 28-9) GT methods are appropriate for studying 'individual processes, interpersonal relations and the reciprocal effects between individuals and larger social processes'. The extent to which they can usefully be applied to inter-communal relations, where individuals are primarily agents of large and complex social groups, is the test. It is certainly a demanding test given the second-order and anarchical nature of international society, its cultural diversity, its multiplicity of languages, and its vast array of national traditions. These basic features engender an environment in which there is there is often a big gap between appearance and reality, between what people say and what they do, between what they say and what they think, and between what they say to one audience and what they say to another. While 'doublespeak' (Orwell, 1981 [1949]), 'two level games' (Putmann, 1988), and 'strategic cover-ups' (Mearsheimer, 2011), to cite some of the terms invented to capture this reality, are far from unknown in domestic settings, in the international setting they are normal. Accurate interpretation of the multiple layers of

meaning in international society is certainly a challenge. But the recent

application of interpretative techniques to areas such as diplomacy

(Neumann, 2011) suggests that this is a challenge we should not be too

daunted to meet.[18] Nor is it one entirely without precedent in ES thinking.[19]

The ES also provides GT with a point of departure in the international realm

with 'background interests' such as the search for the bases of international

order (see e.g. James, 1973; Vincent, 1974; Bull, 1977; Hurrell 2007) and the

relationship between order and justice (see e.g. Bull, 1977: 77-98; Harris,

1993; Wheeler, 2000; Williams, 2005), and 'sensitizing concepts' such as

primary institutions, secondary institutions, and international society.

GT provides the ES with a set of techniques to enable the systematic

gathering of data on practitioner understandings of the institutional structure of

international society. Depending on the size and geographical scope of the

study the patterns we discern may be complex, but for the first time we will

have detailed evidence of how practitioners conceive that structure and its

component parts. For the first time our understanding of the nature and

identity of the international institutions would be empirically grounded. It may

turn out that the putative central idea/concept/insight of the ES, primary

institutions, is not corroborated. It may turn out that secondary institutions

loom far larger in the psychomilieu of practitioners. This should be grist to the

ES mill. The point about an ES-inspired GT of international institutions is it

provides a starting place and initial sense of direction for systematic research

but should in no way predetermine its course and destination.

In the process important light could be thrown on another stubborn problem in IR theory: the relationship between institutions and practices. More than 30 years ago Keens-Soper (178: 43-4) bemoaned the lack of unified usage of these terms and the conditions that, in particular, qualified a 'practice' to be named an 'institution'. A few years later Suganami (1983: 2365) conceived practices as one element of institutions along with social rules, conventions and usages. As we have seen above, Holsti's understanding of institutions makes strong reference to 'patterned practices', as does Buzan's to 'durable shared practices' or 'enduring fundamental practices' (see also Hurrell, 2007: 59; Reus-Smit, 2002: 503). According to Navari (2011: 618-21) the ES's understanding of institutions is identical to understandings of practice prevailing in social practice theory (in particular those of Stephen Turner and Ted Schatzki). However, Duffield (2007: 11) contends that the identification of institutions with practices 'has found little favor' within IR and he excludes the latter from his unified definition of the former. Here he sides with rationalist and constructivist analysts (against those taking a more sociological approach) who contend that associating institutions closely with practices and/or patterned behaviour limits its explanatory value because it is precisely the impact of institutions on practice that they wish to explain. The *explanans* needs to be kept separate from the *explanandum*. In line with this, constructivists Adler and Pouliot (2011) draw a sharp distinction between practices and institutions. However, they provide as examples of the practices a series of things (e.g. diplomacy, the balance of power, international law, human rights) that the ES would regard as institutions. We have therefore a confused picture in IR of the meaning of and

39

relationship between institutions and practices. With practices, as with institutions, the source of this confusion is reliance on stipulative definitions and the failure to ground interpretations in practitioner understandings and experience. Until definitions become more firmly grounded in the social reality of practitioner understandings and experience there is every likelihood that conceptualisations and disagreements will continue to proliferate and conceptual anarchy reign.

But a grounded *theory* of international institutions would go beyond definition and seek a general conceptual understanding of the role and relative importance of institutions, and an evaluation of how they might be made more effective or otherwise improved. It would be a general understanding, however, that emerged from the data, an 'insider' understanding of what those professionally or otherwise intimately involved in international relations conceive to be the role, relative importance, value, and potential for progressive change of institutions. Such an approach will not, of course, provide all the answers. But it holds out the prospect of grounding our understanding and evaluation of institutions in empirical reality, something which prevailing 'outsider' accounts, despite the importance they attach to empirical validation, have so far failed to do.

The Next Step
A grounded theory of international institutions along these lines, however, cannot be built overnight. The resource implications are considerable. To get such a project properly off the ground will require substantial institutional

40

funding. But this does not mean that the 'lone scholar', the main modality of research within the ES, cannot make progress on small projects, focussing on particular foreign service departments, particular groups of international civil servants, or particular gatherings of specific international fora. With regard to perceptions of the international institutional environment one can envisage interviews of experienced practitioners, supplemented by questionnaires, being a rich source of data. But it is only once the data is collected that the process of mapping, for the first time confidently, the institutional contours of international society can begin; and it is only once we have begun to put together a reliable map that we will be in a position to begin the job of exploring the terrain more theoretically.

One of the limitations of the approach is that it cannot be applied to historical international societies, or rather it can only be applied in the form of analysis of extant texts—historical documents, memoirs, personal papers and the like. But one of the advantages is that there is considerable scope for conducting GT research collectively, utilising a division of labour, and involving doctoral students, early-career researchers, as well as more seasoned scholars. In this sense the notion of an ES research 'project' (e.g. Clark, 2011: 49; Schouenborg, 2011: 28) can be made real and the problem of lack of cumulation which has dogged studies in the ES tradition for the first time significantly addressed. While it would be foolish to ignore the difficulties in producing a fully-fledged grounded theory the potential long-term gains are considerable. In the process the analytical promise of the ES, long recognised, could be substantially delivered.

41

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47

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[2] Note, however, that for James diplomacy is a prerequisite of both an international society and an international system. It is hard to conceive of relations of any scale or significance occurring, according to James (1993a; 1993b), without the system of communication called diplomacy.

[3] Some of the likely construction difficulties are pointed out in Evans and Wilson (1992: 340-41) and Dunne (1995: 140-43). A more positive assessment is provided in Buzan's (1993) classic article.

[4] This is Buzan's list of contemporary (cf. historical) institutions. Changes in and of primary institutions occur over time.

[5] Common ground between Holsti and the ES is substantial e.g. regarding: membership of the 'club of states' (pp. 117, 121); the relationship between sovereignty, law, and international order (pp.118, 142); the importance of normative rules (pp.174, 304); and on the ethical merits of international society (p.323). Note also his recent inclusion (and largely positive assessment of Bull) in Navari's explicitly ES 2009 volume.

[6] Something, incidentally, that Bull mentioned in one of his early essays (1966: 48) but did not develop.

[7] Note, however, that Holsti comes very close to conceiving the balance of power as an institution (according to his own definition) in a paragraph on the strong anti-hegemonial tendencies of international society (Holsti, 2004: 306-7; see also 313).

[8] Schouenborg (2011: 32-3) arrives at this formulation following engagement with Ian Clark's argument that legitimacy is a 'more fundamental' property of international society than an institution. But Buzan's 'membership' functional category accommodates the notion of *rightful* membership. Therefore to add 'legitimacy' to 'membership' seems on the face of it superfluous.

54

[9] A few years earlier Nicholas Onuf (2002: 223) spotted a possible paradox: 'Short lists of international institutions belie claims of historical grounding, and they betray a narrow set of assumptions about what rules do and what institutions count. Long, open-ended lists would honour the historical record, but they would also make any general pattern or developmental tendency impossible to discern'.

[10] A lot, of course, depends on what one means by 'sovereignty'. Conceptualizations abound (see e.g. James, 1986, 1999; Jackson, 2007). Note that according to Schouenborg (2011: 36-7) international law should not be considered an institution at all since 'explicit rule-making' is a property of *all* institutions.

[11] It should also be noted that his use of the term institutions is not entirely consistent. He sometimes uses it to signify (in Buzan's scheme) secondary as well as primary institutions (see e.g. pp. 4, 19, 20, 28, 305).

[12] It might be contended that summitry is an aspect of the larger institution of diplomacy. In response it could be said: (a) summitry performs a variety of functions not of all of them diplomatic e.g. enhancing the domestic political prestige of the participants, raising the international profile of the host venue, putting the host venue of the economic/tourist map; and (b) if territoriality, statehood and sovereignty can be conceived as separate institutions, why not summitry and diplomacy? See Dunn (1996).

[13] Which Butterfield (1965: 9) contended must be possible otherwise people would be 'for ever locked away from one another' and all generations (and by extension all classes, nations, cultures, professions, etc.) 'must be regarded as a world and a law unto themselves'.

[14] Note in this regard Dunne's (2001b: 230) observation that Buzan and Little (2000) pursue 'a quasi-positivist approach to history that is at odds with the hermeneutic approach of earlier English School research'.

[15] Seminal works include Glaser and Strauss (1968), Hood (1983), Biernacki (1986), Chenitz and Swanson (1986), Charmaz (1991).

[16] Drawing primarily on Glaser and Strauss (2008 [1967]), Charmaz (1995) and Charmaz (2006).

55

[17] Navari (2009b; 2011) emphasises the importance of intentionality in ES thinking and its concern with conduct—self-conscious acts informed to a greater or lesser extent by normative rules—rather than 'raw' behaviour.

[18] Neumann (2011: 1) describes his work as a 'historically informed ethnography of diplomacy'. It contains many valuable observations and provides a texture to our understanding of diplomacy missing in many general accounts. However I must confess that I find Neumann's approach insufficiently systematic to produce the 'relatively objective' knowledge called for in this article. He feeds his data through extant and favoured analytical constructs (principally Foucault on discourse, power, and knowledge production; Taylor on the 'heroic' and 'bureaucratic' stories of the 'Western self') too early in the research process. While in the spirit of Anthropology he acknowledges the importance of non-judgmental and data-led theory (see e.g. p. 187), in terms of GT he forces the data.

[19] Intriguingly, not long before he died Hedley Bull submitted a proposal to the Ford Foundation to conduct an ethnographic study of diplomacy (Der Derian, 1996: 85, 97).

Table 1: Institutions of International Society: Wight

Wight 1	Wight 2	Wight 3
Diplomacy	Messengers	Diplomacy
Alliances	Conferences & International institutions	Alliances
Guarantees	Diplomatic language	Balance of Power
War	Trade	Guarantees
Neutrality		Arbitration
		War

Table 2: Institutions of International Society: Wight according to Bull

Wight according to Bull 1	Wight according to Bull 2
Alliances	International law
Diplomacy	Resident embassies
War	Great powers
	Balance of power

Table 3: Institutions of International Society: Bull

Bull 1: P5	Bull 2	Bull 3
Balance of power	States	Balance of power
International law	Balance of power	International law
Diplomacy	International law	Diplomacy
War	Diplomacy	International organizations
Great power concert	War	Great power concert
	Great power concert	

Table 4: Institutions and Principles of International Society: Mayall

Institutions	Principles
Diplomacy	Sovereignty
International law	Territorial integrity
Great power concert	Non-intervention
Balance of power (?)	Self-determination
Sovereignty (?)	Non-discrimination
War (?)	Human rights
	Balance of power

Table 5: Primary Institutions of International Society: Buzan

Master Institutions	Derivative Institutions
Sovereignty	Non-Intervention
	Law
Territoriality	Boundaries

Diplomacy	Bilateralism
	Multilateralism
Great power management	Alliances
	War
	Balance of power
Equality of people	Human rights
	Humanitarian intervention
Market	Trade liberalization
	Financial liberalization
	Hegemonic stability
Nationalism	Self-determination
	Popular sovereignty
	Democracy
Environmental stewardship	Species survival
	Climatic stability

Table 6: Institutions of International Society: Holsti

Foundational Institutions	Procedural Institutions
Sovereignty	Diplomacy
Territoriality	Trade
Law	Colonialism
State?	War
	Market?
	International monetary system?
	Aid?

Table 7: Schouenborg's constitutive functional category and institutions

Legitimacy and membership	Sovereignty
	Dynasticism
	Popular will
	Nationalism
	Communism
	Liberal democracy
	Standard of civilization
	Capacity to govern
	Peace-loving nation
	Human rights

Table 8: Schouenborg's regulative functional categories and institutions

Regulating conflicts	War
	Great power management
	Alliances

Trade	Relay trade
	Tribute systems
	Free trade
Authoritative communication	Messengers
	Diplomats
	Embassies
International organization	Religious sites and festivals
	Conferences and congresses
	Multilateralism