

International Organization

Chapter One: Historical Background

Political entities historically have tended to create norms and rules for interacting with their neighbors. The many early schemes that sought methods to manage or eliminate conflicts among different parties were limited to a specific geographical area and lacked permanent institutional relationships.

More than a millennium later, several European philosophers began to elaborate schemes for World Unity. The Roman Catholic Church and its head, the pope, provided the focal point for many of these. When the European states began to challenge the religious authority, Hugo Grotius (1583- 1645), an early Dutch legal scholar proposed a new legitimacy based on international law.

The Grotian tradition set up a number of fundamental principles that serve as the foundation not only for modern international law, but also for international organizations. Grotius believed that all international relations were subject to the rule of law.

He rejected the idea that states can do whatever they wish and that war is the supreme right of states and the hallmark of their sovereignty. For Grotius, states, like people, are rational and law-abiding entities capable of achieving cooperative goals.

The Grotian tradition provided a foundation for the development of international law that is a crucial element in developing international organizations. Yet state sovereignty, the idea that states have exclusive governing authority within their border, became the cornerstone of European politics, as symbolized by the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648.

The Treaty of Westphalia

The Treaty of Westphalia considered the most important attempt to establish something resembling World unity.

It emphasized religious toleration by establishing equality between Protestant and Catholic states and providing some safeguard for religious minorities under

international guaranties, besides, it formulated interesting rules for peaceful settlement of disputes against aggressors.

Thus, the Peace of Westphalia became a model for several subsequent treaties; its rule and principals considered, in a sense, an early precedent for articles 10, 12, and 16 of the Covenant of the League.

Nineteen century roots of Contemporary International Organizations

In the nineteen century, ideas for international organizations began to bear fruit. Three major strands of thinking and practice emerged:

The first strand involved the recognition of the utility of the multilateral diplomacy. Beginning in 1815, the European states participated in the Concert of Europe. Under the Concert system the leaders of the major European powers came together in multilateral meetings to settle problems and coordinate actions. Such a community of interest paved the way for modern international organizations.

The second strand involved the formation of public international unions (such as International Telegraphic Union, The Universal Postal Union -etc.) that had to deal with practical problems of expanding international relations. These public unions began to develop techniques for multilateral conventions and treaties.

The third strand revolved around the Hague System. The Hague conference produced several major procedural innovations whereby participants included both small and non-European states. Thus, what had been largely a European state system until the end of the nineteenth century became a truly international system at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The Hague conferences also promoted the novel idea that humankind has common interests and the codifications of international law. Governments established new approaches to dealing with problems of joint concern.

The above progress arrangements of the nineteen century, however, did not prevent war among the major European powers. The Concert system broke into two Competing military alliance at the turn of the twentieth century. Hence, the outbreak of World War 1 reflected the weakness and shortcomings of the nineteenth-century arrangements.

The twentieth century has been marked by the progressive expansion of the international law and organizations and by the wide acceptance of multilateralism as a general practice in international relations.

Now try to answer the questions:

1. Who are the most salient philosophers who called for world unity?
2. Who is Hugo Grotius?
3. What is meant by Grotian tradition?
4. What did he reject?
5. For Grotius what are the similarities between people and states?
6. Why Grotian traditions are important?
7. What was the cornerstone of European politics?
8. What are the shortcomings of the early norms and rules that were setup to manage conflicts?