

Maxwell's Demon and the Golden Apple: Global Discord in the New Millennium,

Randall Schweller (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 216 pp.,

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Is world politics becoming more chaotic? Recent evidence from Europe's eastern border, Syria, Iraq, and the South China Sea (separating China and Japan) might suggest so. In his timely new book, political scientist Randall Schweller describes the structural reasons behind such bubbling conflicts: the world is reaching a state of entropy and so "in the coming age, disorder will reign supreme" (p. 13).

For Schweller, the initial conditions of disorder have been set by recent history. A declining hegemon—the United States—hampered by its own overreaching, is reluctant to police the globe, though it has no heir apparent. In place of a single power to guarantee order and stability, Schweller says there is instead a plethora of actors—corporations, militias, individuals—competing with rising states in the post-American world. This system is unlike previous world orders in that the diffusion of power is leading to its dissipation, not its concentration, and this is where the concept of entropy gains intellectual purchase. Entropy, as developed by physicists, refers to the observed fact that closed systems of particles will tend toward disorder until reaching eventual equilibrium. Entropy takes hold in

"systems where no new information is yet to be discovered, all actors are known, and the space is clearly defined" (p. 45).

Schweller views the world as a closed system. The elimination of a "great powers" war of hegemonic succession, the near complete control over the earth's territory by states, and instantaneous access to information set the preconditions for entropy to take hold. The consequences are that actors in world politics now behave in an uncoordinated manner, like trapped gas particles: states are unconstrained in their options for choosing allies (or foes). Today's novel geopolitics is à la carte in place of last century's *prix fixe*, such that Russia, or China, or India can both "align *with* or *against*" the United States, and likewise with or against each other, all at cross-purposes (p. 48). Thus, when "anything and everything becomes possible, nothing is predictable or stable" (p. 46).

Maxwell's Demon pursues this line of thought by cobbling together ideas and examples from physics, probability theory, finance, Thomas Pynchon, and even the popular game Angry Birds. But a system left to entropy leads to its own kind of equilibrium: exhaustion.