Chapter 5

‘A Common Interest in Common Interest’: Hedley Bull, Thomas Schelling and Collaboration in International Politics

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Hedley Bull wrote his modern classic *The Anarchical Society* in the office long occupied by the incumbent Professor of International Relations at The Australian National University. The holder of that post is now situated in the Hedley Bull Centre alongside us strategic studies people, for whom Bull stands as an important thinker in our own peculiar subject.¹ In particular, Bull’s 1968 essay in *World Politics*, ‘Strategic Studies and its Critics’² remains unsurpassed in its elegance and power, and in its attempt to defend the academic subject which some regarded then, and may still regard today, as morally and intellectually indefensible.

Thomas Schelling is one of the most influential, and certainly one of the most original, strategic thinkers of the nuclear age. Two years ago he was awarded a Nobel Prize in economics, the subject in which he was educated. But the prize was really for his contributions in applied political economy, celebrating his contributions to the understanding of the processes of international conflict. The main work in which he established this reputation, *The Strategy of Conflict*, was published in 1960, a decade and a half before Bull’s *Anarchical Society* appeared. *The Strategy of Conflict* is essential and provocative reading for anyone wanting to think seriously about strategy as a process of interdependent decision. It remains often cited in the international relations literature as well as in other fields.

This chapter is a preliminary exploration of a common interest in common interest which is apparent in the work of these two scholars. My analysis falls into two main parts. First, I will examine the roughly comparable locations of these two scholars in middle ground between pure cooperation and pure conflict in great power relations. Second, I will demonstrate the interest the two scholars had in each other’s work in the mid-1960s as a possible, although partial, explanation for this intellectual convergence. I will conclude by commenting

briefly on signs that Bull and Schelling were both attracted by the possibility of going beyond a mix of cooperation and competition in international politics to situations where pure coordination and cosmopolitan norms might just prevail.

Theorists of the Productive Middle Ground

Hedley Bull and Thomas Schelling can both be regarded as theorists of the middle ground. I do not mean to say that their work is neither one thing nor the other. I am not implying that their scholarship would appeal to Goldilocks who preferred baby bear's porridge because it was neither too hot nor too cold but 'just right'. Because of their sheer intellectual energy Bull and Schelling probably escape the academic version of the judgment heaped on the Church of Laodicea through John's revelation from God that 'because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth'.³

Instead Bull and Schelling manage to mark out a powerful theoretical middle ground between rival and rather extreme positions on the nature of international politics. The similar location they occupy explains the richness of their respective contributions. However this similarity may not be immediately obvious given the differences in the language they use and also in their disciplinary backgrounds.

Bull's international society approach falls in between the unrelenting conflict of Hobbesian realism and the utopian harmony of Kantian universalism. As Bull explains it in his best known work: 'International politics, in the Grotian understanding, expresses neither complete conflict of interest between states nor complete identity of interest: it resembles a game that is partly distributive but also partly productive.'⁴ His comments at a 1962 meeting of the British Committee on the Theory of International Politics offer an especially useful explanation of this approach and are worth quoting at some length:

Grotius, you will recall, wrote in the situation of international anarchy in which the authority of divine law had broken down; in which the positive law, as it were, of Pope and Emperor had broken down; and in which there were really two views in the field; on the one hand the Machiavellian view that because there was no superior authority over sovereign states, there was really therefore no law or no authority binding on sovereign princes; and the other view ... that the only way to get order among princes was to re-establish some kind of universal state—to re-establish some sort of superior authority. ... Now Grotius was trying to produce a third alternative between these two conceptions, and he found it in the notion that there was an international society—a society of states—which was morally binding and which was a real force even in the absence of any superior authority. The main grounds for his asserting the validity of such a system was his attempt to restate the

doctrine of Natural Law: that there were moral and legal rules which were natural in the sense that they did not derive from God, and in the sense that they were not positive and did not derive from human will, but were obvious to all human beings.⁵

Bull's formulation of the mix of conflict and cooperation in international politics, which I quoted before this longer extract, could easily have been written by Schelling, although he might have said it about strategic relationships specifically rather than international politics in general. Schelling did not identify himself with a particular International Relations tradition. He talked about his work in developing a theory of strategy in pioneering terms as 'something ... that looks like a mixture of game theory, organization theory, communication theory, theory of evidence, theory of choice, and theory of collective decision'.⁶ I remember my first interview with Schelling when he said that he had not been aware of the literature on the balance of power when he developed his thinking on stability, an accusation which could never be made of Bull. This made me revise my account of where Schelling's approach to stability came from (and to contrast it with the different origins of Bull's and Henry Kissinger's).⁷

Instead, Schelling's middle ground approach is best appreciated in terms of microeconomics, the subject in which he was educated. His theoretical focus is on bargaining processes in situations of oligopoly where there are only a few sellers in the market (more like the relationship between Qantas and Virgin Blue than between the many restaurants in Sydney). This results in situations of imperfect competition where behaviour lies somewhere in between the conditions of pure competition (where business survival can be a cut-throat affair) and pure control (where complete monopoly reigns).⁸ These are Schelling's economic analogies of Bull's Hobbesian and Kantian worlds respectively.

Schelling uses this approach to understand strategy as a non-zero sum game (partly distributive and also partly productive) where actors are related to one another by a mixture of competition and cooperation in their interests and behaviour. These games are prevalent in relationships among actors who have the capacity to cause considerable harm to one another, and who in doing so would also damage themselves. In other words, these actors have a common interest in restraining the harm they cause one another, just as unionists and employers have a common interest in finding a bargain between their competing demands.

Bull and Schelling therefore have a common interest in common interest, albeit for somewhat uncommon academic reasons. For both authors, these common interests could be played out through informal institutions (that is, through patterns of collaborative behaviour) as well as (or in Schelling's case instead of) formal ones such as the United Nations. Schelling had a particular interest in tacit bargaining—where the parties would signal their intentions and

agreement through their strategic behaviour rather than through any explicit formal agreement. Bull argued in a broader sense that order was quite possible without formal government. This assessment built on his reading of the anthropology of pre-modern African societies. At one stage he comments that 'international society is an anarchical society, a society without government. But primitive stateless societies also present this spectacle of "ordered anarchy"'.⁹ Contemporary social scientific research thus held an interest for Bull as well as for Schelling who was a wide and eclectic reader.

Both thinkers had a strong interest in consistent patterns of behaviour which could comprise these sometimes informal institutions. This is the basis for what Bull refers to as order, his central preoccupation as a theorist,¹⁰ and for what Schelling refers to as stability. Schelling's fascination with stability—consistent patterns of behaviour around which the expectations and behaviour of strategic actors (such as states) could converge—relied heavily on the insight that these actors were bound together by interdependent relationships. As they interacted and began to appreciate the reciprocal nature of their relationship, patterns could form as the participants tacitly agreed on limits beyond which their behaviour should not be allowed to go.

For Bull, the interest in patterns of behaviour was also very strong. Kai Alderson and Andrew Hurrell write of the

central idea in Bull's work that rules, laws and conventions can, and often do, emerge without an overarching authority on the basis of shared interests. They are of mutual benefit because they help shape expectations, increase the predictability of international life, and thereby reduce uncertainty and insecurity.¹¹

We could substitute Schelling's name for Bull's here without doing any violence to either thinker.

But in Bull's work one gets the sense that the common interests between actors do not so much as follow from their interdependence and interaction but are a prior basis for it. Strongly influenced as he was by Martin Wight's emphasis on the importance of history in international affairs,¹² Bull argued that a strong historical basis, 'a common culture or civilisation', is required to 'underlie an international society'. The features involved here may include 'a common language, a common epistemology and understanding of the universe, a common religion, a common ethical code' which 'may make for easier communication and closer awareness and understanding between one state and another, and thus facilitate the definition of common rules and the evolution of common institutions' or 'may reinforce the sense of common interests that impels states to accept common rules and institutions with a sense of common values'.¹³ In other words, a rich tapestry of collective experience and outlook allows for

effective cooperation. The states involved might be regarded as *natural* collaborators because of this common history. This is certainly the impression one gains from Bull's appreciation of European international society.

Bull tends to define order as something distinct from the rules which contribute to it. The mere existence of limits on behaviour may not be sufficient for order. There needs to be an understanding of the broader purposes which shape the use of these rules. These goals may owe something to natural law, in the way Bull cites Grotius above,¹⁴ even though in his early work Bull seemed to prefer the pluralism and positivism of another international lawyer, Lassa Oppenheim,¹⁵ whose approach might just have appealed to Schelling. As Alderson and Hurrell write:

Bull differed from US theorists of cooperation ... on the importance that he attached to the close study of state practice and to the historical processes by which understandings of common interest evolved and changed through time. ... Rationalist models of cooperation may indeed explain how cooperation is possible once the parties have come to believe that they form part of a shared project. ... But rational prudence alone cannot explain the initiation of the game and why each player individually might choose to begin to cooperate.¹⁶

Schelling's explanation for the patterns of collaboration between states who observe common rules is more ahistorical and social scientific. At times he may stray close to being included in Bull's criticism 'that the practitioners of the scientific approach [to international relations], by cutting themselves off from history and philosophy, have ... a view of their subject and its possibilities that is callow and brash',¹⁷ even though Bull numerous indicated he regarded Schelling as a scientific theorist who rose above some of these problems. For Schelling, the great power collaboration which mattered most, between the Cold War foes the United States and the Soviet Union, arose from a largely blank canvas. They had antithetical politics and what they lacked in communication they more than made up for in mutual suspicion. They were not natural collaborators by any stretch of the imagination. But they could still be expected to work together. Bull's European great powers were longstanding dance partners; Schelling's superpowers were going on a rather risky blind date.

Schelling faced a somewhat uphill battle in selling the argument that the two superpower adversaries could be expected to cooperate, writing as he was in the tensest portions of the Cold War in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Here he relied heavily on the logic of deductive reasoning (as opposed to inductive studies drawn from observing detailed superpower behaviour which would have appealed more to Bull). For example, one of his sources for the argument that potentially competitive actors could stabilise their behaviour around focal points came in the form of the completely unrelated experiments conducted in

the 1930s by the social psychologist Muzafer Sherif who had asked participants to identify the location of a point of light shining onto a screen.¹⁸ These findings indicated that the differences between individual estimations of the point's location were reduced significantly when the same individuals were operating as a group. In other words, when interaction occurred, convergence around common norms became likely. This allows what scholars have come to call strategic learning¹⁹—a phenomenon Bull also believed was possible,²⁰ although not necessarily for the same reasons.

For Schelling, the act of interaction (even between states with little naturally or historically in common) could produce its own culture and common values which underlies cooperation and thus stability. This seems the opposite of Bull where the common values precede the cooperation. In Schelling's theorising, where stability depends on the extent to which common rules are observed, the act of restraint, the limit itself, is essentially equivalent to order. If one finds a pattern of behaviour, if one finds behaviour conducted within limits, one has found stability.²¹ One can even find order in conflict itself. Actors who are fighting one another do not necessarily miss out on order because of the obvious evidence of a record of violence between them: they can still find order within the conflict process. Indeed, Schelling noted in an interview that the steady state of violence on the western front in the First World War constituted stability.

For Bull, war is one of the institutions of international society²² which contributes to order as a 'means of enforcing international law, of preserving the balance of power, and, arguably, of promoting changes in the law generally regarded as just.'²³ Once again there is a separation between the ingredients for order and the order itself. Bull is explicit here about the political uses of, and constraints on, violence. This corresponds rather well to the relationship between military means and political ends, and the ideas of limited war, we can find in Clausewitz. For Schelling, stability existed within the microeconomics of violence rather than in the broader system of international politics—closer to the interactive side of Clausewitz's writings on strategy where war can have a logic all of its own. Schelling focused on the potential for violent (or other harmful) interaction to explode and on the need for restraint to ensure this did not happen. He identified that restraint with decisions on the way in which violence was threatened and applied, and not back to the broader purposes of international society. The political implications are in the background, but they tend to be assumed rather than spelled out.

While Schelling's analysis is also less historically informed than Bull's, it does allow for the significance of track records. For example, earlier resting places or bargains can act as precedents which guide the stabilisation of future behaviour. In the writing where he first explores his theory of bargaining, Schelling draws upon his experience working in the Marshall Plan authority in Europe to suggest

that the allocation of foreign assistance had a tendency to following earlier patterns.²⁴ Whether these allocations were a good outcome for all concerned was not the point; even an arbitrary and undeserved distribution of benefits might act as a self-reinforcing precedent which can shape future behaviour, although notions of fairness (for example, a natural 50/50 split) can come into play but more because of their salience than their justice. For Bull, however, order is much more than following a mere pattern: At the start of *The Anarchical Society*, he argues:

The order which men look for in social life is not any pattern or regularity in the relations of human individuals or groups, but a pattern that leads to a particular result, an arrangement of social life such that it promotes certain goals or values.²⁵

And in the build-up to this passage he argues that 'a pattern may be evident in the behavior of men or groups of men in violent conflict with one another, yet this situation we should characterise as disorderly.'²⁶

For Bull, order needed to be a good pattern. Indeed Bull argues that 'states in the Grotian view are bound not only by rules of prudence or expediency but also by imperatives of morality and law'.²⁷ Stanley Hoffman writes that 'Bull's concern for international society and his interest in moral conceptions are inextricably linked'.²⁸ One does find a similar demarcation in Schelling's work between patterns in general and those particular patterns which involved order; one could expect that the former meant the latter. Schelling once told me that stability was a popular word because of the assumption that it implies something beneficial, whereas it was really an objective characteristic of all sorts of systems. He was willing to attribute the quality of stability to almost any pattern in any situation, including into war itself. Hence Schelling's rather controversial interest in intrawar deterrence, which is not too far from Herman Kahn's colourful and almost unbelievable explorations of the dynamics of nuclear exchanges. Even so, this work might be defended on the basis that such deterrence might limit the further spread of violence beyond the initial nuclear exchange. Indeed it can be argued that Schelling had certain purposes for these patterns in mind: the deterrence of initial war and the limitation of any subsequent violence based on a clear pattern which reinforces those limits.

The appeal of almost any pattern in Schelling's universe does not mean that stability is a naturally occurring phenomenon which turns up almost by accident. It is not like the Newtonian and pre-Napoleonic view of a self-correcting balance of power where the great states mirrored the self-maintaining positions of the planets.²⁹ Schelling's working assumption was that strategic actors tended to behave rationally and certainly purposefully as they sought to enhance their interests. These actors could be expected rather to utilise, construct, and even manipulate patterns which supported those purposes, although there was always

going to be a bargain between the varying self-interest of the participating actors. Schelling did not expect these actors always and everywhere to act rationally. But as an economist, even a heterodox one, he was still inclined to view such an assumption as a useful starting point: 'The premise of "rational behavior" is a potent one for the production of theory. Whether the resulting theory provides good or poor insight into actual behavior is ... a matter for subsequent judgment.'³⁰ Some of Schelling's detractors who regarded him as a dangerous mathematician of violence³¹ may have ignored this subtle but important distinction.

One can find an outwardly very similar logic in Bull's comment that the assumption of rationality, at work in much American international relations thinking was 'only good for formal theorising'.³² But Bull's qualification is much more serious than Schelling's. This is not so much because Bull entirely dismissed the sort of formal theory which Schelling found useful. As James L. Richardson has pointed out, Bull was at times an admirer of aspects of the behaviourist turn in American international relations thinking which at other times he seemed all too happy to debunk.³³ But it is certainly the case that formal theory had far less appeal to Bull who (with the rest of the English School) did not tend to indulge in it. And there were times when he felt that the formal theorists were asking rather too much of real-life strategic actors.

Bull's most memorable and quoted passage on that subject is his comment that the rational strategic man is 'a man who on further acquaintance reveals himself as a university professor of unusual intellectual subtlety'.³⁴ It is more than a little likely that he had Schelling in mind when making this comment. In an essay written ten years later, Bull repeats this splendid line and then adds:

I have also criticised Schelling's theories about force and bargaining, which are primarily and consciously an extrapolation of 'rational strategic action', on the ground that he is inclined to confuse them with descriptions of actual situations and with policy prescriptions.³⁵

This criticism came in Bull's review of Schelling's *Arms and Influence*. This ambitious book takes the bargaining theory developed in *The Strategy of Conflict* and extends it almost to breaking point in suggesting the possibilities of exploiting the power to hurt. Schelling's brilliance in making these arguments was not in doubt. But Bull argues that

there can be no substitute for studying the record of what the governments of the United States, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, China, and France actually do and think. Principles of strategic 'rationality' can help us frame hypotheses about this record but we must resist the temptation to use them as a shortcut.³⁶

Such a comment might be made about all sorts of theoretical reasoning in international relations and strategic studies.

Bull's circumspection about rationality reflected his education in disciplines other than economics. As Stanley Hoffman argues:

Hedley Bull was no believer in the ordinary rationality of states, nor in the usefulness of developing prescriptions for rational action, because he was even more pessimistic than the realists. To them, departures from the norm are exceptions; to Hedley Bull, stupidity, folly, miscalculations, and mischief were always possible.³⁷

Schelling wasn't really a realist either. Not because he was more pessimistic like Bull, but possibly because he was more optimistic than many realists given his assertion of the possibility for strategic cooperation in a way which might position his work as a preliminary to the hopes of the neoliberal institutionalists of the 1970s.

Schelling also recognised the possibility for mischief and miscalculation, including the parallels he drew between the crisis of August 1914 and those of the nuclear age.³⁸ He was concerned that the reciprocally reinforcing expectations and fears of the participants might so easily lead to the outcome that none of them might ordinarily wish for. But he still retained more faith than Bull in the innate rationality of strategic actors, partly because what was irrational for the international system as a whole could sometimes be the product of individual rationalities.³⁹ Stupid outcomes did not mean that the actors who contributed them were similarly unwise—there might be temptations to defect from mutually beneficial bargains which few actors could possibly resist. Rousseau's colourful stag-hunting metaphor of what would come to be called 'the prisoner's dilemma' makes the same suggestion.

Bull set higher standards against which he expected the great powers in particular to act, at least in principle. The great powers were the great responsables (or at least ought to be) who, because of their privileged position and the unequal influence they wielded, had particular obligations to international order.⁴⁰ Historically, at certain times in the European states system (for example, the Concert of Europe) they had delivered on this potential. These same powers, to the extent that they formed an international society, could draw on common standards, rules and behaviour. But in practice Bull expected to be more disappointed because of the very frailty (and vainglory) of those actors in a way that any reader of the power politics literature might agree.

Schelling's norms were much more created than made. They could be introduced on the spot. From the Cuban missile crisis Schelling detected a tacit agreement by the Americans and Soviets, constrained by the awful consequences of a failure to limit their interaction, to prevent things from spreading beyond

the confines of the Caribbean.⁴¹ Norms of behaviour such as these might seem more wobbly than Bull's conventions which were part of an ongoing international society. Schelling's norms of behaviour did not come from a *noblesse oblige* built up historically in a society of states. Instead, in a thermonuclear age where the superpowers could blow most things to smithereens, the Americans and the Russians had little choice but to restrain their behaviour and keep restraining it. In *Arms and Influence*, Schelling argues:

Now we are in an era in which the power to hurt ... is commensurate with the power to take and to hold, perhaps more than commensurate, perhaps decisive, and it is even more necessary to think of warfare as a process of violent bargaining.⁴²

Stability could rest on some rather ghastly foundations: Schelling compared the bargain implicit in mutual nuclear deterrence to the much older practice of exchanging hostages who would thus act rather like human shields.⁴³ But, precisely because Schelling was less demanding about the goodness of patterns (and at the same time more optimistic about the actors' capacity for observing them), he found more room for hope that conventions might be observed. The *logic* of restraint is thus stronger in Schelling's work.

The Bull–Schelling Connection

This is where the work of these two scholars connects in quite a direct way—in the creation of a system of rules for the management of the challenges of an age of nuclear weapons. This is not evident in Bull's *Anarchical Society*—which does not cite the then Harvard University Professor, but which cites Coral Bell, and the sometimes overlooked but brilliant work of Morton Kaplan, and misspells Samuel Huntington's surname. However, Bull's earlier and magisterial *Control of the Arms Race* contains the politically incorrect argument that 'the maintenance of a stable Soviet–Western balance may require high levels and advanced kinds of arguments, and may even be served by the further prosecution of the arms race in certain fields'.⁴⁴ His footnote to that point is as follows: 'The most persuasive exponent of these arguments has been Professor Thomas C. Schelling of Harvard University, to whose work on the theory of arms control, and especially on the problems of surprise attack, I am especially indebted.'⁴⁵ It is important to note here that Bull not only cited relevant parts of Schelling's *Strategy of Conflict*, but also two of Schelling's journal articles from 1960 which indicate he was an avid reader of the American strategist.

Bull had visited the east coast of the United States in September 1957 and met Schelling.⁴⁶ At that time the American thinker's work on strategic bargaining and the limitation of armed conflict was gaining influence through the publication of essays which were to find their way into *The Strategy of Conflict*. It was also the period in which Bull was rejecting the much more absolutist logic of complete

disarmament which he had encountered as a scholar assisting the former British politician Philip Noel-Baker.⁴⁷ Bull's assault in 1959 on Noel-Baker's book, which had been published the previous year under the title *The Arms Race*, carries little direct sign of an awareness of Schelling's work,⁴⁸ but this influence was to become more apparent in Bull's work within the next two years.

Bull's *Control of the Arms Race*, officially the product of an Institute for Strategic Studies working group, but really the work of the author, found an admirer in Schelling who reviewed it in pre-publication form for the Institute's new journal *Survival*. Schelling found it to be a 'cool and competent envelopment of recent strategic thinking in a political treatise on international violence'.⁴⁹ He applauded the 'genius' of Bull's book in putting 'the problem of war in political, historical, and moral perspective'⁵⁰—something the reviewer himself could not have been accused of doing. But it is evident that Schelling considered himself the more original thinker. He argues that 'Bull's careful analysis turns up no new ideas', and might even have been thinking of his own *Strategy of Conflict* in arguing that, had Bull published a year earlier, it 'would have been unique in its application of military reasoning to arms control'.⁵¹

This is not an opinion shared by all. Robert O'Neill and David Schwartz, who two decades ago edited a retrospective volume containing Bull's main works on arms control, call him 'one of its most original and penetrating contributors'.⁵² Even so, a contrast can be made from 1961 between Hedley Bull, a young scholar not yet 30 whose broader ideas on international relations were still evolving, and Thomas Schelling, ten years his senior, who had by that time erected an enduring and mature framework of strategic analysis. In any case, Bull got his own back in a 1967 review of Schelling's *Arms and Influence*. On the eve of his arrival as The Australian National University's second Professor of International Relations, Bull wrote:

This book does not add any major ideas to the stock of very remarkable ones that are contained in Thomas Schelling's writings. But it brings the old ideas together in a more or less orderly exposition: it spells some of them out more fully; it detaches some of them from the framework of the general theory of conflict and places them in the context of an analysis of international relations; and it demonstrates that the author has been reading some translations of the classics.⁵³

That last judgement may have been aimed at Schelling's citation of Xenophon's account of the Persian Expedition:⁵⁴ far from being a long-term influence on his earlier theory, Schelling told me he in an interview that he had simply found the translation in an airport bookstand.

Schelling would himself publish an influential volume in 1961 on the same subject. This was *Strategy and Arms Control*⁵⁵ which Schelling co-authored

with Morton Halperin. Along with Bull's book and a collection edited by Donald G. Brennan,⁵⁶ also published in 1961, these formed the trio of arms control classics for the nuclear age. Schelling and Halperin saw their work as being less concerned with the broader political context of arms control. They advertised their work as concentrating on the 'military environment' rather than the 'more purely political and psychological consequences'⁵⁷ of arms control. Indeed in an interview I conducted in 1996, Schelling told me that they had made a deliberate decision to exclude political considerations so as to emphasise the military element. To some extent this may have been a matter of brand differentiation; after all, they had access to an early draft of Bull's book while writing their own text. But it also reflected Schelling's theoretical predisposition as a microeconomist to use parsimonious models of strategic behaviour which assume away broader contextual factors.

Stanley Hoffman explains the distinction by stating that Bull's

work on arms control ... was planted firmly in a political context, unlike, for instance, the contribution of Thomas Schelling. Like Schelling, Hedley Bull emphasised the unity of strategic doctrine and of arms control; unlike him, Bull also believed in the unity of all military policies (whether strategic or arms control) and foreign policy.⁵⁸

One of Schelling's most vivid phrases is 'the diplomacy of violence',⁵⁹ by which he means the informal and tacit but powerful messages which the use of armed force can deliver. Bull spent a good deal of his time appreciating the broader political and diplomatic context in which those messages might be transmitted.

This early 1960s connection between Bull and Schelling suggests a mutual respect between the two authors, and also a degree of competition in their approach. But what can it tell us about the title of this paper—their common interest in common interest? One sign of a connection in this regard comes in Bull's discussion mid-way through *The Control of the Arms Race* of explicit arms control agreements between the powers. Cautioning against the belief in disarmament agreements as a solution to the competition for military advantage, he writes that

an agreement, if it is reached, represents not the discovery of the solution to a problem, but *the striking of a bargain*. As in other kinds of bargaining agreements may emerge when proposals are worked out that advance the interests of both without injuring the interests of either.⁶⁰

There are no footnotes to this section, but the italicised phrase 'the striking of a bargain' and the reference to other kinds of bargaining which advance both sides interests without harming either one of them is, in my opinion, close to pure Schelling.

For Schelling, strategy was all about bargaining situations. The ability to strike bargains was the secret to stable strategic relations. In *The Strategy of Conflict*, he writes:

A bargain is struck when somebody makes a final, sufficient concession. ... There is some range of alternative outcomes in which any point is better for both sides than no agreement at all. To insist on any such point is pure bargaining, since one always would take less rather than reach no agreement at all, and since one always can recede if retreat proves necessary to agreement.⁶¹

This encapsulates the two points evident in Bull's comment about arms control agreements: that they involve the striking of a bargain, and that they represent a common interest between parties who might otherwise harm one another's interests if they are not able to agree.

Rather than Bull's emphasis on explicit and formal arms control agreements, Schelling's argument deals more with implicit or tacit bargains—where the parties somehow coordinate informally their behaviour around focal points which stand out from the background like the 38th parallel in Korea. Bull certainly has an interest in the informal arrangements which can produce order in the absence of formal government. In a conversation I was able to have in 2007 when she was visiting Australia, Mary Bull noted her late husband's interest in tacit agreements and in Schelling's work in this area. But Hedley Bull was, at least by 1967, not so sure about tacit agreements. He writes

that there are such agreements, that they play a very important part in the structure of international relationships, and that Schelling has done a great service by opening up this question, is beyond dispute. ... But he has done nothing to produce by way of evidence except speculations. I find it hard to recognise American and Soviet behaviour in his picture of two governments orchestrated by purposive individuals, sending and receiving messages and ironing out understandings in these ... fields with scarcely as much as a nod or a wink.⁶²

This is not to imply that Bull regarded Schelling's general contribution as wanting. In one of his most prominent essays published a year earlier, Bull argued that Schelling

has contributed as much as and perhaps more than any other thinker of the scientific genre to the theory of international relations. His elaboration of the notion of arms control, the elements of deterrence, the nature of bargaining, the place in international relations of threats of force are of a rare originality and importance and will probably prove to have a lasting impression on the theory and, indeed, the practice of these matters.⁶³

My analysis of this Bull–Schelling connection may seem a little strained. After all, a good deal of the inspiration for Schelling’s argument about the striking of bargains by parties due to their common interest in avoiding mutual harm is associated from his non-zero-sum reformulation of game theory. Such formal and potentially pseudo-scientific treatments of international behaviour held little water for one of the founders of the English school of international relations who railed against false quantification. The immediately previous quotation praising Schelling comes from his essay ‘International Relations: The Case for a Classical Approach’, in which Bull made some fairly swingeing attacks on those who would view international politics as a science reducible to experimentally testable hypotheses.⁶⁴

But Schelling was a very unorthodox game theorist, interested not in the artificial production of numerical answers to qualitative problems, but in the powerful ideas which game theory helped isolate—including the interdependence of adversaries’ behaviour and interests. And in a 1972 essay, which ended up in *Australian Outlook*—the precursor to today’s *Australian Journal of International Affairs*—and which began as a paper read to an Australian National University Department of International Relations seminar, Bull points out that some of the formal theorists were more than worth paying attention to. Recalling the piece he had written some six years earlier, Bull writes:

I also make it clear that some of the theorists whose work I classified as ‘scientific’ have made major contributions to the study of international relations. I have, for example, heaped high praise on Morton Kaplan and Karl Deutsch [two of the founders of the systems approach to international relations].

And then he goes straight on:

while Thomas Schelling I consider to be one of the major thinkers of the era, one of the few figures to have worked in international relations whose ideas have penetrated far beyond the subject to become part of the general intellectual culture of the age.

In concluding this assessment, Bull nails the informality of Schelling’s formal theorising by saying: ‘My argument was that “scientific” theorists who had made significant contributions did so by failing to adhere to their own methodological principles and reverting to the “classical” style of argument.’⁶⁵ Indeed in an earlier essay he had observed very shrewdly that ‘a number of strategists, like Thomas Schelling who have mastered this technique, but in their work exercises in game theory serve only to illustrate points that are independently arrived at’.⁶⁶

Bull’s comments could not have been more apt in terms of Schelling’s own scholarship. What Bull saw as admirable as a classical theorist was objectionable

to the gatekeepers of the formal game theory. When Schelling's *Strategy of Conflict* was reviewed by leading game theorist Martin Shubik, the following criticism resulted:

It is my opinion that this book would have been a much stronger contribution had most of the references to game theory been deleted. Although the formal structure of the topic could have been of considerable assistance to the type of analysis presented by Schelling, there is little evidence that it has been used.⁶⁷

Schelling's work was also criticised for similar formal inadequacies by Oskar Morgenstern⁶⁸ (one of game theory's giants), who wrote a few years later that 'the theory of games is a mathematical discipline designed to treat rigorously the question of optimal behavior of participants in games of strategy and to determine the resulting equilibria'.⁶⁹ Rather interestingly, Bull observed in 1968 that, 'as far as I know, the only person who has claimed that game theory presents a method of solving strategic problems is Oskar Morgenstern of Princeton University'.⁷⁰ It is quite clear that Bull regarded himself on Schelling's side of the game theory debate. Not only did he reject the more quantitative approach, he also evidently had little time for the claims that Schelling's adaptation of game theory to strategic thinking was dangerous, calling Anatol Rapoport's work 'wrong-headed but subtle and powerful'.⁷¹

A Common Interest in Pure Cooperation?

Bull and Schelling drew strength from a shared realisation that informal collaboration between the great powers, or the nuclear-armed superpowers, was possible in the absence of an overarching sovereign. An international version of Hobbes' leviathan was not necessary. This collaboration was possible because the great powers were interrelated by common interest as well as competitive interest: they could limit the latter (according to Bull if they so chose as responsible heirs of the European international society and according to Schelling if they appreciated the nuclear predicament which made cooperation a requirement for survival).

But there is also a sense in both scholars' writings that the common interest can be extended much further towards situations of purer cooperation where the competitive element in international politics is almost obscured. In Schelling's work, this approach is evident in *The Strategy of Conflict* where he draws on theories of pure coordination where social units need to maximise their collaboration to emerge with a common focus or pattern.⁷² This encourages a potentially hazardous optimism. For example, Schelling regarded the limits being observed by US action in Vietnam in the mid-1960s as an important case of strategic bargaining, where those limits were being clearly communicated to North Vietnam.⁷³ But the likelihood of success relied on Schelling's universalistic

assumption that Hanoi was motivated by common as well as competitive interests. North Vietnam's political interests turned out to be much more zero-sum than he perhaps realised, and the moderating impact of nuclear weapons upon state ambitions did not extend as far as he had thought.

Schelling has been criticised for an approach which encourages the exploitation of violence in international affairs and risks making the world a more dangerous and violent place.⁷⁴ But here he emerges as rather too optimistic about the possibilities of strategic cooperation and the limitation of violence, and possibly exaggerates the extent of common interest between strategic actors. Yet it is this sort of logic which helps explain the award of the Nobel Prize, and the appeal of his work beyond strategic studies into sociology and theories of international regimes.

Bull's contemporaneous work from the early 1960s can hardly be accused of excessive optimism. *The Control of the Arms Race* in particular resembles a demolition job on the arguments for international disarmament and leaves little room for notions of unrelenting international progress. Schelling catches this atmosphere well, noting in his review that he agreed with John Strachey that the book 'offers only wisdom and perspective rather than bright hopes'.⁷⁵ It is noticeable that strategic studies academics, whose subject displaces economics as the true dismal science, seem drawn to the noticeably pessimistic refrain in Bull's work of the 1960s which also infected good parts of *The Anarchical Society*.

But, as some scholars have observed, the so-called 'later Bull' seemed to allow more scope for what he called the 'solidarist' interpretation of international society where the interests of the whole international community would increasingly dominate the plural interests of individual states. This theme is evident in Bull's early work. It is certainly there in *The Anarchical Society*: Alderson and Hurrell note that one of the readers of the manuscript described the work as 'hopelessly over-optimistic'.⁷⁶ By the early 1980s, some of Bull's work may even risk echoing the Kantian arguments he rejected earlier on. For example, his arguments for the just treatment of 'third world' countries within the international system, and to 'some degree of commitment to the cause of individual human rights on a world scale'⁷⁷ seem some distance from the brilliant grumpiness of his earlier writings, partially infused as these were with the melancholy of power politics. This increasing cosmopolitan streak may help explain why Bull has been claimed by some scholars as an early constructivist.⁷⁸ The appeal here is not just because this later work might be read to imply the primacy of evolving social norms over hard power, but also because the evolution of Bull's own thinking might be read as an example of the social construction of ideas.

Of course, this also means that in Bull's work in particular there is something for just about everyone. It is just possible that a baby bear, mama bear and papa

bear would all find parts of his work to their liking, or at least tasty enough to require a response. The same is true for strategists, for members of the English School—both explicit and tacit, for positivist and post-positivist international relations scholars, and also for those who belong to more than one of these categories. This is why it is especially apt that so many of us will be inhabiting the Hedley Bull Centre.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ This chapter is based on a paper read to the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre seminar series, The Australian National University, August 2007.
- ² Hedley Bull, 'Strategic Studies and Its Critics', *World Politics*, vol. 20, no. 4, July 1968, pp. 593–605.
- ³ Revelation 3:16, *The Bible*, New International Version translation.
- ⁴ Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1977, pp. 26–27. On the consistent importance of common interests in Bull's view of international relations, see Kai Alderson and Andrew Hurrell, 'Bull's Conception of International Society', in Alderson and Hurrell (eds), *Hedley Bull on International Society*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2000, p. 5.
- ⁵ Hedley Bull, comments to the British Committee on the Theory of International Politics (Sunday afternoon, 15 April 1962, 2.30 pm–4.30 pm) in Alderson and Hurrell, *Hedley Bull on International Society*, pp. 119–20.
- ⁶ Thomas C. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1960, pp. 14–15.
- ⁷ See Robert Ayson, *Thomas Schelling and the Nuclear Age: Strategy as Social Science*, Frank Cass, London, 2004, pp. 54–57.
- ⁸ Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict*, p. 5.
- ⁹ Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*, p. 59.
- ¹⁰ See R.J. Vincent, 'Order in International Politics', in J.D.B. Miller and R.J. Vincent (eds), *Order and Violence: Hedley Bull and International Relations*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1990, p. 38. Also see Alderson and Hurrell, 'Bull's Conception of International Society', p. 3.
- ¹¹ Alderson and Hurrell, 'Bull's Conception of International Society', pp. 5–6.
- ¹² See J.D.B. Miller, 'Hedley Bull, 1932–1985', in Miller and Vincent (eds), *Order and Violence: Hedley Bull and International Relations*, pp. 4–5.
- ¹³ Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*, p. 16.
- ¹⁴ Hedley Bull, 'The Grotian Conception of International Society', in Herbert Butterfield and Martin Wight (eds), *Diplomatic Investigations: Essays on the Theory of International Politics*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1966, pp. 70–71.
- ¹⁵ Bull, 'The Grotian Conception of International Society', pp. 65 and 67.
- ¹⁶ Kai Alderson and Andrew Hurrell, 'International Society and the Academic Study of International Relations', in Alderson and Hurrell (eds), *Hedley Bull on International Society*, pp. 27–28.
- ¹⁷ Hedley Bull, 'International Theory: The Case for a Classical Approach', *World Politics*, vol. 18, no. 3, April 1966, p. 375.
- ¹⁸ See Thomas Schelling, 'Prospectus for a Reorientation of Game Theory', RAND P-1491, 17 September 1958, p. 121. For Sherif's work, see Muzafer Sherif, *The Psychology of Social Norms*, Harper, New York, 1936.
- ¹⁹ For an example of Schelling's comments on learning, see Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict*, p. 168.
- ²⁰ See Alderson and Hurrell, 'International Society and the Academic Study of International Relations', p. 27.
- ²¹ See the analysis in Ayson, *Thomas Schelling and the Nuclear Age*, pp. 93–99.
- ²² Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*, p. 184.
- ²³ Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*, p. 188.

- ²⁴ Thomas C. Schelling, 'International Cost-Sharing Agreements', in *Essays in International Finance*, No. 24, International Finance Section, Department of Economics and Sociology, Princeton University, Princeton, September 1955.
- ²⁵ Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*, p. 4. For a recent commentary, see John Williams, 'Order and Society', in Richard Little and John Williams (eds), *The Anarchical Society in a Globalized World*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2006, p. 18.
- ²⁶ Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*, p. 3.
- ²⁷ Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*, p. 27.
- ²⁸ Stanley Hoffman, 'International Society' in Miller and Vincent (eds), *Order and Violence: Hedley Bull and International Relations*, p. 19.
- ²⁹ See Herbert Butterfield, 'The Balance of Power', in Butterfield and Wight (eds), *Diplomatic Investigations: Essays on the Theory of International Politics*, p. 132.
- ³⁰ Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict*, p. 4.
- ³¹ See Anatol Rapoport, *Strategy and Conscience*, Harper & Row, New York, 1964; and Philip Green, *Deadly Logic: The Theory of Nuclear Deterrence*, Ohio State University Press, Columbus, 1966.
- ³² See Hoffman, 'International Society', p. 32.
- ³³ James L. Richardson, 'The Academic Study of International Relations', in Miller and Vincent (eds), *Order and Violence: Hedley Bull and International Relations*, p. 153.
- ³⁴ Hedley Bull, *The Control of the Arms Race*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson for the Institute of Strategic Studies, London, 1961, p. 48. (And quoted in Hoffman, 'International Society', p. 32).
- ³⁵ Bull, 'International Relations as an Academic Pursuit', (1972) in Alderson and Hurrell, *Hedley Bull on International Society*, p. 259.
- ³⁶ Hedley Bull, review of *Arms and Influence* by Thomas C. Schelling, *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, March 1967, pp. 25–26.
- ³⁷ Hoffman, 'International Society', p. 15.
- ³⁸ See Thomas C. Schelling, 'War Without Pain and Other Models', review of *Conflict and Defence: A General Theory* by Kenneth E. Boulding, *World Politics*, vol. 15, no. 3, April 1963, p. 473.
- ³⁹ Hence the titles of his later books, Thomas C. Schelling, *Micromotives and Macrobehavior*, W.W. Norton, New York, 1978; and Thomas C. Schelling, *Choice and Consequence*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1984.
- ⁴⁰ See Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*, p. 202. For discussion and criticism of this approach, see Richard Little, 'The Balance of Power and Great Power Management', in Little and Williams (eds), *The Anarchical Society in a Globalized World*, pp. 110–11.
- ⁴¹ See Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1966, p. 87n5.
- ⁴² Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, p. 33.
- ⁴³ Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict*, p. 239.
- ⁴⁴ Bull, *The Control of the Arms Race*, p. 60.
- ⁴⁵ Bull, *The Control of the Arms Race*, p. 60 n. 17.
- ⁴⁶ As recorded in J.D.B. Miller, 'Hedley Bull, 1932–1985', p. 6.
- ⁴⁷ See Robert O'Neill and David N. Schwartz (eds), *Hedley Bull on Arms Control*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1987, p. 3.
- ⁴⁸ See Hedley Bull, 'Disarmament and the International System', (1959), in O'Neill and Schwartz (eds), *Hedley Bull on Arms Control*, pp. 27–40.
- ⁴⁹ Thomas C. Schelling, review of *The Control of the Arms Race* by Hedley Bull, *Survival*, vol. 3, no. 4, July–August 1961, p. 195.
- ⁵⁰ Thomas C. Schelling, review of *The Control of the Arms Race*, p. 195.
- ⁵¹ Thomas C. Schelling, review of *The Control of the Arms Race*, p. 196.
- ⁵² O'Neill and Schwartz, 'Introduction', in O'Neill and Schwartz (eds), *Hedley Bull on Arms Control*, p. 1.
- ⁵³ Hedley Bull, review of *Arms and Influence* by Thomas C. Schelling, *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, March 1967, p. 25.
- ⁵⁴ Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, pp. 12–13.

- ⁵⁵ Thomas C. Schelling and Morton H. Halperin, *Strategy and Arms Control*, The Twentieth Century Fund, New York, 1961.
- ⁵⁶ See Donald G. Brennan (ed.), *Arms Control, Disarmament, and National Security*, George Braziller, New York, 1961.
- ⁵⁷ Schelling and Halperin, *Strategy and Arms Control*, p. 6.
- ⁵⁸ Hoffman, 'International Society', p. 31.
- ⁵⁹ This is the title of the first chapter of Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, pp. 1–34.
- ⁶⁰ Bull, *The Control of the Arms Race*, p. 69.
- ⁶¹ Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict*, pp. 21–22.
- ⁶² Bull, review of *Arms and Influence*, p. 26.
- ⁶³ Hedley Bull, 'International Theory: The Case for a Classical Approach', *World Politics*, vol. 18, no. 3, April 1966, p. 368.
- ⁶⁴ See Bull, 'International Theory: The Case for a Classical Approach', pp. 361–67.
- ⁶⁵ Bull, 'International Relations as an Academic Pursuit' p. 256.
- ⁶⁶ Bull, 'Strategic Studies and its Critics', pp. 601–602. On Bull's admiration for what one especially perceptive scholar calls the 'tacit use of the classical approach' in the work of Schelling and Kaplan, see Richardson, 'The Academic Study of International Relations', p. 170.
- ⁶⁷ Martin Shubik, review of *The Strategy of Conflict* by Thomas C. Schelling and *Fights, Games and Debates* by Anatol Rapoport, *Journal of Political Economy*, vol. 64, no. 5, October 1961, p. 502.
- ⁶⁸ See Oskar Morgenstern, review of *Fights, Games and Debates* by Anatol Rapoport and *The Strategy of Conflict* by Thomas C. Schelling, *Southern Economic Journal*, vol. 28, no. 1, July 1961, pp. 103–105.
- ⁶⁹ Oskar Morgenstern, 'Game Theory: Theoretical Aspects', in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, Macmillan and the Free Press, New York, 1968, vol VI, p. 62.
- ⁷⁰ Bull, 'Strategic Studies and its Critics', p. 602.
- ⁷¹ Bull, 'Strategic Studies and its Critics', p. 601.
- ⁷² See Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict*, p. 85.
- ⁷³ See Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, p. 171.
- ⁷⁴ See Richard Ned Lebow, 'Thomas Schelling and Strategic Bargaining', *International Journal*, vol. 51, no. 3, Summer 1996, pp. 555–76.
- ⁷⁵ Schelling, review of *The Control of the Arms Race*, p. 196.
- ⁷⁶ Alderson and Hurrell, 'Bull's Conception of International Society', p. 15.
- ⁷⁷ Hedley Bull, 'Justice in International Relations: The 1983 Hagey Lectures', in Alderson and Hurrell, *Hedley Bull on International Society*, pp. 221–22.
- ⁷⁸ As noted in Alderson and Hurrell, 'International Society and the Academic Study of International Relations', pp. 34–35.