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Moral Hegemony: Not a Contradiction, but a Peaceful System

Megan Worden
Denison University

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Prominent political scientists incorrectly endorse the balance of power theory, the belief that order comes about in an international system of states through the equal sharing of power and responsibility between respective actors. Ironically, more stability is established with a hegemonic structure in which a few powerful states control the system. This dictatorial construct places less responsibility on individual states, as their relationships and actions are controlled by the system hegemon. Wealthier nations become leaders because of their power to place their own self-interest before other states', creating order through hierarchy.[1] Establishing structure, though, is only part of making and keeping peace. To maintain order, states must recognize the need for unity on the level of identity by creating and recognizing institutions built on common values that serve as a guide to discipline state action.[2] States strive for a combination of supremacy and morality, referred to as moral hegemony, to create and preserve order in the international system because said structure supports states' interests by ensuring stability through shared values. Moral hegemony is the best form of an international system for its ability to make and keep peace.

The first account of international politics, Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*, details the successes and failures of the different forms of international systems throughout history. The Peloponnesian War was systemic, with Athens seeking supreme power. Thucydides offers a similar explanation for the cause of war between Athens and Sparta: "What made war inevitable was the growth of Athenian power and the fear which this caused Sparta."[3] In other words, the threat of Athenian hegemony was too great a danger to the Spartan interest of becoming a fixture of power in the Hellenic system. This explanation conforms to the behavioral norms outlined in the Security Dilemma, which contends that state actors will respond to fortification efforts with military action in an attempt to preserve their place in the international system. Sparta believed its position was compromised by Athens' availability of resources through its empire. As a well-rationalized state, Athens could exploit its people for a variety of products and services through its authority. Thus, Athens sought to assume the position of hegemon because of its inflated sense of self. Out of fear for its own interests, Sparta declared war in the hope of Spartan hegemony. No matter the victor, hegemony in ancient Greece would have initiated peace in the area. States would have a defined role in society that many were unlikely to challenge out of fear of punishment. Though there was no such term as "The Security Dilemma" in ancient Greece, Thucydides correctly identified the phenomenon by citing the cause of the Peloponnesian conflict as the disparity in power between Athens and Sparta.

Causes of peace in post-Napoleonic Europe were not as clear as the catalyst of the Peloponnesian War. There are several well-informed theories on the cause of sustained tranquility in Europe after 1815, but only one recognizes the crux of the issue: hegemony. Political scientists developed tools known as counterfactuals, hypothetical situations that test the validity and applicability of a theory, to analyze clashing viewpoints to determine which is most correct.[4] It is crucial to consider these factors of plausibility, proximity in time, relation to theory and facts before determining one theory, or elements of several theories, to be true.[5] Historian Paul Schroeder sees past the idealism of the innumerable balance of power theories to realize the success of European peace was the opposite of balance: bi-polarity.[6] Schroeder attributes Britain and Russia's dominance in the international system after 1815 to their wealth of resources and their resulting power.[7] The states' assets allowed them to pursue their interests individually, without having to rely on another state for such commodities as security and stability. Britain and Russia's independence guaranteed the subjugation of other states within the European system. Schroeder delves further into the issue of

power in this bi-polar system by distinguishing between "predatory and benign hegemonies," the latter of which he considers the cause of peace in 1815.[8] Britain and Russia did not overtake the European system, though they had the power, because they realized the importance of the system's well being with regard to the attainment of their own interests. Displays of brute force were no longer in states' interest, but rather peaceful means to express and achieve their goals. States appeared to mature. With this shift in ideology, the value of the international system rose greatly. The new system needed to be hegemonic in order to be effective. Scholars get lost in the idea of balance of power, unable to see the potential flaws in sharing responsibility and power. With hegemony, each state has a responsibility to fulfill for the betterment of the system and, consequently, their own interests. Thus, hegemonies increase states' dedication to their common cause of providing for the system as a whole. States' interests were now synonymous with the system's stability.

Hegemony creates the possibility for morals to influence states' decisions by giving a few states the power to determine the specifics of the system. Ultimately, these select actors must agree collectively on the extent to which morality is incorporated into the international system. States often opt for morality to have a larger, rather than smaller, stake in the system for reciprocity concerns. States are not so much interested in protecting other states, as they are concerned about the protection of their own interests in the event of crisis. Furthermore, it is also in the states' interest, and the system's indirectly, to establish third party organizations to protect states and mitigate conflict. Joseph Nye argues that "the international system is a mental construction" crafted for the purpose of maintaining security and sovereignty of every state member.[9] Security and sovereignty are rights and therefore must be protected, but a problem exists with enforcement of such ideas. The indeterminate quality of the issue must be met with an equally indeterminate solution for progress. The answer is found in the establishment of a system guided by moral action and

the creation of equally chaste governmental institutions. This system is best because it holds individual government actors responsible for their decisions by having such an emotional foundation. With the creation of a common moral compass, states' behavior is regulated for the protection of all, and states are united in their desire for individual stability, a by-product of a strong international system.

This may sound too theoretical and idealistic to apply to reality, but morality proved its worth in post-Napoleonic society by creating prolonged peace in Europe. Richard Elrod maintains that a moral foundation served as the basis for negotiations at the Congress of Vienna in 1815, "The Concert of Europe was born, and with it a genuine sense of solidarity and responsibility for Europe."[10] Although Elrod's statement is correct, the idea that states adopted policies of cooperation was less a revelation than a lesson learned through states' experiences with the Prisoner's Dilemma. This circumstance promotes concurrence by positioning states to protect their interest without knowledge of the opposing body's intention.[11] Historically, collaboration was interpreted as signal of weakness, but the shift in political thought that occurred after the Napoleonic Wars allowed states to realize the benefit of pooled efforts, leading to the creation of international organizations to protect state interests and security. It is easy to characterize states as autonomous beings when looking at their actions from a theoretical standpoint, but it is important to remember that there are people behind every state action and decision who are affected by their own moral code. Thus, morality is an inseparable aspect of international politics. 'Moral politics' is frequently viewed as a pejorative, when in actuality the practice is beneficial to the system as it helps keep the international system understanding.

Moral hegemony is the best international system structure for its proven ability to foster peaceful interstate relationships. Hegemonies establish order by creating a hierarchy of states, whereas a shared set of values unites states by

putting the condition of the system in the individual states' interest of stability, procuring peace. This re-purposed theory satisfies the four counterfactuals of political science. It is highly likely that humans, the controllers of states, respond well to a system of defined responsibilities where they use their personal values as a basis for political decisions. Although the two major events, the Peloponnesian War and Concert of Europe, used to assert the role of hegemony and morality in the international system are separated by thousands of year of history, they share several common characteristics, such as the determining role of hegemony in their course of action. Furthermore, political science theory and facts support states' positive reaction to hegemony and morality in international politics throughout the course of history. As this patchwork theory of moral hegemony fulfills political science's four counterfactuals, it should be considered a viable construct for the international system and its related organizations.

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[1] Paul W. Schroeder, "Did the Vienna Settlement Rest on Balance of Power?" The American Historical Review 97, no. 3 (June 1992): 684, http://0-www.jstor.org.dewey2.library.denison.edu/stable/i337847.

[2] Richard B. Elrod, "The Concert of Europe: A Fresh Look at an International System," World Politics 28, no. 2 (January 1976): 162, http://0-www.jstor.org.dewey2.library.denison.edu/stable/2009888.

[3] Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War, trans. Rex Warner (New York: Penguin Group, 1954), 49.

[4] Joseph S. Nye, Understanding Global Conflict and Cooperation (Boston: Longman, 2011), 65-68.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Schroeder.

[7] Ibid., 687.

[8] Ibid., 694.

[9] Nye, 43-44.

[10] Elrod.

[11] Nye, 17.

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Sometimes the hardest task a writer has is to make a compelling argument for a rather controversial topic. In Worden's essay, she accomplishes exactly that. The argument she makes, that a strong imperialistic hegemony is a stable and just style of international governance, is not one that at first glance sits easily with most. Through her argument, though, Worden gives a convincing account of how this could be the case through two notable historical examples of a "moral hegemony" creating a safe and stable environment. Worden, in this essay, makes good use of scholarly work and analysis thereof to make a hard-to-swallow premise palatable, and that is what makes this paper an example of strong writing.

-Patrick Kolehouse, Writing Center Consultant