

The English School: an underexploited resource in IR

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Abstract. The English School is an underutilized research resource and deserves a larger role in IR than it currently has. Its distinctive elements are its methodological pluralism, its historicism, and its interlinking of three key concepts: international system, international society and world society. International society is the main focus, and the *via media*, between the other two, but more work needs to be done to develop the School's theoretical position, particularly in understanding the relationship between international and world society. In order to realize its potential, the English School needs both to construct a more coherent research agenda and to recover some of the working method of the British Committee. It is potentially a way of challenging the theoretical fragmentation that afflicts IR, and of setting up the foundations for a return to grand theory.

1. Introduction

The English School as an approach to international relations (IR) is ripe for reconsideration. It has succeeded in establishing a globally recognized brand name (no mean feat for a non-American theory in the second half of the twentieth century), and is well into a substantial third generation of active scholarship. Yet it still remains outside the mainstream of American IR, and had its designation as a School given to it by someone calling for its closure.² Although impressively active in terms of people writing within or about it, it displays no discernible sense of direction, and the systematic working method that animated and inspired its first generation has atrophied even as the number of people working in the tradition has expanded. Jones's call for closure can be largely disregarded. Few people reading his paper now would accept his depiction of an English School largely defined by the work of Manning and Wight as valid. Indeed, his target was not really the English School, but the whole attempt to construct International Relations as a subject distinct from political theory. His objections to holistic and abstract approaches now seem quaint, and his belief that the English School 'has cut itself off from the classical theme of political thought' (p. 2) is simply wrong.

This article starts from the assumption that IR is a valid enterprise, and makes the case that the English School deserves a larger role within it. I argue that the

¹ I would like to thank Tim Dunne, Lene Hansen, David Jacobson, Tonny Brems Knudsen, Richard Little, Nick Rengger, Ole Wæver, Adam Watson, Nick Wheeler, Richard Whitman, Jaap de Wilde, Yongjin Zhang and two anonymous reviewers for the *Review of International Studies* for comments on earlier drafts of this article.

² Roy E. Jones, 'The English School of International Relations: A Case for Closure', *Review of International Studies*, 7 (1981), pp. 1–13.

English School is an underutilized research resource. The time is ripe to develop and apply its historicist, constructivist, and methodologically pluralist approach to IR. Its methodological pluralism almost certainly precludes it from being set up as a 'research program' as that term is understood by mainstream (that is, positivist) American IR. The English School is not just another paradigm to throw into the tedious game of competing IR theories. It is, instead, an opportunity to step outside that game, and cultivate a more holistic, integrated approach to the study of international relations. By this I do not mean the narrow 'neo-neo' synthesis that has settled around rational choice methodology and questions of absolute versus relative gains as a way of understanding international cooperation. As I hope to show, the English School offers a basis for synthesizing that is both wide and deep enough to set up the foundations for a return to grand theory. The next section sets out a very brief sketch of how the English School has developed to date. Section 3 argues the case for reconvening the English School, and Section 4 proposes (as an opening move in what needs to be a negotiation) what a more self-conscious and forward-looking research agenda might look like.

2. A brief sketch of the English School and its work to date

As a self-conscious intellectual movement, the English School begins with the British Committee on the Theory of International Politics, which started meeting in the late 1950s.³ Earlier roots could perhaps be traced in Charles Manning's and Martin Wight's lectures about international society. The British Committee worked as a sustained series of meetings amongst a diverse group that contained not only people from several academic disciplines but also practitioners from the world of diplomacy. The cross-fertilizations generated by the process of debate in these meetings was a product at least as valuable as the specific publication projects on which the Committee worked. Many subsequent books took important parts of their inspiration from these discussions.⁴ Ironically, given the subsequent emergence of the 'English School' label, most of the meetings were funded by the Rockefeller Foundation. This story has been told in a couple of places.⁵ There is some argument about what boundaries should define the School, and who should be in or out.⁶ While keeping the label 'School', my intention here is to treat it as a zone of

³ Adam Watson, 'The British Committee for the Theory of International Politics' (1998), <http://www.ukc.ac.uk/politics/englishSchool/>

⁴ Discussions with Adam Watson.

⁵ Most obviously in Tim Dunne, *Inventing International Society: A History of the English School* (London: Macmillan, 1998). See also the 'Preface' to Herbert Butterfield and Martin Wight (eds.), *Diplomatic Investigations: Essays in the Theory of International Politics* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1966); the later work of the British Committee is considered in detail in Brunello Vigezzi's introduction to *L'Espansione Della Società Internazionale: L'Europa e il Mondo della fine del Medioevo ai tempi nostri* (Milan: Jaca Books, 1994).

⁶ Dunne, *Inventing International Society*; Hidemi Suganami, 'C. A. W. Manning and the Study of International Relations', *Review of International Studies*, 27.1 (2001), pp. 91–107. For a more direct exchange about Manning and the English School, see Suganami, 'A New Narrative, A New Subject? Tim Dunne on the "English School"' and Dunne's reply 'All Along the Watchtower: A Reply to the Critics of *Inventing International Society*', in *Cooperation and Conflict: Nordic Journal of International Studies*, 35.2 (2000), pp. 217–38.

intellectual activity whose frontiers are extensive and fuzzy enough to avoid most disputes about ins and outs. The ideas of Manning and Carr, for example, influenced many of the British Committee participants and their debates, though neither was a member of the British Committee.

It is difficult to fix the story of the English School into neat stages without provoking controversy. Wæver suggests four phases and his scheme is as good as any for setting out the main threads of the evolution.⁷

- *Phase 1* runs from 1959, with the founding of the British Committee, to 1966 with the publication of Butterfield and Wight's *Diplomatic Investigations*. During this period, the Committee developed the focus on international society as its preferred approach to theorizing about international relations.
- *Phase 2* runs from 1966 to 1977, in which year two of the foundational texts of the English School appeared: Bull's *The Anarchical Society*, which focused on the nature of Western international society, and Wight's *Systems of States*, which opened up the exploration of international society in a world historical context. A younger generation also began to make its mark at this time, most notably with Vincent's 1974 book *Nonintervention and International Order*.
- *Phase 3* runs from 1977 to 1992. It is basically about consolidating the English School, and in some respects also about passing the torch to a new generation. The British Committee's work continued up to the mid-1980s, but after Bull's death the formal structure of regular meetings broke down, and the British Committee phase of the English School came to an end. Its main fruits were the 1984 book edited by Bull and Watson, *The Expansion of International Society*; and Watson's 1992 book *The Evolution of International Society*, which carried on with the comparative historical approach opened up by Wight. Vincent's main books—*Foreign Policy and Human Rights* (1986), and *Human Rights and International Relations* (1986) fall within this period. So do several edited volumes: J. D. B. Miller and R. J. Vincent (eds.), *Order and Violence: Hedley Bull and International Relations* (1990); Hedley Bull, Benedict Kingsbury and Adam Roberts (eds.), *Hugo Grotius and International Relations* (1990); Michael Donelan, *The Reason of States* (1978); James Mayall, *The Community of States* (1982); and Cornelia Navari, *The Condition of States* (1991); and two important monographs: Mayall's 1990 *Nationalism and International Society*, and Donelan's 1990 *Elements of International Political Theory*. It was during this phase that the English School got its name from Roy Jones, which began a cycle of self-reflections on the state of the School.⁸
- *Phase 4* runs from 1992 to the present. It is about the arrival of a new generation of English School writers with few or no direct links to the British Committee, and more open to working with English School ideas and approaches in the wider context of developments in IR theory generally (for examples neorealism, regime theory, constructivism, globalization). It was heralded by the 1992 Special

⁷ Ole Wæver, 'Four Meanings of International Society: A Trans-Atlantic Dialogue', in B. A. Roberson (ed.), *International Society and the Development of International Relations Theory* (London: Pinter, 1998), pp. 85–9.

⁸ Sheila Grader, 'The English School of International Relations: Evidence and Evaluation', *Review of International Studies*, 14 (1988), pp. 29–44; P. Wilson, 'The English School of International Relations: A Reply to Sheila Grader', *Review of International Studies*, 15 (1989), pp. 49–58.

Issue of *Millennium*, 'Beyond International Society', and by the 1992 ECPR workshop in Limerick which eventually produced B.A. Roberson's 1998 collection *International Society and the Development of International Relations Theory*. During this fourth phase the English School has successfully reproduced itself both through the force of its ideas crossing three generations of scholars, and the influence of several of its central figures and regular contributors on their graduate students. It remains vigorous, but what it has so far failed to do during the 1990s is to recreate the sustained discussion forums that played such a big role in stimulating and orientating the work of the earlier generations.⁹

What ties all this activity together? If the English School is coherent enough to deserve the label 'School' (or even 'zone of intellectual activity' or 'cluster of thinkers') what defines its common ground? In Dunne's view, the intellectual terrain of the English School is demarcated by acceptance of 'three preliminary articles':¹⁰ (1) a given tradition of enquiry; (2) a broadly interpretive approach to the study of international relations; and (3) an explicit concern with the normative dimension of IR theory. Dunne's approach may, as Suganami suggests, be a bit too demanding, running the risk of generating scholastic debates about ins and outs.¹¹ Normative theory, for example, is without doubt a very strong part of the English School tradition, but whether it has to be a *necessary* condition for 'membership' or participation is more arguable. A less demanding demarcation of the English School's core domain might focus on just two elements: its methodological approach and its three key concepts.

As Little points out, the English School is based on a tripartite distinction amongst international system, international society and world society.¹² Within the English School discourse, these are sometimes (and perhaps misleadingly) codified as *Hobbes* (or sometimes *Machiavelli*), *Grotius* and *Kant* (Cutler, 1991).¹³ They line up with Wight's 'three traditions' of IR theory: *Realism*, *Rationalism* and *Revolutionism* (though this parallel is less obvious in Wight's original formulation than in subsequent usage of these terms).¹⁴ Broadly speaking, these terms are now understood as follows:

- International system (Hobbes/Machiavelli) is about power politics amongst states, and Realism puts the structure and process of international anarchy at the centre of IR theory. This position is broadly parallel to mainstream realism and neorealism and is thus well developed and clearly understood.

⁹ There were many more works within these periods than those listed here. For a comprehensive bibliography, see the English School website: <http://www.ukc.ac.uk/politics/englishSchool/>

¹⁰ Dunne, *Inventing International Society*, pp. 5–11.

¹¹ Suganami, 'C. A. W. Manning'.

¹² Richard Little, 'Neorealism and the English School: A Methodological, Ontological and Theoretical Reassessment', *European Journal of International Relations*, 1 (1995), pp. 15–16.

¹³ Claire A. Cutler, 'The "Grotian Tradition" in International Relations', *Review of International Studies*, 17 (1991), pp. 41–65.

¹⁴ Martin Wight, *International Theory: The Three Traditions* (Leicester: Leicester University Press/Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1991). Edited by Brian Porter and Gabriele Wight. This 'Rationalism' is not the same as that understood in American debates about rationalism versus reflectivism.

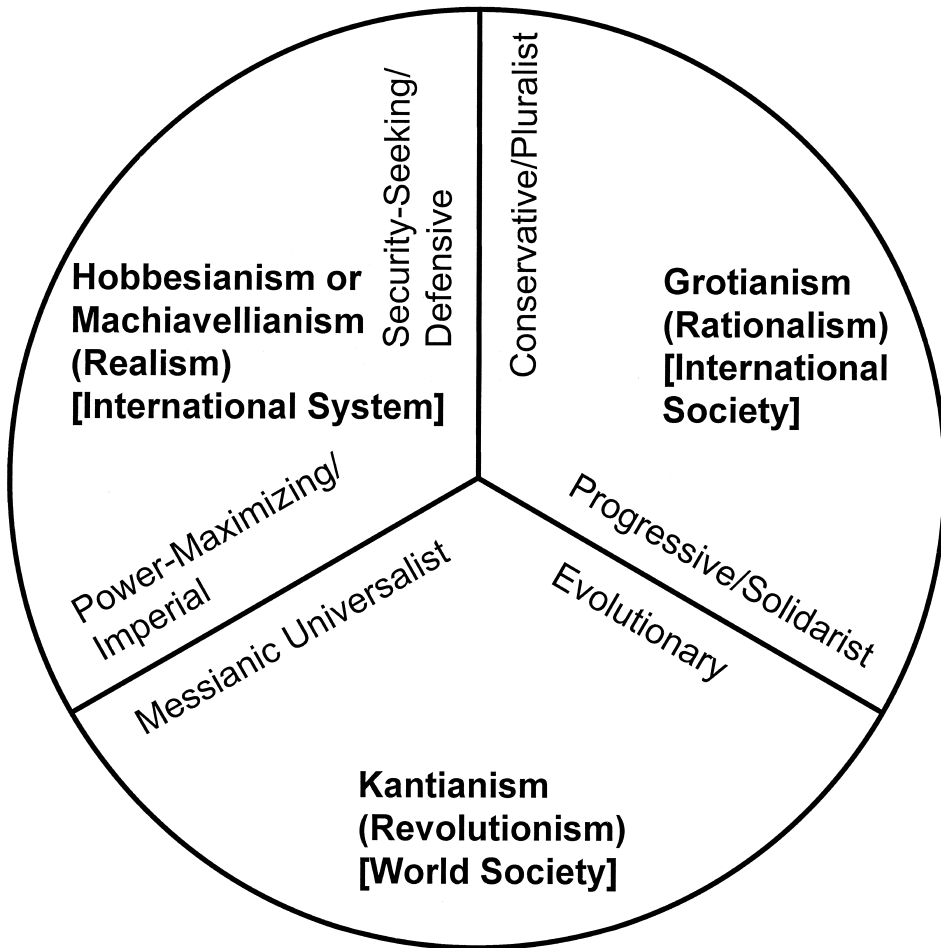


Figure 1. *International Relations as viewed through the three traditions of the English School.*

Notes: Titles in () are Wight’s labels; titles in [] are the analytical focus; titles along the border zones are where the traditions blend into each other.

- International society (Grotius) is about the institutionalization of shared interest and identity amongst states, and Rationalism puts the creation and maintenance of shared norms, rules and institutions at the centre of IR theory. This position has some parallels to regime theory, but is much deeper, having constitutive rather than merely instrumental implications. International society has been the main focus of English School thinking, and the concept is quite well developed and relatively clear.
- World society (Kant) takes individuals, non-state organizations and ultimately the global population as a whole as the focus of global societal identities and arrangements, and Revolutionism puts transcendence of the state system at the centre of IR theory. Revolutionism is mostly about forms of universalist cosmo-

politanism. It could include communism, but as Wæver notes, these days it is usually taken to mean liberalism.¹⁵ This position has some parallels to transnationalism, but carries a much more foundational link to normative political theory. It is the least well developed of the English School concepts, and has not yet been clearly or systematically articulated.

In a later work, Little goes on to argue that each of these elements is associated with a different methodological approach: international system with positivism, international society with hermeneutics and interpretivism, and world society with critical theory.¹⁶

As illustrated in Figure 1, the idea is that these elements form a complete and interlinked picture of the International Relations universe. Although each element is conceptually and methodologically distinct, they blur into each other at the boundaries. In the English School perspective, all three of these elements are in continuous coexistence and interplay, the question being how strong they are in relation to each other. It is this explicitly pluralist (or multiple rather than competing paradigms) methodological approach that underpins the distinctiveness of the English School as an approach to the study of IR. By introducing a third element not only as a *via media* between realism and liberalism/utopianism, but also as the keystone to an interdependent set of concepts, the English School transcends the binary opposition between them that for long plagued debates about IR theory. By assuming that all three elements always operate simultaneously (that is, methodological pluralism), it also transcends the assumption often made in the so-called inter-paradigm debate, that realist, liberal and Marxist approaches to IR theory are incommensurable. Within this framework, there is general agreement that the main thrust of the English School so far has been to establish the Grotian/Rationalism element by developing the concept of international society.

Bull and Watson's classic definition of international society is: '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'.¹⁷ This definition neatly demonstrates the methodological pluralism of the English School by combining the Hobbesian/Realist element of international system, with the Grotian/Rationalist element of a socially constructed order. It interleaves the logic of more material theories of the international system, driven by billiard ball metaphors, with the view that sentience makes a difference, and that social systems cannot be understood in the same way as physical ones. When units are sentient, how they perceive each other is a major determinant of how they interact. If the units share a common identity (a religion, a system of governance, a language), or even just a common set of rules or norms (about how to determine relative status, and how to conduct diplomacy), then

¹⁵ Ole Wæver, 'International Society—Theoretical Promises Unfulfilled?', *Cooperation and Conflict*, 27 (1992), p. 98.

¹⁶ Richard Little, 'The English School's Contribution to the Study of International Relations', *European Journal of International Relations*, 6 (2000), pp. 395–422.

¹⁷ Hedley Bull and Adam Watson (eds.), *The Expansion of International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p.1.

these intersubjective understandings not only condition their behaviour, but also define the boundaries of a social system. The basic idea of international society is thus quite simple: just as human beings as individuals live in societies which they both shape and are shaped by, so also states live in an international society which they shape and are shaped by. This social element has to be put alongside realism's raw logic of anarchy if one is to get a meaningful picture of how systems of states operate.

The main thrust of the English School's work has been to uncover the nature and function of international societies, and to trace their history and development. Its foundation has been the synthesis of realism and rationalism just outlined. But pursuit of this goal has obliged the English School to engage with the element of liberal revolutionism. Once the idea of society was conceded, one had to think not just of international society (amongst states), but also 'world society' (the idea of shared norms and values at the individual level, but transcending the state). It is clear that the relationship between international society and world society is fundamental to English School theory. It is also clear that its ability to focus enquiry along these lines is one of the attractions of English School theory.

Yet despite some advances, this key relationship remains an area of confusion and contestation within the English School. In particular, the concept of world society remains seriously underspecified, in some ways resembling the theoretical dustbin that neorealists made of the unit level. In an ontological sense, world society starts from individuals and is in clear contrast to the state-based ontology of international society. But while this distinction is clear up to a point, it begs the question of where the organized but non-state components of global civil society should be located. If transnational firms and international non-governmental organizations are part of world society, it is far from clear how they relate to world society conceived in terms of shared identity at the individual level. Nor, looking back at Figure 1, is it clear how either of these more empirical interpretations of world society relates to Wight's Kantianism/Revolutionism, even though they inhabit the same slice of the English School pie. The confusion surrounding world society makes it a key priority for further work.

The more historical side of the School, represented by Butterfield, Wight and Watson, think of world society (in the form of shared culture) as a *prerequisite* for international society. As Wight puts it: 'We must assume that a states-system [that is, an international society] will not come into being without a degree of cultural unity among its members'.¹⁸ Much of the historical record from classical Greece to early modern Europe supports this view, suggesting that a common culture is a necessary condition for an international society. As in the expansion of European international society, states from other cultures may then join this core raising questions about how the norms, rules and institutions of international society interact with the domestic life of polities rooted in different civilizations, and whether international norms are sustainable under these circumstances. But a case can also be made that a preceding world society is neither historically nor functionally a necessary condition for the formation of an international society.¹⁹

¹⁸ Martin Wight, *Systems of States*, edited by Hedley Bull (Leicester, UK: Leicester University Press, 1977), p. 33.

¹⁹ Barry Buzan, 'From International System to International Society: Structural Realism and Regime Theory Meet the English School', *International Organization*, 47 (1993), pp. 327–52.

Those more concerned with the maintenance and development of international societies, rather than their origins, come from a different angle (though the two concerns meet on the ground where established international societies expand into areas with a different world society, as has happened in modern times). This question is too complicated to explore fully here. One key issue is the possibility of an ontological tension between the development of world society (particularly human rights) and the maintenance of international society. The argument is that the development of individual rights in international law will undermine state sovereignty. The expansion of individual rights threatens external, or juridical, sovereignty by facilitating grounds for outside intervention in the domestic life of the state. It threatens internal, or empirical, sovereignty by restricting the rights of the state against its citizens. In other words, regardless of whether a measure of common culture is required as a foundation for international society, any serious attempt to develop a world society (by advancing a universalist human rights law for example), will tend to undermine the states that are the foundation of international society. Linklater celebrates the potential of this assault on the Westphalian order.²⁰ Bull is fearful of destructive dynamics between the two levels of society.²¹ One line of concern is the mirror image of Linklater's, namely that if the individual ontology becomes powerful in relation to the state one, weakening sovereignty, then it is not clear on what basis international political order can be maintained. Another is that the rise of sharp differences at the world society level (such as during the Cold War, or as currently over disagreements about 'universal' human rights) will corrode the stability of international society.

The international/world society question remains one of the most interesting unresolved issues in English School theory. The principal frame for discussing it is the distinction between *pluralist* and *solidarist* conceptions of international society (see Figure 1). Pluralist conceptions lean towards the realist side of rationalism. They presuppose that sovereignty is about the cultivation of political difference and distinctness. If that is the case, then the scope for international society is fairly minimal, centred on shared concerns about international order under anarchy, and thus largely confined to agreement about sovereignty, diplomacy and non-intervention. Pluralism stresses the instrumental side of international society as a functional counterweight to the threat of excessive disorder in an international anarchy. Solidarist conceptions lean towards the revolutionist side of rationalism. They presuppose that the potential scope for international society is somewhat wider, possibly embracing shared norms about such things as limitations on the use of force, and acceptable 'standards of civilization' with regard to the relationship between states and citizens (that is, human rights). In this view, sovereignty can also embrace many degrees of political convergence (as in the EU). Solidarism focuses on the possibility of shared moral norms underpinning a more expansive, and almost inevitably more interventionist, understanding of international order. A solidarist international society is not the same as a world society.

²⁰ Andrew Linklater, 'Men and Citizens in International Relations', *Review of International Studies*, 7 (1981), pp. 34–5.

²¹ Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society. A Study of Order in World Politics* (London: Macmillan, 1977), pp. 151–3; Hedley Bull, *Justice in International Relations*. Hagey Lectures, University of Waterloo, Ontario (1984), pp. 11–18.

It has been a matter of debate as to whether pluralism and solidarism are mutually exclusive positions, separated by fundamental differences, or whether they define the ends of a spectrum along which movement is possible. If they are mutually exclusive, then they simply reproduce within the rationalist 'via media' a version of the polarization between realism and liberalism that splits IR theory more generally. Although placing this polarization within the linking framework of international society and world society concepts lowers the ideological heat of this debate, and opens the possibility of conducting it in a shared institutional and evolutionary context, this would weaken the potential of the English School to offer its methodological pluralism as a foundation for grand theory. But a better case can be made that the two concepts are in some foundational ways linked together. Pluralism has to rest on some elements of solidarism, and solidarism depends on the pluralist framework to structure its political order. Increasing degrees of solidarism do not necessarily threaten the preservation of pluralist difference across the board, and sovereignty is a sufficiently flexible concept to remain central to the definition of political order even within quite thick networks of international norms, rules and institutions.

Discussion of solidarism eventually spills over the boundary into world society. Once again, the question arises of whether international societies can arise without having precursor world societies of shared culture. And at what point does the carrier of solidarism have to expand from ruling elites to the citizenry at large, thus crossing the boundary from international to world society? While it might be argued that a primitive pluralist international society does not, in principle, require much by way of world society, a case can be made that solidarism cannot develop far without being accompanied by democracy, and thus by matching transnational developments in world society.²²

3. The case for reconvening the English School

If the English School is in vigorous condition, and has solved the problem of reproducing itself across the generations, why worry about it? Will not a *laissez-faire* attitude suffice? No. The problem is not to rescue an enfeebled body of thought that is in danger of going extinct, but to take a robust body of thought and increase its impact and reach by giving it more social cohesion and a sharper intellectual focus. The British Committee flourished not just because it had good ideas and good people, but also because it had a good working method. It created both a sense of intellectual community and a set of research priorities. As things now stand, the English School no longer has any identifiable leading figure or core forum. The lack of a leading figure may not matter too much. Indeed, it may even be a welcome development. The English School is substantially bigger than it was, and there are plenty of strong performers in its ranks. But the lack of a core forum is more serious, especially given the larger size and global spread of the current English School research community. Because of this lack, there is a danger that fragmentation will dissipate energies, and lead to the cumulative opus of the English School

²² Buzan, 'From International System'.

becoming less than the sum of its parts. Too many individuals are now working in isolation, and although there is a quite strong sense of tradition, there is not much sense of division of labour or overall direction.

There are many obvious differences of circumstance between now and forty years ago, but these do not undermine the case for taking an updated version of the British Committee as a model of what might be aimed for now. The community of IR scholars is now much bigger, more diverse, better organized, and more conscious of itself as a field, if not as a discipline, than was the case during the 1950s and 60s, and its theoretical environment is much more pluralist (or in a negative light, fragmented) than that which faced the members of the British Committee. Various aspects of the contemporary *Zeitgeist* in IR also support the case for reconvening. There is a greater openness to both world history and normative debate than there has been for some time. The constructivist wave also resonates with the English School concepts of international and world society, though as Wæver argues, there are dangers in conflating the two.²³ In turn the School offers not only a coherent framework within which many of the fragmentations and diversities of IR can be synthesized, but also an ideal platform from which to build bridges to related discourses. The English School research agenda ties together political theory and IR theory, and offers strong links to historical sociology, world history, international law, philosophy/ethics, international political economy (and possibly macro-sociology more generally, and business studies). IR's pretensions to holism and multi-disciplinarity have often been more rhetorical than real, and the English School, both with its key concepts and its methodological pluralism, is a good vehicle for addressing these issues. The built-in historicism also offers a useful opportunity to challenge the Westphalian-dominated foundations of much mainstream IR theory.

In effect, the theoretically pluralist frame of the English School approach requires analysts of international systems to tell three parallel stories about their subject, and to question how these stories line up with each other. Far from requiring the abandonment of existing skills, this approach optimizes them. IR already knows how to tell Hobbesian, Kantian and Grotian stories. But as things stand, it prefers to tell these stories in opposition to each other. IR needs to shift perspective so that it sees these stories not as alternative, mutually exclusive, interpretations, but as a linked set, each illuminating a different facet of reality. The interesting question is not which of these stories is right, but what kind of configuration the combination of them produces. In a longer historical perspective, the question is how they evolve together, and how to identify when major changes across the board define shifts of era in the history of international systems.

The English School thus represents a strong and distinctive approach to the study of IR that could benefit greatly from an improved sense of self-awareness and coordination. In the 1990s it became bigger and more scattered than its predecessors, and has not yet found a way of organizing and directing its energies. The British Committee constructed a sense of direction and coordination, defined a division of labour, and made sure that developments cross-fertilized throughout the English School community. It is clear in hindsight to see how this worked and how it

²³ Ole Wæver, 'Does the English School's *Via Media* equal the Contemporary Constructivist Middle Ground?' BISA Conference Paper, Manchester (December 1999).

could be made to work again, and we need all of those benefits now. If the English School is to successfully promote its claim to be one of the major approaches to the study of IR, and especially if it is to do so in a world still heavily dominated by US-based theories and debates, then the School must both give people a sense of the part their research plays in the overall scheme of things, and increase awareness of the research opportunities existing in the project as a whole.

At its most ambitious, what I have in mind is that a 'great conversation' should be created around the English School, rather as Wallerstein has done around 'world-systems'. This would encourage a wide circle of participants both from outside academia, and from within several academic disciplines, and try to create some sense of a linked research agenda, both theoretical and applied. The English School is an excellent and appropriate vehicle for this. Like Wallerstein's thinking, it easily combines IPE and world history perspectives, thereby avoiding the mistake made by much traditional mainstream IR of splitting into contending realist and liberal (and radical) streams. This mistake perhaps goes a long way towards explaining why IR theory has made so little impact outside its own circle: neither liberalism nor realism is plausible by itself, and much energy is dissipated by the opposition between them. Overall the English School framework offers the best available basis on which to synthesize quite a few of the main lines of IR theory, and thus to revive a 'grand theory' project.

4. Suggestions for an English School research agenda

This Section looks at the six main traditional areas of English School work, taking them as a template for starting to think about what potentialities have been underexploited, what new areas and applications might be opened up, and what division of labour might be constructed. The English School is now easily big enough to sustain, and indeed to require, some specialization. In the space available here it is not possible to do more than suggest a number of lines of enquiry and attempt a first suggestion about a new set of priorities. The purpose is to start a conversation rather than to set out any definitive position. If it is to be reconvened, then one of its founding moves will be to work out its priorities for a detailed research programme.

Self-referential reflections

This already constitutes the largest section of the English School literature. Raking over the works of old masters in order to find reassessments and reinterpretations reflects similar approaches in political theory, and is thus not an unusual method of work. But it could also be seen as a bit obsessive and backward looking, and perhaps one of the causes of Wæver's criticism that the English School has largely stagnated, despite its 'extremely interesting locale in the IR landscape'.²⁴ While all of

²⁴ Wæver, 'International Society', p. 121.

the central figures merit visiting and revisiting, there should surely now be more space for developing the agenda away from the works of its founding fathers. Given the array of new talent that is interested and available, there should also be sufficient confidence to do so.

Of course, contemplating the classic works is one way of thinking about English School theory. But there is also a case for making the theoretical problems clearer, more explicit and more generally accessible by delinking them from the masters, and formulating them as an agenda in their own right. There need to be core theoretical and definitional debates about the nature of international and world society, how they relate to each other, and how they are constructed and deconstructed. Several questions strike me as being particularly important in this context, and I am sure there are others:

1. *The relationship between international and world society.* As noted above, there is an unresolved tension in English School thinking about the relationship between international and world society. Does international society require world society as a precondition, as Wight seemed to think, or can one take a more functional view of how international societies develop? Can developments in world society threaten international society, either by undermining the state or by blocking the development of solidarism? In the existing literature, this tension is complicated by being embedded in empirical realities and might benefit from being considered as well in more abstract terms. Perhaps the first priority here is to unpack the still rather murky concept of world society and make more explicit what it actually contains.

2. *The tension between conservative/pluralist, and progressiv/solidarist views of international society.* Is international society a system for preserving the distinctiveness and independence of states within a limited framework of shared rules, or does it develop, as the practice of regimes and regional cooperations seem to suggest, into increasing degrees of harmonization and integration (thus the necessary link to world society), not to mention intervention? At what point does solidarism become so progressive that it calls into question the existence of a state system (*viz.*, the EU), or is it the case that the understanding and practice of sovereignty evolve along with solidarism, continuously solving the contradiction as it arises? There is room for a lot of empirical work here looking at contemporary international and world society in English School theoretical perspective. There is also room for some normative work, for example posing a strong international society as the only solution to the problem of weak states and underdevelopment. Unless there is to be sustained chaos, international society has to provide the layers of governance that weak states cannot yet provide for themselves. In a sense, it has to take over from imperialism as the next phase of the transition to modernism (and its derivatives and successors) that all parts of the world except the West still have to go through—not necessarily in the same stages, but somehow having to get to a similar end result, compatible with their cultures.

3. *The tension between global and subglobal, particularly regional, levels of international society.* Much of the ‘classical’ English School literature seems to be based on the assumption that the baseline story is the emergence of a distinctive European international society, its transformation into a global international society,

and the ups and downs of that global international society since then. While this formulation certainly represents a substantial part of the truth, it is both too globalist and too Eurocentric in its assumptions. The lines of argument opened in (1) and (2) immediately above suggest that there is a lot of room for differentiating between global international society on the one hand, and subglobal, and particularly regional, international/world societies on the other. Neither 'international' nor 'world' in this usage necessarily imply global (just as 'world-systems' and 'world empires' do not have to be global). The empirical record suggests that different regional international societies can build on common global international society foundations, as they have done in Europe, the Islamic world, and Southeast Asia (and earlier amongst the communist states). Given the apparent regionalizing tendencies in the post-Cold War international system, the scope for subglobal developments, and their implications for global ones, needs to be investigated urgently. So too does the possibility for non-Western forms of international society, or fusions between Western and non-Western forms.

4. *The classification of types of international society.* Wight made an early start on this, but there is clearly much more room for development.²⁵ A robust taxonomy is a necessary condition for being able to monitor structural change. One might, for example, analyse international societies according to three organizing principles: (a) political inequality amongst units (Imperial); (b) political equality amongst units (Westphalian), and (c) functional differentiation of units (Mediaeval or Neo-mediaeval). Pure forms of any of these may be rare, and nuanced analysis will focus on the mix and balance amongst them. One might prefer to try to identify some other aspect of norms (religious, economic) as a basis for analysis. We also need to be able to differentiate between weak and strong international societies, particularly if solidarist/progressive views of international society are to be given scope.

The relationship of the English School to IR theory

If the English School is to develop as a major approach to IR, then work on how it relates to the IR project as a whole will continue to be necessary. Two lines stand out as particularly important for the future. The first is the linkage and interplay between constructivism on the one hand, and the English School concepts of international and world society on the other. As the constructivist wave gathers strength in IR, it will be important to establish that international and world society should be priority subjects on the constructivist agenda, and to make the case that the more historical approach of the English School is a useful gateway into understanding the normative structure and practices of international society.

Second is the methodological pluralism that underlies the whole approach and the contrast of this with the more methodologically monist approaches (neorealism, neoliberalism, world systems) that underlie much other IR theory. Part of the attraction of the English School is, as Wæver notes, its ability to 'combine traditions

²⁵ Martin Wight, *Systems of States*, edited by Hedley Bull (Leicester, UK: Leicester University Press, 1977)..

and theories normally not able to relate to each other'.²⁶ This position will have to be both defended and promoted if the English School is to be able to make more substantial inroads into the US IR community than has been the case thus far. One way of facilitating this would be to bridge-build between the English School community and those engaged in IPE, regime theory and globalization. Some linkage between the English School and regime theory has already been made.²⁷ The linkage to IPE and globalization is obvious in terms of the centrality of norms, rules and institutions to both approaches, and as with constructivism there is an available bargain in offering IPE and globalization a ready-made legitimizing link to 'classical' IR theory. The English School trilogy of international system, international society and world society may well offer ways of clarifying the formlessness that afflicts much of the discussion of globalization.

War and balance of power in international society

If we are to take seriously the stories about democratic peace and globalization that we tell ourselves these days, then war and balance of power are going to be less central to international society than in the past. These topics will remain of interest to those pursuing the history of international society, and perhaps also to some contemporary regional international societies, but they no longer seem anything like so important to the story of the West as previously. This change is itself worthy of close attention. If war and the balance of power were core institutions of classical European international society, what has replaced them (markets? great power security communities?) and how does such a shift affect the nature and operation of international society?

The history of international society

A willingness to embrace history has been one of the distinctive features of the English School compared to most other mainstream IR theories. Much good work has been done in sketching out the story of international society over the last five millennia, and on tracing in more detail the particular emergence, and subsequent globalization, of the distinctive European international society. But this is a vast subject area in which huge and underexploited reserves of comparative material remain to be tapped. We still need to know about earlier international societies in more detail, and to feed this understanding into the taxonomic exercise of classifying international societies suggested above. We need to know more about the history of international systems and societies in order to place our own experience

²⁶ Wæver, 'International Society', p. 121.

²⁷ Tony Evans and Peter Wilson, 'Regime Theory and the English School of International Relations: A Comparison', *Millennium*, 21 (1992), pp. 329–51; Buzan, 'From International System'; Andrew Hurrell, 'International Society and the Study of Regimes: A Reflective Approach', in Volker Rittberger (ed.), *Regime Theory and International Relations* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993).

into context, and the English School has a substantial comparative advantage in being the vehicle for this development.

There is also much room left for more country studies, looking at how particular states and peoples encounter and adapt to international society. This literature should find connections to the agent-structure debate.

And while there remains a strong need to look back, there is an almost equally strong need to apply the English School lens to contemporary and future studies. Its methodological pluralism should, in principle, give it a comparative advantage both in trying to capture the nature of the present world order, and in contemplating how it might evolve in the future. IR theory in general has proved disappointing both in creating overviews of the present and in anticipating the future. Yet in principle, looking simultaneously at international system, international society and world society should open up a powerful approach to considering these questions. Some moves in this direction have already been made,²⁸ but much more could, and should, be done.

Perhaps the greatest opportunity available here is to link the English School to debates about the EU. It is frequently observed that the study of the EU is heavily empirical, and that this theory-free quality is not desirable. On the face of it English School theory is admirably suited to this task, for what is the EU if not the most highly developed, thickest, most solidarist/progressive international society ever seen? Where better to explore the difficult relationship between international and world society than in the context of the debates about EU widening and deepening? Where better to contemplate the outer limits of international society, the frontier zone across which a very thick international society acquires so much collective 'actor quality' in the wider international system that it can no longer really be thought of as an anarchic substructure? Where better, indeed, to contemplate the future by anticipating the costs and benefits of more advanced types of international society? If it remains generally true of international systems that the economic sector is always more globalized than the political sector, which in turn is always more globalized than the societal (identity) sector, then the EU is the perfect place to observe the problems and opportunities created by the disjunctures across these three bands of human activity. A marriage between English School theory and EU studies could be fruitful in many different directions.

Using the same logic, an almost equally compelling case can be made for integrating English School theory and IPE. IPE's concern with regimes and international economic orders fits neatly into the framework of international and world society. Bringing English School theory into contact with EU studies and IPE promises rich rewards in both directions. English School theory can fill a void in some still excessively empirical areas of IPE, and the development of English School theory would almost certainly gain from the stimulus of being engaged with what are arguably the two most important lines of development in the contemporary international system. As contemporary developments in the West generally and Europe in particular show with great clarity, the development of an increasingly dense network of shared norms, rules and institutions amongst states cannot continue

²⁸ Rick Fawn and James Mayall, 'Recognition, Self-Determination and Secession in Post-Cold War International Society', in Rick Fawn and Jeremy Larkin (eds.), *International Society After the Cold War* (London: Macmillan, 1996); Ronnie Lipschutz, 'Reconstructing World Politics: The Emergence of Global Civil Society', *Millennium*, 21 (1992), pp. 389–420.

without a parallel development of shared norms and identities among the peoples, particularly when the states are liberal democracies. More advanced forms of international society require matching developments of 'world' culture amongst the masses. Conversely, a world society cannot emerge unless it is supported by a stable political framework, and a state-based international society remains the only plausible candidate for this. Thinking along these lines exposes fault lines within the English School between conservative/pluralist positions, which see international society as mainly about the preservation of cultural difference and political independence (Bull's label 'anarchical society'), and liberal ones, which take the definition of society at face value, and therefore open up to the possibility of international society as solidarist/progressive, leading towards more cultural homogeneity and a degree of political integration (as best illustrated by the EU).

Ethics, international law, intervention and international society

The strong strand of normative and ethical enquiry in the English School remains robust. Its most natural link, as Rengger argues, is with the parallel tradition in political theory.²⁹

If international society is about shared norms, rules and institutions, then it must be closely related to international law. If one takes a narrow view of what constitutes international law (focusing mainly on the 'positive' law made by agreements amongst states), then international society is a much wider concept than international law. But some of the more expansive understandings of law would narrow the gap between them (customary law standing as a near synonym for norms, natural law underpinning claims to universalist norms). There was some interest in this linkage in earlier English School works, but no systematic interdisciplinary link with International Law ever developed. I lack the expertise to suggest exactly how the discourses of English School thinking and international law should be brought together. But there seems a strong case for mounting some sort of formal bridge-building dialogue amongst like-minded persons from both camps to explore the question. If complementarities or synergies are found, they should be developed and fed into the two communities of scholars.

The question of intervention blends elements of normative and legal debate and very much connects both to current affairs. Is intervention a right or a duty, and for what ends and with what effects? The subject is as important, possibly more important, now than in the past, and should remain a key focus of the English School agenda. One key to it lies in the distinction between global international society and subglobal/regional international societies made above. If it is possible to build distinctive subglobal/regional international societies on the common foundations provided by global international society, then this arrangement frames the issue of intervention in the form of three questions.

1. How legitimate is intervention within the global rules and norms: that is, the lowest common denominator of international society?

²⁹ Nicholas Rengger, 'A City Which Sustains all Things? Communitarianism and International Society', *Millennium*, 21:3 (1992), pp. 353–69.

2. How legitimate is intervention within the rules and norms of a given subglobal/regional international society such as the EU or the Arab League?
3. How legitimate is intervention *across* the boundary between distinctive subglobal/regional international societies: for example, from the West into Africa?

Questions about the legitimacy of intervention relate so intimately to the issue of sovereignty that it is impossible to separate them. At the pluralist end of the spectrum, in a pure Westphalian international society, virtually all intervention is illegitimate (except against forces aiming to overthrow the international order). At the solidarist/progressive end is a thick international society such as that represented by the EU, where the agreed unpacking of sovereignty, and the establishment of agreements about elements of justice, makes many more kinds of intervention legitimate.

The state

The state has been central to English School theory. Unlike neorealism, which makes system structure dominant over the units, English School theory is much more inside-out, than outside-in. International society is constructed by the units, and particularly by the dominant units, in the system, and consequently reflects their domestic character. In this sense, English School thinking is close to Wendt's view that 'anarchy is what states make of it'. It also accepts as true for international, and perhaps world, society the neorealist injunction that international systems are largely defined by the dominant units within them. This being so, the English School should be particularly interested in the evolution of the leading modern states from absolutist to nationalist to democratic to postmodern, charting the impact on international society of these domestic transformations. It should also be interested in the question of sovereignty, not only because of links to intervention suggested above, but even more so because any solidarist/progressive view of international (let alone world) society requires sharp moves away from rigid Westphalian conceptions of what sovereignty is and how it works. As the case of the EU illustrates, thick international societies have to unpack and redistribute elements of sovereignty. English School theory needs to understand all of this better than it now does. It needs to think about sovereignty and the postmodern state. And it needs to go on from there to contemplate functionally differentiated international societies, in which states are not the only actors generating, and being generated by, international society, though in some sectors they may still remain the dominant actors. This agenda finds its roots in Bull's 'neomedieval' idea, which has had some resonance in English School thinking. But whereas Bull saw such development as problematic because of its incompatibility with the Westphalian state, a new approach might instead see it as part and parcel of how the postmodern state is itself evolving. Both postmodern states and premodern, weak, ones may only be sustainable within strong, functionally differentiated international societies.

This focus should not obscure the continuing need to deal with questions of ideology and revolutionary states. If Fukuyama is right that the struggle between ideologies has broadly collapsed into debates within liberalism then it becomes

important to understand liberal ideology as a source of norms, rules and institutions. Revolution seem more likely to be located at the periphery than at the core, and therefore more likely to affect regional international societies than the global one—though a fusion of terrorism with weapons of mass destruction could quickly change this picture.

5. Conclusions

If the arguments made above are sound, then there is a strong case for reconvening the English School. Its approach offers ways to address a number of problems in IR. In particular, its historicism and methodological pluralism offer ways not only of reintegrating the fragmented world of IR theory, but of strengthening connections between IR and the other social sciences and world history. IR has imported much from other disciplines, but exported little to them, and if this embarrassing imbalance of trade is to be rectified, IR needs to promote concepts that other disciplines can integrate into their debates. The English School offers such concepts, and also the possibility of reviving grand theory. Before it can play these roles, however, its energy and activity needs to be much better coordinated than it now is. The English School needs not only to recover some of the working methods of the British Committee, but also to address systematically some of the unresolved questions in its own theoretical repertoire. Some suggestions on how to proceed have been sketched out above as an invitation to opening the necessary debate.