

New thinking on international society¹

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Abstract

International society refers to the dominant diplomatic and normative discourse in the practice of world politics. At a minimum, its rules and institutions regulate interactions by sovereign communities, prescribing permissible forms of behaviour. There is also a deeper sense of society in which members share values about the 'ends' that communities ought to try and achieve. While this diplomatic and normative discourse is thought to have existed for several centuries, it is only in the last four decades or so that it has become a central concept in academic International Relations. The article begins by re-stating the research agenda for the study of international society as conceived of by writers belonging to the classical English School. It then considers in detail the way in which recent publications have sought to carry these debates forward. Three clusters of issues are dealt with here: system and society; rules and institutions; and the issue of normative change. The article concludes with an evaluation of the state of the English School within the study of International Relations.

'Professor Einstein, do you realise that this is the same exam paper that you set last year', said the examination officer. 'Ah,' began the reply, 'the questions are the same, it's the answers that have changed.' This apocryphal story serves as a useful way to think about the evolution of the English School approach to international relations (Dunne 1998). My aim here is to engage with a range of recent important books and edited collections that share much with the 'classic' English School writings of (among others) Martin Wight, Hedley Bull, R. J. Vincent and Adam Watson, but exhibit important differences. Suffice to say at this stage that the new generation who continue to identify consciously with the classical English

School canon are more open than their predecessors to influences from philosophy, social theory and world history. In the main, the recent work suggests that the Oxbridge *mentalité* that dominated the British Committee on the Theory of International Politics from the late 1950s to the early 1980s has been replaced by a greater political and theoretical pluralism.

The other important dynamic illustrated by these texts is the increasing interest in the English School research agenda by theorists who do not demonstrate any self-identification with the School. Bull's *The Anarchical Society* is indicative here. It exerts greater influence on the subject in the United States today than at any point since it was first published in 1977. Another sign of the growing relevance of English School thinking is that the language used by Wight, Bull et al. has become incorporated into other approaches to the subject. His metaphor of 'neo-medievalism' has been picked up by many theorists of European integration; normative thinkers frequently invoke the 'pluralist' and 'solidarist' distinction to delineate different kinds of community; and the idea of 'world society' has been developed by a group working at the universities of Darmstadt and Frankfurt. More generally, the idea that statecraft must be understood in historical and sociological context is one that *other* IR theories are taking more seriously. There is no better example of this than recent contributions by realists and constructivists. Both offer sophisticated theoretical accounts of the relationship between states, rules and interests; but *neither* remains within a traditional English School framework. What this suggests is that theorising international society is no longer the exclusive domain of the English School (Dunne 2000; Little 2000).

R. J. Vincent once impishly remarked that, like the Romans, the English School thinks in threes. So it is perhaps not surprising that I have identified three core research questions (a modified version of the 'next stage' argument made in Linklater 1992) that can be found in both classical and contemporary theories of international society. All the recent literature considered here addresses one or more issue areas. The article will examine the extent to which this literature contributes to each of the three elements of this distinctive research agenda:

- (i) The first cluster of issues/questions is historical and comparative. It concerns both the evolution of historic states systems and the development of modern international society. Key debates here include: what kinds of order existed in premodern international systems; how (and when) modern international society developed; what kinds of relations were maintained with those entities

- excluded from it; when did international society become global in scope; and what is distinctive about it?
- (ii) The second cluster of issues/questions is more sociological and normative. It asks what the rules and institutions of international society are and how have they changed. Underlying this issue is the analytical debate as to the extent to which norms shape outcomes. International society may be an arena of rules and institutions, but are these—realists ask—what causes states to act in a certain way, or is it really power and interests doing the work. Underlying this debate is the complex relationship between language, action and intentions. The sociological dimension of the agenda can become critical in so far as it recognises the contingency of the current order and the possibilities for transformation that are immanent within it.
- (iii) The third cluster of issues/questions is more praxeological (and something of a marginal presence in the classical English School literature). It asks: ‘what is to be done?’ What advice does the international society approach offer to modern-day princes? A key issue here is whether the English School can provide a moral compass to those in high office facing a choice between competing moral values. The case of Kosovo is one that, as we will see, polarises recent English School contributions in terms of the answers given by different authors to these questions. It is important to note that the praxeological element of the English School agenda is not limited to the inter-state realm. In our globalised world, a whole range of non-state actors in part constitute and are constituted by the rules and institutions of international society. Therefore, a key aspect of praxeology is to evaluate the extent to which new social and economic forces are widening or contracting the possibilities for reaching internationally agreed goals concerning, *inter alia*, human rights and the environment.

States systems and international society

Hedley Bull defined international society as existing ‘when a group of states, conscious of certain common interests and common values, form a society in the sense that they conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another and share in the working of common institutions’. It can be found on page 13 of *The Anarchical Society* (Bull 1977), his most widely read and cited book. But Bull wrote a

great deal more about international society, often in chapters that are in out-of-date collections or in journals to which few under-resourced libraries can afford subscriptions. Kai Alderson and Andrew Hurrell have put together these *ad hoc* contributions, which together make a fine collection of theoretical essays (2000).

Hedley Bull on International Society contains the following: three opening chapters by the editors; Bull's famous British Committee papers published in *Diplomatic Investigations* (Butterfield and Wight 1966); his retrospective on E. H. Carr (1969); his overview of academic IR from *Australian Outlook* (1972); two articles published in 1979 on natural law and the state; an unpublished paper that he presented to the British Committee in 1980 on 'The European international order'; his essay on Hobbes (1981); and, perhaps most significantly of all, the collection includes his lectures 'Justice in international relations' given at the University of Waterloo, Canada, 1983. We can all now dispose of our 'underground' copy of the lectures, the one where the print descends illegibly into the dark and blurry middle of the double-page.

What does the collection add to our understanding of the breadth and depth of international society that we could not already find in *The Anarchical Society*? Two possible answers suggest themselves. First, there is a great deal of important material on the normative content of the rules and institutions of international society. Bull always intended to write a book on justice to accompany his work on order but died before this could be realised. The Alderson and Hurrell collection goes some of the way to giving a sense of the direction this book might have taken. At this juncture, I will refrain from answering the question about the normative content as this will be dealt with in the following section. The second aspect of Bull's theoretical contribution that is given proper consideration in *Hedley Bull on International Society* is his later work on the relationship between European international society and the non-European world (touching upon the first research question outlined above). Here we find Bull at his most reflective about the conditions that made the emergence of international society possible and the related issue of whether it is practical or just for this framework to structure global politics in an era after decolonisation.

International society, for Bull, can only be understood in contradistinction to the idea of a states system. The mark of a states system is the presence of 'mutual sensitivity' on the part of the actors (not necessarily states in the modern sense but independent communities); in other words, a sufficient condition for a states system to be in existence is the mere fact that the parts interact as a whole. States systems in different regions of the

world have coexisted historically; it is only in the last century that a genuinely global states system has emerged.

There are a number of problems with Bull's distinction between a system and a society (and world society for that matter). Like most ideal types, it tends to overstate the differences between the categories. And it encourages a peculiarly positivist approach to history where the past is sifted in order to demonstrate the adequacy—or otherwise—of the categories we use to understand it. A debate along these lines was conducted within the British Committee, with Bull criticising his colleagues for imputing too much 'consciousness' to their idea of a states system (Dunne 1998, 125). Part of the reason why he was so determined to distinguish system and society was no doubt driven by his desire to demonstrate that his ontology differed significantly from behaviouralists such as Morton Kaplan. But the result of this disciplinary manoeuvre was unsatisfactory for three reasons. First, Bull underestimates the extent to which mere 'contact' through trade and war can lead to the emergence of common interests and agreed rules (Buzan 1993; James 1993). Secondly, Bull's formulation of the system–society distinction reifies the single historical moment—i.e. Westphalia—when one set of actors and rules were replaced by another. It would be more theoretically and historically appropriate to examine continuities and discontinuities in the manner in which organised political units have co-operated to achieve international order. Thirdly, the related point that Bull sees the formation of international society as being inextricably linked to the birth of the modern state. In this sense, Bull is arguably mistaken in interpreting international society as a 'society of states' since many of the rules and institutions of international society predated the emergence of the modern state. It is time that the English School jettisoned the ontological primacy it attaches to the state (Almeida 2000). International society existed before sovereign states and it will outlive sovereign states.

Bull's mentor Martin Wight did not think about the history of international society in the same manner. There was no mythical original position of a presocial states system out of which a society was formed. In opposition to Bull, Wight believed that patterns of order were sustained in many premodern states systems. This is evident in his path-breaking essay 'De systematibus civitatum', which is the most important of his British Committee papers on historic states systems. Andrew Linklater rightly includes it in his magnificent five-volume collection of international relations theory essays (2000). Before engaging further with Wight's contribution to the historical sociology of states systems, it is perhaps worth pausing and reflecting on the purpose behind Linklater's *International Relations: Critical*

Concepts in Political Science. The choice of the 88 entries is highly inclusive: realists are present as are post-structuralists, and international relations theorists find themselves alongside political philosophers such as Richard Rorty, Jürgen Habermas and Onora O'Neill. And there are a few surprises such as Robert Keohane's seldom-referenced piece on 'Closing the fairness–practice gap'. The five volumes are divided into the following sections: the nature and purpose of IR theory; idealism and realism; the scientific turn and its critics; society and co-operation; the liberal peace; Marxism; historical sociology; neo-realism, critical theory and constructivism; and the final two sections are on normative theory.

There is clearly a great deal more to this collection than commentaries by members of the English School but it is significant to note that Bull contributes four essays (more than any other thinker) and that an English School voice can be heard in eight of the ten sections. This is perhaps an indicator that the School has greater influence today than when Wight wrote his 'De systematibus civitatum' in 1967. While his British Committee colleagues realised the importance of a historical and sociological approach to states systems, few others in academic international relations followed them down this path. As noted above, Wight preferred to compare successive historical states systems rather than emphasise the unique character of modern international society. For Wight, an essential feature of a states system is that the actors both claim sovereignty and recognise one another's. This was present, he argues, in 'the Hellenistic Kingdoms' but not in the medieval system because of the context of the *societas Christiana* that constituted the normative framework for political conduct. In addition to reciprocal recognition, Wight argues that permanent communication is a feature of all states systems. He also recognised a cultural and political dimension. He argued—in contrast to Bull—that a states system 'will not come into being without a degree of cultural unity among its members' (Linklater 2000, vol. iv, 1263). When we look at his analysis of the political dynamics, we see Wight posing two fundamentally important questions for a historical sociology of states systems. First, how do systems evolve and decline, and is there a logic that leads to the establishment of hegemony or world empire? Secondly, the normative question, why should we believe that a states system is a more desirable arrangement than the alternatives (Linklater 2000, vol. iv, 1271)?

Barry Buzan and Richard Little have done more than any other contemporary writers in the field of international relations to take up the questions posed by Wight (and later by Adam Watson, 1992) and fashion them into a systematic and comparative study of international systems.

Quite rightly, Linklater places their theoretical paper ‘The idea of an “international system”’ immediately after Wight’s ‘De systematibus civitatum’. Buzan and Little open by reminding us how underdeveloped our conception of an ‘international system’ is despite the fact that it is a central—arguably *the* central—concept in international relations. Apart from rare exceptions, Wight and Watson among them, the study of international systems has been too concerned with the last five centuries of European history. Buzan and Little then set out the parameters for a non-Eurocentric research agenda. Six years on, the fruits of this labour have been published in what is an extremely impressive book on *International Systems in World History*. There is no doubt that the authors have considerably advanced the study of international systems; it is theoretically rigorous, genuinely comparative, and vast in its co-ordinates of space and time. In the opening chapter, they set out the aim of the book in terms of challenging ‘the way in which the subject of IR is defined and understood’ (Buzan and Little 2000, 34). If they succeed in this goal, the subject will be the stronger for it.

The introduction makes a number of important arguments that can be summarised as follows. First, the Westphalian model has either been the exclusive referent or else has become an inappropriate standard for judging the international systems that formed in the preceding five millennia. Secondly, the results of international relations thinking on systems have been so underdeveloped that they have had little or no impact on how world historians think about the past; and yet, they argue, it should be a concept that is applicable to a wide variety of other social science subjects. Third, only by drawing on world history is it possible to view past systems that were not organised around the relations among states. The discussion below will examine what Buzan and Little tell us about the transformation from the medieval to the modern. In doing so, I recognise that this is not in the spirit of the volume in so far as I am beginning at the end of the book. That said, the authors do in fact argue that we can best understand modernity’s transition to a global international system using this combination of systems theory and world history.

Buzan and Little argue that while ‘state-like units’ existed in the classical Greek and Renaissance systems, between 1500 and 1800 a new kind of state emerged. The distinctive characteristics of the modern state are described in the following manner: ‘a combination of military, extractive, administrative, and productive organizations, “governing multiple and contiguous regions and their cities”, and mixing capital and coercion both in its formative process and in its empire-building style’ (Buzan and Little 2000, 246). As Hendrik Spruyt and others have shown, albeit in a somewhat circular

fashion, there was nothing inevitable about this development; modern states had a combination of advantages that other actors such as city-states, regions, leagues, estates and so on could not match. They were more efficient at extracting an economic surplus from their merchants and using these resources to protect and extend their territorial control. Examining changes in the units must proceed alongside an analysis of what Buzan and Little call 'process' (patterns of action and interaction), 'interaction capacity' (the amount of transportation, communication, and organisation capability) and 'structure' (how the units are arranged). The scope and the speed of each of these factors changed beyond recognition in the modern period. This leads Buzan and Little to conclude that the structure of the global international system after 1500 is much stronger than its predecessors.

Few dissent from the fact that the modern is different, but there is plenty of dispute as to why and how (Linklater 2000, 1304–1408). More of this in a moment. But first let me return to one aspect of the Buzan and Little book that rests uneasily with earlier English School research. As noted above, Buzan and Little are self-conscious about the way in which they are building on the research agenda for historic states systems identified by Wight (1977) and Watson (1992). They have also sought to draw heavily on neo-realist insights into systems theory (Waltz 1979; Buzan, Little and Jones 1993). The result is a quasi-positivist approach to history that is at odds with the hermeneutic approach of earlier English School research. As Bull reflected on the work of the British Committee, they saw theory not as 'models' or 'conceptual frameworks' but as 'doctrines in which men in international history have actually believed' (Alderson and Hurrell 2000, 36).

Buzan and Little do not believe it is problematic to add Waltz and 'stir' neo-realism into the English School. At different points in the book they allude to the fact that their approach is consistent with the 'three Rs'. But have they, in their words, given 'equal theoretical weight to each of its traditions' (Buzan and Little 2000, 408)? Even if one concedes that their predecessors were even-handed in their approach to systemic, societal and transnational dynamics, the purpose guiding the analysis of Wight and Bull was quite different to that evident in Buzan and Little's book. As Bull's papers on international society evince, he was not content merely to identify the realist and revolutionist challenges to the societal element. The key question for Bull was whether the states system continued to provide 'an imperfect and rudimentary form of order that holds anarchy at bay' (Alderson and Hurrell 2000, 150) and how we might evaluate other arrangements for ordering international relations.

Rules and institutions

While Buzan and Little are seeking to build bridges from the English School to neo-realism, Christian Reus-Smit's *The Moral Purpose of the State* is pulling the tradition in the direction of constructivism. As he puts it in the introduction, the book is building on the work of the English School in his endeavour 'to develop a historically informed constructivist theory' (Reus-Smit 2000, 5). His book neatly complements Buzan and Little in that he too seeks to explain how the structure of the international system has evolved. But there is an important difference. Reus-Smit's focus is not international systems going back 5,500 years when the first contact between 'state-like units' occurred (Buzan and Little 2000, 4). Rather, his concern is the comparison across history of different kinds of international society, approximating to the historical periods of ancient Greece, Renaissance Italy, absolutist Europe and the modern era. In other words, Reus-Smit is examining only one of the 'sectors' identified by Buzan and Little—namely, the 'societal' in their language (little or no attention is paid to the other sectors: military, political, economic and environmental). Given this sectoral preference, it is perhaps not surprising that Reus-Smit's book places greater emphasis upon the constitutive role that ideas and institutions play in determining the prevailing patterns of interaction in international society (thereby contributing in the main to the second cluster of issues/questions on the English School agenda).

Reus-Smit has written a very fine book. It is theoretically sophisticated and impressively analytical in its approach to institutional change. Not only is it an important book in its own right, it also suggests a coming of age of constructivism. The emphasis upon grand theory evident in earlier constructivist work—like the relationship between agency and structure—has been partially eclipsed by attention to historical change. Reus-Smit is critical of constructivism for a different reason. It has, he argues, tended to place too much weight on 'sovereignty' and not enough on 'the deep constitutive values that define the social identity of the state' (Reus-Smit 2000, 26). To rectify this, he introduces the concept of 'constitutional structures', which he defines as 'coherent ensembles of intersubjective beliefs, and norms that perform two functions in ordering international societies: they define what constitutes a legitimate actor, entitled to all the rights and privileges of statehood; and they define the basic parameters of rightful state action' (ibid., 30). The constitutional structure is rather like a Durkheimian social fact; it conditions the identity of the units and shapes their behaviour. A key part of Reus-Smit's argument is that the

constitutional structure is ontologically deeper than the 'fundamental institutions' that international society creates to solve collective action problems. Nested within the layer of fundamental institutions are issue-specific regimes. Here it is apparent that the author believes that the rationalist literature on co-operation stays on the surface of international society as opposed to excavating the foundations, which allow us to see variations in the social identity of the state and the range of permissible actions within each constitutional order. As we will see below, Nicholas J. Wheeler shares the same archeological instinct, evident in his analysis of how evolving notions of humanitarianism constitute new possibilities for forcible acts of intervention.

Whereas the analytical account of international systems offered by Buzan and Little raises the difficult question of how to 'add up' the various sectors into a single theory of system change, Reus-Smit's constructivism presents the opposite dilemma. How does one separate the various links in his chain of argument? While he presents law (fundamental institution) as being constituted by legitimacy (constitutional structure), one could argue that the affinity can also travel in the opposite direction: what is lawful from a procedural point of view can change the language of legitimate statehood. Reus-Smit is not alone in finding himself caught in a web of circularity; the same can be said of Bull's thinking on the relationship between order and society (Bull 1977) and arguably Wendt's theorisation of interests and identity (Wendt 2000). To avoid this suspicion, Reus-Smit's argument needs to identify more clearly the empirical consequences of the changing constitutional structure. The argument would be further strengthened by considering instances where 'absolutist' acts (such as colonial conquests) persisted after the new 'meta-values' of international law and multilateralism had come to define the constitutional structure of international society. Why was this new normative structure unable to contain the darker side of Westphalian absolutism, evident at the Berlin Africa Conference of 1884/5? One reason why such questions are not examined lies in the fact that the book is European/American in its focus. In this respect, the works by Reus-Smit and Buzan and Little advance two very different claims. The former argues that we can only understand the institutional structure of modern international society in terms of a comparison with previous incarnations (ancient Greek, Renaissance, absolutist), while Buzan and Little maintain that 'the real antecedent' can only be grasped by examining 'the whole sweep of ancient and classical history' (Buzan and Little 2000, 20).

To what extent do the case-study chapters in *The Moral Purpose of the State* clarify the relationship between the deep structure of legitimacy,

fundamental institutions and regimes? In chapter 5, Reus-Smit considers the extent to which Westphalia marks the origins of modern international society. Like John Ruggie (1998) he sees a change in 'generative grammar' of politics, particularly with the formation of territorially bounded spheres of power (sovereign states) replacing feudal heteronomy (the decaying *respublica Christiana*). But contrary to many readings of Westphalia considered above, Reus-Smit does not regard this as the beginning of *modern* international society. The justification he gives for this argument is that the 'metavalues' of the constitutional structure remained within a 'rigidly hierarchical social order' (2000, 120).

It is not until the turn of the twentieth century that we see, according to Reus-Smit, the birth of the modern. In a fascinating discussion of evolutionary change following the Concert of Europe, Reus-Smit places great importance on the first Hague Peace Conference. Here, he argues, old diplomacy was rejected, arbitration was accepted, and international law was recognised as being crucial for the deliverance of international civility. Unsurprisingly, this view is echoed by Anthony Clark Arend in his book on *Legal Rules and International Society*. He points to the fact that as early as 1900, the United States Supreme Court pronounced that "international law is part of our law" (Arend 1999: 34). And yet the United States, like all great powers before it, regularly contravenes international law when it runs counter to the national interest. Does this mean that international law is 'just talk'?

This question is at the heart of the debate between realism and the English School (and variants of constructivism). All the work considered in detail here touches upon it in one way or another. Arend refers to international law as a system of rules; in this respect, and in many others, he turns to Hedley Bull to furnish him with the appropriate concept, definition or insight. The endless debate about the 'status' of international law was, for Bull, something of an irrelevancy. In Bull's words: 'The fact that these rules are believed to have the status of law, whatever theoretical difficulties it might involve, makes possible a corpus of international activity that plays an important part in the working of international society' (Arend 1999, 34–35). From a realist perspective, this simply will not do. The signing of treaties or the following of customary rules is nothing other than a coincidence of law and interests. When they diverge, law becomes a sideshow. In opposition to the realists, Arend reminds us that neo-liberal institutionalists are prepared to concede that law has a causal capacity, providing that the framework for resolving collective-action problems is sufficiently robust. What they do not account for, Arend argues, is the fact that legal

regimes not only shape the interests of states, they can also change a state's identity. Arend provides the example of Sweden's emerging identity as a 'nonnuclear state'. In 1945, Sweden began to take seriously the possibility of building a nuclear weapons programme. Over time, particularly in the context of Sweden's work within the non-proliferation treaty regime, going 'nuclear' was simply out of the question (even though it possessed the technology) 'because this would be contrary to its identity' (Arend 1999, 137).

One of the most articulate critics of constructivist accounts of international society is Steven D. Krasner. His latest book, *Sovereignty: Organised Hypocrisy* is a masterly account of why states follow rules and, more importantly, why we should not be surprised when they break them. Before unpacking his theoretical framework, I will briefly outline the scope and purpose of the book. It is, he argues, fundamentally an attempt to 'understand what sovereign statehood has meant in actual practice with regard to international legal and Westphalian sovereignty' (Krasner 1999, 5). These are the two most important of his four conceptions of sovereignty. By international legal sovereignty, Krasner means the rule that recognition 'is extended to territorial entities that have formal juridical independence'. The rule for Westphalian sovereignty, by contrast, is the 'exclusion of external actors, whether de facto or de jure, from the territory of a state' (ibid., 4). Krasner then goes on to delineate two kinds of 'logics of action', namely the logics of consequence and the logics of appropriateness. These are rather awkward terms for what most international relations students call utility maximisation in the case of the former and rule following in the case of the latter. We soon read that the author's preference is for the utility-maximising 'logic' as an explanation for how states behave. As Krasner argues:

The basic contention of this study is that the international system is an environment in which the logics of consequences dominate the logics of appropriateness ... In the international environment, roles and rules are not irrelevant. Rulers do have to give reasons for their actions, but their audiences are usually domestic. Norms in the international system will be less constraining than would be the case in other political settings because of conflicting logics of appropriateness, the absence of mechanisms for deciding among competing rules, and power asymmetries among states (ibid., 6).

To adapt a Wendtian metaphor, the question is whether it is *interests* or *rules* all the way down? How can we judge which is doing the work in

explaining international social action? In defence of Krasner, his book is extremely effective at showing how many international rules are honoured in the breach. As he puts it, 'rules as apparently uncontested as the treatment of diplomats have been grossly violated' (ibid., 51). At the level of high politics, the Westphalian rule of territorial exclusion is regularly broken by intervention and by invitation. Equally, international legal sovereignty has not been granted to many states who satisfy the stipulative criteria of defined borders, stable population and effective institutions of governance; concurrently, many states *who do not meet the criteria* have been recognised as sovereign members of international society.

What significance does *Sovereignty: Organised Hypocrisy* have for new thinking on international society? The first point to notice is the centrality that Krasner accords to the English School as one of five 'major theories' of international relations. More importantly, Krasner believes that the empirical tricks that history has played on the 'Westphalian model' constitute a severe challenge to the English School. At this point, one might criticise Krasner for not being able to differentiate between breaches of 'Westphalian sovereignty' and changes in what is permitted (or prohibited) by the norms that constitute relations among organised political units. To argue that Belgian sovereignty breaches the Westphalian norm of 'exclusion' is to misunderstand the emergence of a context where these norms are no longer operative. English School and constructivist theorists would point to a change in the generative grammar of European Union politics where the boundaries between inside and outside are perhaps more closely akin to the model of heteronomy that preceded Westphalia. Despite the analytical richness of Krasner's account of sovereignty, historical variation and normative change is inadequately explained.

Normative change

While Stephen Krasner and Christian Reus-Smit are content to limit their ambition to a historical and institutional analysis of international society, Robert Jackson's *The Global Covenant* seeks to do both of these *and* consider the practical normative dilemmas of the post-cold war period (thereby addressing the third research question outlined in the introduction). Jackson's location at the heart of the English School needs no elaboration (Jackson 1990). His introduction makes this clear when he notes that the aim of the book 'is to take up the theory of international society at the point at which Martin Wight and Hedley Bull left it' (2000, 25). How far does he succeed in this endeavour?

By 'global covenant' Jackson means the constitutional arrangement—or rules and institutions—that gives 'substance to pluralism'. The latter is to be valued because it accommodates the diversity of all peoples, unlike other kinds of order that differentiate insiders and outsiders according to a universal set of values. The most striking aspect to the first part of the book is the extent to which it analyses the basis of the 'classical approach' that was adopted by Butterfield, Wight, Watson and Bull, albeit without a great deal of critical reflexivity on their part. There is something of an irony here; it is clear that Jackson does not have any sympathy with post-positivism and yet one can only make sense of part 1 of *The Global Covenant* against the backdrop of the debate between positivism and its critics. Be that as it may, he provides a very good account of how 'normativity' is part of the everyday language of international society. By this he means that there is a moral language in international political practice, one that can be read in newspapers, seen on the global media and referred to in international treaties. As academic theorists, we need to make sense of what these normative entanglements mean from the point of view of decision-makers. The strength of the classical approach to international relations is that it can get 'inside' the discourse 'without surrendering to the beliefs, values and prejudices of the people under study' (Jackson 2000, 58).

Part 2 of the book is concerned with practical problems or dilemmas that appear on the agenda of contemporary international relations. A persistent theme in these chapters concerns the extent to which theoretical ideas have outrun actual practices. For example, the human security ethos advocated by the Commission on Global Governance and by social democratic state leaders is thought by Jackson to be destabilising. Likewise, NATO's war against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia: 'the stability of international society, especially the unity of the great powers', Jackson writes, 'is more important, indeed far more important, than minority rights and humanitarian protections in Yugoslavia or an other country—if we have to choose between those two sets of values' (Jackson 2000, 291). The revived doctrine of 'trusteeship' for so-called failed states is similarly thought to be potentially damaging to the pluralist rule of 'tending your own patch'. And those who support a right of democratic governance are criticised for elevating the value of democracy over freedom, when real democracy can only flourish if it is freely chosen by a particular community.

Jackson's analysis of the post-cold war period reveals the depth of his ethical pluralism. But where does this come from? It seems that the author believes it is an essential part of the human condition (Jackson 2000, 403).

In an engaging chapter on ‘the pluralist architecture of world politics’ we read how pluralism became embedded in modernity. In his words: ‘The *societas* of sovereign states is the idea and institution that expresses the morality of difference, recognition, respect, regard, dialogue, interaction, exchange, and similar norms that postulate existence and reciprocity between independent political communities.’ At a practical moral level, the fact of international society means we should ‘turn a blind eye to each other’s domestic values when we disagree with them’. ‘It teaches’, Jackson continues, ‘the virtues of toleration and self-restraint’ (ibid., 182).

In Bull’s later work, pluralism often appears a ‘second-best’ normative position (Brown 1995). But, for Jackson, the pluralist ethics that sustains international order is the optimum institutional arrangement for sustaining a global good life. In an intriguing study of order, N. J. Rengger points out the problem English School theorists encounter when defending order. How can we judge whether pluralism is to be valued, he asks, ‘unless there is, at least potentially, some standard outside the *existing* “patterns of activity” which could allow us to say that A rather than B under circumstances X is more appropriate’ (Rengger 2000, 79). Rengger’s book *International Relations, Political Theory and the Problem of Order* goes much further than a critique of the English School approach, particularly in the second half of the book on ‘ending order’. In fact, the book is something of a dialogue between the various international relations theories and how they treat order.

Like all good political theorists, Rengger tells us the right way to frame the question but he does not suggest much in the way of an answer to the problem of order. In common with Jackson, it is clear that the question must be normative, but, unlike Jackson, he does not believe that communitarian logic can furnish us with an answer to Socrates’ question ‘how shall we live?’ Although the book has many other merits, the key point at issue here is that Rengger has posed a significant ethical problem for followers of the English School: the existence of international society cannot itself be the source of the moral rules ‘as the consensus that forms international society and provides the framework for ethical decisions is always a moving target’ (Rengger 2000, 79).

One of the key ingredients for the analysis of ‘order’ in the 21st century, for Rengger, is a ‘melding’ of political and international theory. This is certainly evident in Nicholas J. Wheeler’s *Saving Strangers: Humanitarian Intervention in International Society*. Injunctions from critical theorists regarding ideal dialogue have been followed, metaphors from constructivists deployed and insights from Wittgenstein borrowed. This is not to suggest

that Wheeler is normatively agnostic, far from it. His task is to build a solidarist theory of international society that retains the virtues of the kind of classical English School scholarship represented by Jackson and Bull while reaching beyond the ethical constraints of pluralism. Humanitarian intervention is the vehicle Wheeler uses for examining whether there has been a change in the generative grammar of international society from pluralism to solidarism.

Bull famously argued that humanitarian intervention—like the norms of humanitarianism of which it is a subsidiary—lacked legitimacy in international society. The opening chapter of *Saving Strangers* captures the reason for his objection: ‘The pluralist concern is that, in the absence of an international consensus on the rules governing a practice of unilateral humanitarian intervention, states will act on their own moral principles, thereby weakening international order built on the rules of sovereignty, non-intervention, and non-use of force’ (Wheeler 2000, 29). Just as Rengger worries about ethics descending into practice, Wheeler also regards this as a fundamental problem. In place of pluralism, Wheeler strongly argues that a solidarist theory is both immanent and necessary; the former because of the growing intrusion of humanitarian norms in post-cold war international society, the latter because our cosmopolitan moral awareness demands that we respond—where practicable—to what he calls ‘supreme humanitarian emergencies’.

The strength of the book does not reside in its theoretical innovation alone. Through three cold war and four post-cold war case studies, Wheeler examines the motives, justifications and outcomes of successive humanitarian interventions. These case-study chapters deserve far more judicious attention than I am able to give them here. The main thread of the argument running through the cases is that, during the cold war, humanitarian justifications for using force were not seen to be legitimate. Yet, he argues, the actions of India in Bangladesh, Vietnam in Cambodia, and Tanzania in Uganda, ‘were all justifiable because the use of force was the only means of ending atrocities on a massive scale, and the motives/means employed were consistent with a positive humanitarian outcome’ (Wheeler 2000, 295). With the end of the cold war, there is no doubt that humanitarian motives are now considered to have greater legitimacy but that does not mean there is complete agreement about *what* constitutes a humanitarian emergency and *how* international society should respond. NATO’s war against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia highlighted this tension. The action was justified primarily on the grounds of ‘our’ obligation to save ‘them’, making it the first unambiguous case of collective

forcible humanitarian intervention. But given that there was no explicit UN authorisation, the bombing campaign was in breach of UN Charter law. In this sense, the moral purpose adumbrated by NATO states was running ahead of the accepted legal and institutional norms of international society.

Saving Strangers pulls the English School away from the territory staked out in *The Global Covenant*. This is evident in the contrasting treatments of the Kosovo case in the two books. Where Jackson sees NATO action as undermining order, Wheeler is more willing to argue that the meaning of sovereignty has changed such that international legitimacy rests on a notion of the world common good as well as the collective will of the society of states. Perhaps a better way of putting this would be to argue that, for solidarists, the meaning attributed to sovereignty has changed. Whatever the merits or otherwise of NATO's bombing campaign, the dispute over solidarism is more wide-ranging. Jackson's reading of solidarism is very revolutionist. At one point in the book he describes a solidarist world as one in which 'the singular notion of one commanding authority (source of law) that everybody must obey and one directing doctrine (religion or ideology) that everybody must follow' (Jackson 2000, 179). Yet this interpretation is not one that Bull would have endorsed. As the book *Hedley Bull on International Society* demonstrates, there are three dimensions to Bull's solidarism: first, the content of norms become co-operative in the face of new threats and emerging sensibilities; secondly, the source of norms can be located outside of a state-centred framework; thirdly, more effective implementation of these norms through collective security 'and through coercive intervention to promote common goals or uphold common values' (Alderson and Hurrell 2000, 9–10). By the time Bull gave his Hagey Lectures on justice in 1983, his early scepticism towards solidarism was being checked by his understanding that the pluralist rules and institutions were no longer morally or practically efficacious.

Nicholas J. Wheeler's solidarist investigation is consistent with the direction that Bull's thinking was taking towards the end of his life, and was further explored by R. J. Vincent (1986; Vincent and Wilson 1993). Although persuasive in many respects, there are important objections to his argument. In the first instance, the theoretical argument about the power of a legitimate norm would have been greatly enhanced if it could also have been shown that the absence of a legitimate right of human intervention *prevented* an instance of intervention from occurring. While the cases of Iraq, Somalia and Rwanda demonstrate that the Security Council enabled the use of force, Kosovo shows that the absence of a resolution did not

stop NATO governments from going to war in defence of human rights. As Wheeler argues in his chapter on 'Bosnia and Kosovo', NATO leaders realised that it would be preferable to have a 'mandate from the UN' as Robin Cook noted in early June of 1998 (Wheeler 2000, 260). Even though Security Council Resolution 1199 did not give them a warrant for using 'all necessary means' against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, on 13 October NATO issued an activation order for air-strikes against military targets.

The absence of proper Security Council authorisation did not deter the British government from claiming to have the law on its side. Baroness Symons, minister of state at the Foreign Office, concocted a legal defence based on precedence citing northern Iraq as being the crucial case (Wheeler 2000, 276–277). Perhaps a better 'precedent' would have been Frederick the Great's conquest of Silesia in 1740. He was well aware of the fact that the hereditary claim he advanced to defend the invasion contravened the accepted rule known as the 'pragmatic succession' of the Habsburg empire. Nevertheless, he and his advisors set to work to find a covering law to justify his actions. When his foreign minister, Podewils, came up with a legal justification for the use of force, Frederick praised him with the words: 'Splendid, that's the work of an excellent charlatan' (Korman 1996, 70).

Stephen Krasner would see this as just one example among many where accepted rules of non-intervention and dynastic succession were breached. Rules and actions were 'decoupled' (Krasner 1999, 220), just as they were in 1983 when the United States invaded the island of Grenada in the full knowledge that this was a clear violation of international law (Arend 1999, 123). Here we come to the crux of the debate between rationalists and constructivists over rules. For rationalists, rules are exogenous to action whereas for constructivists, rules are constitutive of action. Can this dispute be resolved? The answer is that it is likely to rumble on for some time to come. What can be surmised at this point is that constructivism has more work to do in convincing sophisticated rationalists that international social action is propelled by normative considerations and not utilitarian calculations of interests.

There are clearly important 'meta' questions at stake in the debate between English School constructivists and 'neo-neo' rationalists. But there is a danger of becoming too absorbed in such questions. Reus-Smit, for example, provides a first-rate account of how the 'metavalues' of the system have evolved, but in the end he tells us very little about moral purposes the state should promote. A legitimate response would be to say that this lies outside the scope of the book (Reus-Smit 2000, 164) and no doubt he

will take up this challenge in later writings. Wheeler, on the other hand, *does* deal with a normative agenda. But how well does the theory of solidarism travel outside the issue-area of humanitarian intervention?

As noted earlier, there is some confusion in the English School as to whether solidarism is an anti-statist ideology (Jackson 2000) or the attempt collectively to articulate and promote cosmopolitan values by a range of actors *including* states. It is clear from *Saving Strangers* that Wheeler aligns himself with this wider definition of solidarism. But what he does not discuss is the moral content of these solidarist goals and how they have come about. Given the complexity of this question, it was prudent of Wheeler not to go down this precarious path. Instead, he basically rests his moral argument on the human rights regime itself. In other words, we know what gross violations of human rights are because we have a normative 'script' that enables us to identify them. This script, of course, is unfinished. As Foucault said of truth we might also attach to humanity: how can there be such a thing as 'humanity' when humanity has a history. Therefore, the solidarity that Wheeler presupposes—and the one that is written into the 'we the peoples' constitution of late modern international society—is always incomplete. For evidence of this we need look no further than the fact that the meaning of a human rights 'violation' is culturally contested.

In order to deepen our understanding of solidarism, international relations specialists can turn to philosophers such as Richard Rorty. His essay on 'solidarity' in the Linklater collection provides a historically sensitive reading of how we come to define the boundaries of 'our' community in different ways. According to Rorty, the idea of solidarity is about extending 'our sense of "we" to people whom we have previously thought of as "they"' (Linklater 2000, 1895). Moral progress, therefore, is the extent to which differences (such as race) become seen to be less important than similarities (mother, human being, one of 'us'). This has important implications for the question of humanitarian intervention: we in the liberal west took risks (albeit low ones) for Kosovar Albanians but not for Rwandans because the pain and suffering of Europeans mattered more than Africans. The larger question that solidarist advocates of humanitarian intervention must face up to is why certain kinds of 'pain and suffering' justify a debate (at the least) and others do not. Why is intervention thought to be an appropriate course of action to prevent a local Balkan 'strongman' from terrorising a minority of citizens and yet the deaths of millions more through famine and disease does not count as a humanitarian emergency? What this suggests is that the cosmopolitan goal of moral equivalence is a distant one. In the meantime, as international society intermittently faces

violent threats from genocidal killers, Kofi Annan is right to think that the development of an international norm 'in favour of intervention to protect civilians from wholesale slaughter' is 'a hopeful sign' (Wheeler 2000, 285).

What this recent literature demonstrates is that international society remains a useful category for thinking about the regulative order in world politics. The classical works of Wight and Bull have, after a long period on the sidelines, become the primary stimulus for a wide-ranging research agenda. By way of conclusion, let me briefly note the following points about the new English School. First, the recent literature suggests that the School has been cut loose from its national moorings: Alderson, Jackson and Reus-Smit are illustrative in this regard. Secondly, the growing relevance of the English School can be seen from the fact that those not identifying with it at least now recognise its importance and distinctiveness. This is particularly evident in the books by Rengger, Arend and Krasner; and also in the priority accorded to the English School in Linklater's collection *International Relations: Critical Concepts in Political Science*. More substantively, these books illustrate the growing importance of understanding international society in 'historical and sociological depth'. The key dispute here revolves around the question of how international society relates to other forms of international system; in the next wave of research we are likely to see greater attention given to the charges of Eurocentrism and statism.

Apart from the 'turn' to history, the other main area of contention that is likely to preoccupy advocates of the English School concerns the debate with realism. For too long the argument about the differences between a realist and English School view of the world has been made *ex cathedra*. The transmutation of realism into neo-realism made this theological claim easier to maintain (intuitively, international society looks different from the static and hierarchical system sketched by Waltz). But as American realism redefines itself in terms of a sophisticated interpretation of how interests and institutions work, the English School will need to demonstrate—as Reus-Smit and Wheeler have sought to do—that language *does* matter and that rationalist utilitarian arguments are an inadequate account of international social action. The lines between these positions have been clearly drawn, but it is only when we have sustained comparisons between rival interpretation of the same cases that we will be able to judge which offers the most convincing explanation. Let us hope that this dilemma will attract the attention of the next generation of research students. For the present, the current wave of publications show that, two decades on, Roy Jones' case for the 'closure' of the English School (Jones 1981) seems to have been both premature and misplaced.

Note

1. I would like to thank Barry Buzan (University of Westminster), the editors of the *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* and the theorists in my Department (University of Wales, Aberystwyth) for the helpful advice they gave me during the writing of the article.

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