
CHAPTER 15

THE ENGLISH SCHOOL

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INTERNATIONAL relations is no longer an American social science, as Stanley Hoffmann (1977) proclaimed. This is true in a literal sense: The subject is taught in universities in dozens of countries and is becoming a global discipline. It is also true insofar as the study of international relations outside the United States is often committed to theoretical orientations that are hostile to the dominant approach encapsulated by the phrase “an American social science.” The English School of international relations is the oldest and arguably the most significant rival to the American mainstream. By English School, I mean a group of scholars located mainly in the UK who have a common ontological disposition and are critical of the kind of scientific method advanced by positivists. During the classical period in its evolution (1950s–1980s), the leading figures in the School were Charles Manning, Herbert Butterfield, Hedley Bull, Adam Watson, and R. J. Vincent. In the post-classical phase (1990s onwards), the most prominent writers are Barry Buzan, Andrew Hurrell, Robert Jackson, Edward Keene, Andrew Linklater, Richard Little, James Mayall, Hidemi Suganami, and Nicholas J. Wheeler.

The claim that the English School constitutes a distinctive and systematic approach to international relations is one that is relatively uncontroversial today but would not have been accepted in the 1980s, when the landscape of international relations was carved up into the paradigms of realism, pluralism, and structuralism.

I would like to thank Chris Reus-Smit for extremely helpful feedback on an early draft of this chapter.

Today the English School is not only more confident of its own contribution; it is increasingly being taken seriously by other theoretical approaches. What evidence can be cited in support of this claim? To begin with, key textbooks surveying international relations theory today include the English School (Burchill et al. 2001; Dunne, Kurki, and Smith 2007). Additionally, the influential Cambridge University Press/British International Studies Association series is consistently publishing books on the School, including Buzan (2004) and Linklater and Sukanami (2006). A final indicator is the extent to which international relations researchers—primarily in the United States, Canada, Australia, and Scandinavia—are engaging with the work even though many do not identify themselves as being part of an English School project per se (Finnemore 1996; Epp 1998; Reus-Smit 1999; Wendt 1999; Jackson 2000; Shapcott 2004; Adler 2005).

This geopolitical diversity points to an anomaly with the label “English School” in that even in its heyday some of its leading contributors were not English (though all built their academic reputations at British universities). The empirical deficiencies with the label has generated a great deal of debate and to some extent resentment on the part of those who sympathize with the ideas but not the act of union to a particular place. While recognizing this deficiency, it is probably time to admit that the label has taken hold and is understood by just about every undergraduate studying international relations.

Those who identify with the English School today see it as occupying the middle ground in international relations alongside constructivism: This location is preferable to the dominant mainstream theories of neorealism and neoliberalism and the more radical alternatives (such as critical theory and poststructuralism). They are drawn to an English School perspective because it offers a synthesis of different theories and concepts. In so doing, it avoids the “either/or” framing of realism versus idealism, as set out in the writings of many great figures during the 1930s and 1940s. It also avoids the explanatory versus interpretative dichotomy that generated so much heat during the “fourth debate” in the 1990s. In place of these dichotomies, the English School purports to offer an account of international relations that combines theory *and* history, morality *and* power, agency *and* structure.

One obvious consequence of this level of theoretical ambition is that the boundaries of the English School often appear to be unclear, which in part explains the ongoing debate about who belongs in the School and how it differs from other theoretical accounts of world politics. To shed light on these questions, Section 1 of this chapter will consider in more depth the contextual emergence of the English School, and in particular its determination to develop an original account of interstate order. Section 2 takes its central claim—that the practice of states is shaped by international norms, regulated by international institutions, and guided by moral purposes—and explores this in relation to the countervailing forces of the states system and world society. In the course of this exploration, the argument opens up a number of “axes of difference” within the School (Reus-Smit 2002, 496–9) such

as the extent to which ontological primacy is accorded to international society, and, at a deeper level, whether that society is understood in procedural or substantive terms.

In Section 3, the focus shifts away from debates inside the English School and toward a wider reflection on its place within international relations as a whole. What do leading US theorists regard as the contribution of the School, or, putting it more negatively, what do they see as being wrong with the English School? Perhaps the most significant conversation of them all is the one with constructivism. The broadly sociological assumptions shared by both schools generated excitement on the part of adherents to the English School: Suddenly works that had seemed outdated and idiosyncratic were opened up for new critically informed readings. Over a decade later, the initial excitement has waned as the English School has come under “friendly fire” from constructivists. As I argue in this chapter, while the English School has a great deal to learn from constructivism, it should maintain its distinctive voice primarily because it has greater synthetic potential and is more openly committed to certain ethical standpoints.

1 CONTEXT AND EMERGENCE

The English School can claim to be a distinctive theory of international relations because of a shared history and a sense that its approach to the subject was a living tradition. What is apparent from existing accounts of the development of the School is the extent to which the main protagonists believed themselves to be part of a collective enterprise, and consciously sought to carry its debates forward.

The emergence of a self-conscious research program, with an open yet distinct agenda, can be seen in the writings of early post-1945 writers working in leading UK universities. Manning developed a curriculum in which the idea of international society played a prominent role. In the 1950s, his colleague Martin Wight developed an approach to the subject that viewed international society as a middle way between realist accounts of systemic logics and revolutionist accounts that plotted the downfall of the state system as a whole. Wight’s most famous protégé was Bull. He too was increasingly dissatisfied with the either/or choice between realism and idealism. The former, Bull believed, was right to puncture the utopian schemes of the idealists but wrong to rule out the idea that the inter-state order was capable of reform.

The search for a new analysis of international relations was what drove Butterfield to set up the British Committee on the Theory of International Politics (Dunne 1998; Vigezzi 2005). The committee met regularly between 1959 and 1984. The chairs of the Committee were the pivotal figures in the classical period:

Butterfield (until 1968), Wight (until 1972), Watson (until 1978), and Bull until his death in 1984. By then, the work of the Committee and those sympathetic to it was increasingly seen as being out of step with the emergence of new theories (such as postmodernism and critical theory) and sub-disciplines (such as foreign-policy analysis and international political economy). Unsurprisingly, we find that in reflections on the “state of the discipline” in the 1980s, the English School was nowhere to be seen (Banks 1984; Smith 1987); neither did it figure in early representations of the debate between neorealism and its critics. Yet, within a decade, interest in the English School had begun to rekindle. Many influential textbooks published in the 1990s began to include it as an alternative approach to the subject, placing it alongside realism, liberalism, and various critical approaches (Der Derian 1995; Brown 1997; Jackson and Sørensen 1999). Added to these, original contributions to the history and theory of international society have proliferated, all taking the English School as their point of departure (*inter alia*, Jackson 1990; 1995; Armstrong 1993; Osiander 1994; Welsh 1995; Buzan and Little 2000; Wheeler 2000; Keene 2002; Keal 2003; Clark 2005; 2007; Gonzalez-Pelaez 2005).

This sense of a resurgent paradigm was prompted in part by the recognition that it represented a distinct position that was inhospitable to the rationalist assumptions underpinning both neorealism and neoliberalism. Moreover, in terms of substantive research questions, the English School had long focused on the kind of cultural questions and normative contestations that were rising to the top of the international agenda in the 1990s. Such momentum prompted Buzan—along with Little—to seek to invigorate English School theorizing. This new phase was marked by the publication of Buzan’s agenda-setting paper, “The English School: An Underexploited Resource in IR” (Buzan 2001), developed further in Buzan (2004) and followed by Linklater and Suganami’s major reassessment of the School (2006).

The previous paragraphs have provided some historical and sociological context for the emergence of the English School. What follows is a focused discussion of “international society,” and how this needs to be situated between the system and world society pillars of the world political system.

2 INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY: BETWEEN SYSTEM AND WORLD SOCIETY

A feature of the earliest historiographical accounts of the English School is that they refer to their defense of international society being the “distinguishing power” of the School (Wilson 1989). Following Buzan (2004), I now hold the view that the School needs not only to provide a powerful account of how and why states form a

society; it must also show how this domain relates to world society. Moreover, going further than Buzan, I argue that the distinguishing power of the English School is its synthetic account of how the three pillars of the world political system hang together: the system, the inter-state society, and world society.

According to Bull, the categories system, society, and world society are “elements” that exist “out there” in world politics but can be known to us only through interpretative designs. They are ideal-types, bundles of properties that highlight certain important features while minimizing that which is thought to be less relevant. By seeking to clarify the concepts that reveal patterns in world history, the English School is working with a very different notion of “theory” to that which is found in the dominant American approaches. Rather than “operationalizing” concepts and formulating “testable” hypotheses, the emphasis upon contending concepts is driven by a search for defining properties that mark the boundaries of different historical and normative orders.

It is necessary, before going any further, to consider one objection to representing English School theory as a conversation between three overlapping domains. In Andrew Linklater’s view, although the School talked about international society as only one element in the complex patterns of international interactions, it was nevertheless “its central purpose” (Linklater and Suganami 2006, 119).¹ Therefore, to treat the three as being of equal significance is to misunderstand the distinctive character of English School thought. I do not doubt that one of the intellectual drivers propelling the English School into existence was a defense of a middle way between realism and idealism. I also recognize that many publications by English School advocates in the 1990s continued to privilege the societal domain, in part due to the desire to show that the English School was not just a polite form of realism, as many in the 1980s had assumed. However, neither of these points undermines the claim that the most persuasive case one can make in defense of the English School is that it is potentially more illuminating than mainstream alternatives because it seeks to provide a synthetic account of global politics that avoids the series of false dichotomies thrown up by the alternatives such as power versus norms, materialism versus idealism, anarchy versus hierarchy, reasons versus causes. Such a move requires that we situate the inter-state normative order alongside the other two ideal-types to illustrate its boundaries and constraints.

2.1 International Society: Definition, Properties, Variations

Perhaps the sharpest definition of international society is to be found on the first page of the edited collection *The Expansion of International Society*. By an international society, Bull and Watson (1984, 1) write,

¹ Although the Linklater and Suganami book is co-authored, the introduction clearly states which chapters were drafted by which author—hence the reference to Linklater only.

we mean a group of states (or, more generally, a group of independent political communities) which not merely form a system, in the sense that the behaviour of each is a necessary factor in the calculations of the others, but also have established by dialogue and consent common rules and institutions for the conduct of their relations, and recognize their common interest in maintaining these arrangements.

The discussion that follows scrutinizes each component of this definition.

The first key element of international society is the unique character of the membership that is confined to sovereign states. What is significant here is that actors both claim sovereignty and recognize one another's right to the same prerogatives (Wight 1977). Clearly the act of mutual recognition indicates the presence of a social practice: recognition is fundamental to an identity relationship. Recognition is the first step in the construction of an international society. If we were to doubt for a moment the social nature of the process of recognition, then this would quickly be dispelled by those peoples in history who at some time have been or continue to be denied membership of the society of states. The history of the expansion of international society is a story of a shifting boundary of inclusion and exclusion. China was denied sovereign statehood until January 1942, when Western states finally renounced the unequal treaties. Why was this the case? Membership became defined, particularly in the nineteenth century, by a "standard of civilization" that set conditions for internal governance that corresponded with European values and beliefs. What we see here is how important cultural differentiation has been to the European experience of international society. China was not recognized as a legitimate member of international society, and, therefore, was denied equal membership. If the West and China did not recognize each other as equal members, then how should we characterize their relations? Here we see how the system-society dynamic can usefully capture historical boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. There was a great deal of "interaction" between China and the West during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but this was driven by strategic and economic logics. Crucially, neither side believed itself to be part of the same shared values and institutions: China, for example, long resisted the presence of European diplomats on its soil along with their claim to extraterritorial jurisdiction, which has been a long-standing rule among European powers. In the absence of accepting the rules and institutions of European international society, it makes sense to argue that from the Treaty of Nanking in 1843 to 1942 China was part of the states system but was not a member of international society (Gong 1984).

After rightful membership, the next consideration involves thinking about what it means for a state to "act." Here the English School encounters criticism from empiricists who argue that collective constructs cannot have agency. What does it mean to attribute agency to collectivities like states? One straightforward answer is that states act through the medium of their representatives or office-holders. Every state employs officials who act externally on its behalf, from the lowly consulate dealing with "nationals" who have lost their passports to the "head of state." In a

narrowly empirical sense, therefore, the diplomatic and foreign-policy elite are the real agents of international society. This is the original sense in which the term "international society" came into existence in the eighteenth century. In 1736, Antoine Pecquet argued that the corps of ministers formed an "independent society" bound by a "community of privileges" (Frey and Frey 1999, 213). If we are looking for the real agents of international society, then it is to the diplomatic culture that we must look, that realm of ideas and beliefs shared by representatives of states (Der Derian 2003).

Sovereign states are the primary members of international society; however, it is important to note that they are not the *only* members. Historical anomalies have always existed, including the diplomatic network belonging to the Catholic Church and the qualified sovereign powers that were granted to nonstate actors such as the rights to make war and annex territory that were transferred to the great trading companies of the imperial era. One might also argue that influential international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) are members insofar as they give advice to institutions such as the United Nations and on occasions participate in the drafting of significant multilateral treaties. The other important anomaly with the membership of international society is the fact that sovereign rights are often constrained for economic or security reasons. Robert Jackson (1990), a leading writer in the English School, pointed to the fact that postcolonial states are "quasi" sovereigns in that they are recognized by international society but are unable to maintain an effective government internally. A related development is the temporary suspension of sovereign prerogatives by an international institution or occupying authority, a practice that follows from a period of civil conflict or external military intervention. In the colonial period this was often described as trusteeship (Bain 2003); in contemporary international society it goes under the less politically sensitive label of a "transitional authority."

The element of mutual recognition is highly significant for English School understandings of international society, but it is not a sufficient condition for its existence. The actors must have some minimal common interests, such as trade, freedom of travel, or simply the need for stability. Here we see how aspects of the system impinge on the possibilities for a society to develop. The higher the levels of economic interdependence, the more likely it is that states will develop institutions for realizing common interests and purposes. The independence of sovereign states, however, remains an important limiting factor in the realization of common goals. For this reason, the purposes states agreed upon for most of the Westphalian era have had a fairly minimal character centered upon the survival of the system and the endurance of the dominant units within it. The condition of general war is an example of the breakdown of order, but Bull was quick to point out that, even during the Second World War, certain laws of war were respected and, perhaps more significantly, the period of total war triggered an attempt to construct a new order based largely on the same rules and institutions that had operated in the prewar era.

It was this that led him to claim that “the element of society had always existed” in the modern states system (Bull 1977, 41). Such a claim prompted disquiet from constructivists, who rightly argued that, if “society” produces order, how can it continue to exist during historical periods when order has clearly broken down (Finnemore 2001)?

2.2 Types of International Society

One answer to Finnemore’s question, which the English School needs to develop more fully, is to provide clearer benchmarks that enable an evaluation of how much “society” is present in the inter-state order. At the more minimal end of the spectrum of international societies, we find an institutional arrangement that is restricted solely to the maintenance of order. In a culturally diverse world, where member states have different traditions and political systems, the only collective venture they could all agree on was the maintenance of international order. Without order, the stability of the system would be thrown into doubt and with it the survival of the units. Yet, the extent to which states formed an international society was limited and constrained by the fact of anarchy. For this reason, international society was to be equated not with a harmonious order but, rather, with a tolerable order that was better than a realist would expect but much worse than a cosmopolitan might wish for (MacMillan and Linklater 1995).

In a pluralist international society, the institutional framework is geared toward the liberty of states and the maintenance of order among them. The rules are complied with because, like rules of the road, fidelity to them is relatively cost free but the collective benefits are enormous. A good example is the elaborate rules to do with ambassadorial and diplomatic privileges. Acceptance that representatives of states were not subject to the laws of their host country is a principle that has received widespread compliance for many centuries. This is one instance among many where the rules of coexistence have come to dominate state practice. Pluralist rules and norms “provide a structure of coexistence, built on the mutual recognition of states as independent and legally equal members of society, on the unavoidable reliance on self-preservation and self-help, and on freedom to promote their own ends subject to minimal constraints” (Alderson and Hurrell 2000, 18). Fully to comprehend the pluralist order, one needs only to be reminded that great powers, limited war, and the balance of power were thought by the English School to be “institutions.” By this term, Bull and his colleagues were pointing to the practices that helped to sustain order, practices that evolved over many centuries. For example, if the balance of power was essential to preserve the liberty of states, then status quo powers must be prepared to intervene forcefully to check the growing power of a state that threatens the general balance.

Are pluralist rules and institutions adequate for our contemporary world? This is a question that has provoked differing responses within the English School. On one

side, traditionalists like Jackson (2000) believe that a pluralist international society is a practical institutional adaptation to human diversity: The great advantage of a society based on the norms of sovereignty and nonintervention is that such an arrangement is most likely to achieve the moral value of freedom.

Critics of pluralism charge that it is failing to deliver on its promise. The persistence of inter-state wars throughout the twentieth century suggest that sovereignty norms were not sufficient to deter predatory states. Moreover, the rule of nonintervention that was central to pluralism was enabling statist elites to violently abuse their own citizens with impunity. For these reasons, both Bull and Vincent were drawn to a different account of international society in which universal values such as human rights set limits on the exercise of state sovereignty. The guiding thought here, and one that is captured by the term solidarism, is that the ties that bind individuals to the great society of humankind are deeper than the pluralist rules and institutions that separate them.

Bull defined a solidarist international society in terms of the collective enforcement of international rules *and* the guardianship of human rights. It differs from cosmopolitanism in that the latter is agnostic as to the institutional arrangement for delivering universal values: Some cosmopolitans believe a world government is best and others would want to abandon formal political hierarchies altogether. By contrast, solidarism is an *extension* of an international society not its transformation. Like pluralism, it is defined by shared values and institutions and is held together by binding legal rules. Where it differs is in the content of the values and the character of the rules and institutions. In terms of values, in a solidarist international society individuals are entitled to basic rights. This in turn demands that sovereignty norms are modified such that there is a duty on the members of international society to intervene forcibly to protect those rights. At this point, Bull was hesitant about what was implied by solidarism. He believed that there was a danger that the enforcement of human rights principles risked undermining international order. Until there was a greater consensus on the meaning and priority to be accorded to rights claims, attempts to enforce them—what he described as “premature global solidarism”—would do more harm than good.

For much of the post-cold war period, the normative debate within the English School fractured along a pluralist/solidarist divide. On one side of the divide, Jackson (2000) made a forceful case for upholding pluralist norms, while Wheeler (2000) set out a persuasive argument in defense of a solidarist account of rights and duties. Buzan is right to argue that one of the negative consequences of the debate is that it assumed normative density was an issue primarily for the inter-state realm rather than understanding how it shapes and enables the transnational and inter-human domains.

While it is correct to argue that “pluralism versus solidarism” was one of the principal axes of difference in English School thinking after the cold war, from the vantage point of today this dispute looks increasingly like a conversation inside

the normative wing of the School. Alongside the normative wing, we have seen the emergence of an analytical wing led by Buzan himself and including the work of Little. The former are drawn toward historical narratives of how the international social structure has evolved/changed (e.g. Armstrong 1993; Wheeler 2000; Bain 2003; Keal 2003; Linklater and Suganami 2006), while the latter search for analytical explanations of the various domains and sectors and how these impinge on each other (Watson 1992; Wæver 1998; Buzan and Little 2000; Little 2000; Buzan 2004).

2.3 The Elements of System and World Society

Both Wight and Bull recognized that a sophisticated analysis of world politics required a systemic component. Yet their discussion of Hobbesian dynamics in the “system” is inconsistent and unpersuasive. In my view, this vital element of the English School’s theorization of world politics ought to be refined rather than discarded as Buzan (2004, 106) has argued. Bull defined the system as being an arena where there was interaction between communities but no shared rules or institutions. In order for a system to come into being, there has to be sufficient intensity of interactions to make “the behaviour of each a necessary element in the calculations of the other” (Bull 1977, 12).

The concept of a system plays three important roles in the English School’s theory of world politics. First, as discussed above, the system/society distinction provides a normative benchmark for addressing the question of how far international society extends (Wight, Wight, and Porter 1991). Secondly, by looking at the formation of the system, it is possible to discern mechanisms that shape and shove international and world societies. Thirdly, the category of the system can be used to capture the basic material forces in world politics—flows of information and trade, levels of destructive capability, and capacities of actors to affect their environment. Let me examine each of these briefly in turn.

The English School’s use of the category international system—or more accurately an inter-state system—shares a great deal with the use of systems theory in realist thought. What sets them apart is that the English School was interested in the system primarily for what it tells us about the history of international society. If one takes Bull’s developmental insight into the relationship between system and society, then it is clear that the existence of a society presupposes the existence of a system. This can open up into an intriguing series of discussions as to when a system becomes a society—what level and type of interactions are required in order for the units to treat each other as ends in themselves? And under what circumstances might a society lapse back into a systemic order in which their actions impact upon one another but there is no mutual recognition or acceptance of a common framework of rules and institutions? In the British Committee’s writings on decolonization, the emphasis is placed on the gradual inclusion of the

non-Western world into a globalized society of sovereign states. It is also important to realize that systemic interactions remain a possible future arrangement if the dominant actors in international society cease to comply with the rules and act in ways that undermine international security. The hypothetical case of a major nuclear confrontation could become a reality only if the great powers acted in ways that were catastrophic for international society. As a result, the society collapses back into the system.

The idea of a states system is also useful to identify the current boundaries between members and those states that find themselves shunned by international society. It is in the dark recesses of the states system that pariah states and failed states find themselves. This does not mean pariahs are outside the framework of the rules and institutions entirely, only that their actions are subjected to far greater scrutiny. Actors in the states system can have structured interactions with members of international society—they may even comply with treaties and other rules—but these interactions remain systemic unless the parties grant each other mutual respect and inclusion into international society.

Thinking about the systemic domain also alerts us to the downward pressure exerted by the distribution of material power. In Bull's work we can find two important instances where the system impinges upon the society. First, he notes how general war is "a basic determinant of the shape the system assumes at any one time" (Bull 1977, 187). Even in the cold war, where the massive nuclear arsenals of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and Warsaw Pact countries were not unleashed, the presence of these weapons was a crucial constraint on the two superpowers' room for maneuver. If the Soviet Union had only conventional weapons, would the United States and its allies have tolerated the "fall" of central European countries into the Soviet sphere of influence? Closely related to the phenomena of general war and destructive capacities as basic determinants of the system, one can find in the English School the view that there is logic of balancing in the states system. Under conditions of anarchy, where there is no overarching power to disarm the units and police the rules, it is in the interests of all states to prevent the emergence of a dominant or hegemonic power (Watson 1992). Those who take the balance of power seriously point to repeated instances in modern history where states with hegemonic ambition have been repelled by an alliance of powers seeking to prevent a change in the ordering principle of the system. Even if this tendency requires states to "act" in order to uphold the balance of power, it can still be persuasively argued that the survival of the states system *demand*s balancing behavior from states such that it becomes an inbuilt feature of the system. This is contrasted with the institution of the balance of power in international society that is not mechanical but is rather the outcome of a deliberate policy of pursuing a strategy of self-preservation in the absence of world government (Wight 1978).

Looking through the systemic lens does not only show the ordering of the units; it also directs our attention to the levels of technology, the distribution of material

power, and the interaction capacity of the units. Together, these factors tell us a great deal about the ability of units to act, and particularly their “reach” (are actors local, regional, or global?). Levels of technology can be thought of as attributes of the units; an obvious case in point is whether a state has nuclear weapons technology or not. However, it is also useful to think about technology in systemic terms, particularly in areas such as communication, transportation, and levels of destructive capacity. Compare, for example, a states system in which the dominant mode of transportation is a horse-drawn wagon, as opposed to a system in which individuals and goods can be transported by supersonic jets, high-speed rail, and ships the size of several football fields placed end-to-end. As these technologies spread, “they change the quality and character of what might be called the *interaction capacity* of the system as a whole” (Buzan, Jones, and Little 1993, 70).

What make these attributes “systemic?” They are systemic in that for the most part they fall outside the institutional arrangement developed by states to regulate order and promote justice. By way of illustration, take the place of Britain in the world from the early 1940s to the beginning of the cold war. Throughout the war, Britain was one of the “big three” great powers who were the architects of the postwar order. By 1948, the country was increasingly a policy-taker on the world stage and not a policy-maker, despite the fact that its diplomatic network remained global, its language remained dominant, and its values ascendant. None of these soft power advantages was enough to configure the system in multipolar terms. Without wanting to imply overdetermination, it is nevertheless useful to invoke the system to characterize those factors that appear immovable from the perspective of the actors, such as their geographic location, population base, and technological/economic capacity. Of course they are not immovable over the long term—even geographical “distance” can change over time, as globalization has demonstrated in recent decades.

The third element in the English School triad is world society. This concept runs in parallel to international society albeit with one key difference—it refers to the shared interests and values “linking all parts of the human community” (Bull 1977, 279). Vincent’s definition of world society is something of a menu of all those entities whose moral concerns traditionally lay outside international society: the claim of individuals to human rights; the claim of indigenous peoples to autonomy; the needs of transnational corporations to penetrate the shell of sovereign states; and the claim to retrospective justice by those who speak on behalf of the former colonized powers. It is undeniable that human rights are at the center of the classical English School’s conception of world society. An account of the development of human rights would need to show how the cosmopolitan culture of late modernity is shaping a new institutional arrangement in world society.

One indicator of an evolving world society is the emergence of international humanitarian law. The United Nations Charter represented an important stage in

this evolution, thus indicating the dynamic interplay between the inter-state and the world society domains. Justice, rights, fundamental freedoms, were all given prominence in the Charter, and subsequently universal norms of racial equality, the prohibition on torture, and the right to development have been added (among others). Various changes in international criminal law have significantly restricted the circumstances in which state leaders can claim immunity from humanitarian crimes committed while they were in office. Similarly, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court adds another layer of international jurisdiction in which agents of states can be held accountable for alleged war crimes. Taken as a whole, one authority on the English School argued that they “may be interpreted as involving a clear shift from an international society to a world society” (Armstrong 1999, 549). Such a claim, however, understates the extent to which the development of world society institutions is dependent on the ideational and material support of core states in international society.

World society is not just about the growing importance of transnational values grounded in liberal notions of rights and justice. Transnational identities can be based upon ideas of hatred and intolerance. Among a significant body of world public opinion, the strongest identification is to the faith and not to the state. This generates countervailing ideologies of liberation on the part of fundamentalist Christians and holy war on the part of certain Islamist groups. In English School thinking, such dynamics can usefully be considered in the context of earlier “revolts” against Western dominance that were apparent during the struggle for decolonization.

3 THE ENGLISH SCHOOL AND ITS CRITICS

It is not unusual for proponents of a particular international relations theory to claim to be “misunderstood.” From the 1970s to the early 1990s, the leading figures of English School were identified as traditionalists who bought into key realist assumptions about great-power dominance amid international anarchy. Somewhat polemically, a recent intervention by John Mearsheimer suggests the opposite: According to him, Butterfield, Wight, and Bull were “Cold War idealists” (Mearsheimer 2005, 144). This chapter has sought to show that the English School is not reducible either to realism or to idealism even if the focus on systemic forces draws insights from realism just as processes in world society—such as our widening moral sensibility—overlaps with idealism (Bull, in Hurrell and Alderson 1999).

The one theoretical position that has positively engaged with the English School is constructivism. Moreover, in the course of this conversation, constructivists have

highlighted significant sources of conceptual confusion and theoretical underdevelopment at the core of the English School's research program. In the paragraphs below, I consider the constructivist challenge and examine the extent to which the English School has the capacity to engage in theoretical modification as well as remaining distinct from constructivism.

Christian Reus-Smit has written a number of articles that set out the terms of the debate between the English School and constructivism (Reus-Smit 2002; 2005). He rightly argues that those who wrote about the convergence in the middle 1990s did it on the basis of a narrow reading of both paradigms. On one side, the work of Alexander Wendt was taken to be representative of the constructivism project overall, while, on the other, there was little effort to engage with the richness of English School thinking beneath the standard claim that states form an international society.

Limitations on space do not permit a lengthy discussion of the faultlines between the English School and constructivism. I nevertheless want to reflect on two significant questions that have emerged from the debate. One immediate contrast with constructivism concerns the importance of metatheoretical correctness. Constructivists are theoretically reflective about the meaning of collective action, the status of norms, the relative priority accorded structures and agents, and causation, and the processes of socialization. The English School, by contrast, are more likely to offer narratives on the evolution and contestation of norms and institutions *without* explicit metatheoretical reflection. Part of the explanation for this divergence is the emergence of constructivism in leading American departments of political science where methodological rigor and epistemological awareness is an expectation for all doctoral candidates and early career researchers. So is the need to identify—in exclusionary ways—with one paradigm or another. Constructivism very much emerged as an alternative to the dominant rationalist approaches to international relations: As rationalism has never been anything other than a minority interest in the UK, there was no need of, or desire for, metatheoretical exceptionalism on the part of the English School.

This is not to say that leading members of the English School have avoided all engagement with disciplinary politics. Indeed, one of the motivating factors behind the relaunch of the English School in 2001 was precisely to take theory-building to a new level. Buzan's agenda setting paper (2001) was published by the *Review of International Studies*, with several authors from outside the English School asked to comment. Martha Finnemore, writing from a constructivist standpoint, posed a series of penetrating questions about the School's method and its theoretical claims. While American international relations is driven by the search for causal explanations, Finnemore (2001, 513) ruefully notes that "I am not sure that the English School shares this interest."

Linklater and Suganami (2006), in their recent book *The English School of International Relations*, have taken up this challenge. They argue that Bull's classic text

The Anarchical Society (1977, 74–5) explicitly asks the question whether rules and institutions are a “necessary and sufficient” condition for international order to exist. The problem for Bull is that the answer cannot be clear-cut, as the dependent variable (order) is implicated in the independent variables (institutions). The same rules and institutions that “cause” international order also form part of the shared knowledge that animates social action and makes it intelligible.

What the English School needs to set out more clearly—and Buzan has begun this journey—is the way in which the ideal-types of system, society, and community can elucidate important dynamics in the international system. It is not surprising that constructivists ask for greater clarity about the status of these ideal-types and how they relate to each other. “How do you know,” asks Finnemore (2001, 509), “an international society (or international system or world society) when you see one?” As I have argued elsewhere, these are analytical categories rather than entities belonging to the real world. International society “is not something you see, but an idea in light of which we can make sense of an aspect of contemporary international relations” (Linklater and Suganami 2006, 103).

Wight’s work (1977) was primarily interested in showing how individuals thought and acted in ways that reinforced or altered the normative order. His project comparing international societies throughout history drew extensively on cults, practical philosophies, rhetoric, propaganda, and whatever other contextual clues he could uncover. Diplomatic treaties and legal judgments have also proved to be rich resources for those writings, revealing the prevailing understandings of the states system at any point in time (Osiander 1994; Keene 2002; Clark 2005; 2007). This attention to meaning and understanding in the history of ideas about international society is not *absent* from constructivism (particularly in Fierke 1998; Rae 2002), but it is perhaps more clearly *present* in English School writings.

The treatment of “norms” within the English School is more avowedly normative than one finds in mainstream constructivist thinking. Take, for example, the treatment of human rights by Vincent (1986) and Thomas Risse, Steve Ropp, and Kathryn Sikkink (1999). Vincent seeks to provide a normative defence of human rights. We ought, he argues, to defend the universal rights of citizens to security and subsistence; delivering this basic right to life requires rethinking the authority and legitimacy of sovereign states. The structure of Vincent’s argument is classically identifiable with English School theory. Realism is dismissed for not taking duties to noncitizens seriously, while full-blown cosmopolitanism is rejected because, in the minds of domestic publics, citizens matter *more* than strangers. This leaves him to explore the complexities of human rights within contending normative conceptions of international society.

In the Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink volume, the concern is with the status of human rights norms. What impact have they had on practice? How do we account for variation? And by what processes are actors socialized into compliance with the norms? This latter question is addressed by the application of a “spiral model” that

begins with repression and ends with sovereign states fully internalizing human rights norms and practices (Risse and Sikkink 1999). While it is noteworthy that the rightness of moral universalism is not openly discussed, the strength of the Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink collection is in its analysis of how international norms become domestically instantiated.

The retreat of human rights post-September 11 raises important questions for constructivist analysis, not least whether the process of socialization is reversible. An English School take on this question would, as I have suggested above, situate the institutionalization of human rights within the interplay of system, society, and community in international politics. Classical writers such as Wight and Watson believed there to be a centripetal momentum to power such that it concentrates around a single source. Once the centralization reaches a tipping point, the conditions exist to challenge the pluralist rules and institutions upon which the post-Westphalian order has been built. This line of thought goes to the heart of debates about the role of the United States (and its allies in the West) in building a world order in its own image. Aside from the emergence of an unbalanced power with global economic and military reach, the other significant systemic logic is that of "new terrorism." The willingness of coordinated Islamist terror networks to use violence against Western targets undermines international society's claim to monopolize violence and regulate its use.

Weaving together these two tendencies—the appearance of an imperial power seeking to wage pre-emptive war and a nonstate actor wielding violence outside the framework of the laws of war—we might conclude that Bull was right to be concerned that the element of international society was in decline. Set against this, just as the bell has tolled for the inter-state order many times before, it is possible that the element of society is resilient enough to resist the power of US hegemony and the challenge of transnational nihilism.

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