

BARRY BUZAN

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE  
**ENGLISH SCHOOL**  
OF INTERNATIONAL  
RELATIONS

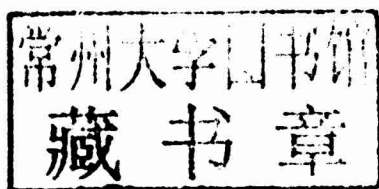


# AN INTRODUCTION TO THE ENGLISH SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

---

The Societal Approach

BARRY BUZAN



polity

Copyright © Barry Buzan 2014

The right of Barry Buzan to be identified as Author of this Work has been asserted in accordance with the UK Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

First published in 2014 by Polity Press

Polity Press  
65 Bridge Street  
Cambridge CB2 1UR, UK

Polity Press  
350 Main Street  
Malden, MA 02148, USA

All rights reserved. Except for the quotation of short passages for the purpose of criticism and review, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher.

ISBN-13: 978-0-7456-5314-3  
ISBN-13: 978-0-7456-5315-0 (pb)

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Typeset in 10.5 on 12 pt Times  
by Toppan Best-set Premedia Limited  
Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, St Ives PLC

The publisher has used its best endeavours to ensure that the URLs for external websites referred to in this book are correct and active at the time of going to press. However, the publisher has no responsibility for the websites and can make no guarantee that a site will remain live or that the content is or will remain appropriate.

Every effort has been made to trace all copyright holders, but if any have been inadvertently overlooked the publisher will be pleased to include any necessary credits in any subsequent reprint or edition.

For further information on Polity, visit our website: [www.politybooks.com](http://www.politybooks.com)

# An Introduction to the English School of International Relations

# FOREWORD

---

Louise Knight at Polity had the original idea for this book, which she put to me in January 2010. It was conceived as a teaching text, but it has become more than that. It explains not only what the English School is, where it came from and how it is placed in the wider canon of IR, but also what its key concepts and ideas are and what is distinctive about them. It examines the English School's standing as theory, and it provides a guide to the main branches of work and their principal authors in the literature. It does not introduce many new concepts or arguments not already in the literature, though it does call for some obscure ones to be given more attention and in places goes into considerable depth to clarify complex issues and debates. It picks out the main trends, identifies places where further work is necessary, and sets out the ongoing research programme. The aim of the book is to make sense of the existing literature rather than to try to extend it, as I did in my previous English School book (Buzan 2004).

The book speaks to three audiences. It provides a comprehensive guide to the English School's approach to international society that will serve the needs of beginners, whether at undergraduate or postgraduate level. For those with partial knowledge of the English School, it will both round out the picture and put what they know into context. For those already very familiar with the English School, I hope that the concentrated and comprehensive overview will provide them with new insights and new questions, as the process of writing this book has done for me. I hope that all readers will get a sense of where good research opportunities lie and that they will feel invited to join the English School's conversation.

Since part of the aim is to introduce readers to the literature, the bibliography and referencing are fairly extensive, though going for general representation rather than trying to be exhaustive. The book thus has a bibliographical essay woven throughout, which links to the more complete annually updated bibliography on the English School website: [www.leeds.ac.uk/polis/englishschool/](http://www.leeds.ac.uk/polis/englishschool/). To avoid obstructing the flow of reading, any reference containing more than three sources has been put into the endnotes. The book covers a very wide range of topics, from war to environment and from nationalism to the market, many of which have extensive literatures of their own. My strategy is to focus almost exclusively on the English School output on these topics and not to reference the wider literatures, except where they are sensitive to English School ideas.

The English School is taught mainly as part of omnibus courses at both undergraduate and postgraduate level that cover IR theory as a whole. The book will be of use in such courses, and, like similar volumes on realism and other IR theories, also to those individuals who want to pursue the ideas further.

Since I am a part of the story here, and since this book is in part intended to be a guide to the literature, I have referred to myself and my work in the third person, trying to locate my own contributions in the same way that I have done for other authors. My aim is to provide an evenly balanced description and assessment of the English School. I have tried to avoid making it merely an extension of my own lines of argument, which, while part of the English School's conversation, are not representative of the mainstream.

Several people across the range of the English School have been of invaluable assistance in helping me to shape and execute this project. Alex Bellamy and Molly Cochran commented on the original proposal. Will Bain, Tim Dunne, Andrew Hurrell, Andrew Linklater, Richard Little, Cornelia Navari and John Williams commented both on the proposal and on the first draft of the full manuscript. Robert Falkner, Rita Floyd and Nick Wheeler commented on the first draft, and Cornelia Navari, Brunello Vigezzi, Peter Wilson and Yongjin Zhang commented on the penultimate version. Lene Hansen, George Lawson and Iver Neumann helped me on particular points. The thoughtful, constructive and often very detailed inputs of this group represent collegiality of the highest order. They had a considerable impact both on the ultimate design of the book and on too many of the points made along the way to allow for more than occasional individual acknowledgment. I thank them deeply both for helping me to find a fair balance and for embodying the collaborative spirit of the English School's 'great conversation'.

I would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers for *Polity* for helpful comments on the proposal and the manuscript.

The text of chapter V draws heavily on Barry Buzan and Richard Little, 'The Historical Expansion of International Society', in Navari and Green, 2014.

Part I gives a general overview of the English School's history, main ideas, methodology and placement in the wider canon of IR theory. Part II gives a detailed look at the historical, regional and social structural strands of English School work. Part III explores the normative side of the English School through an in-depth account and analysis of pluralist and solidarist orientations towards order and justice, and how these play out in the evolution of primary institutions over the last half millennium. The concluding chapter looks at ongoing debates and at how the English School research programme is unfolding.

Barry Buzan  
London, September 2013

# CONTENTS

---

<i>Foreword</i>	vii
<b>Part I Background and Context</b>	<b>1</b>
Introduction	3
1 The Evolution of the English School	5
2 Key Concepts	12
3 Theories and Methodologies	21
Conclusions to Part I	39
<b>Part II The Historical/Structural Orientation</b>	<b>41</b>
Introduction	43
4 International Society in World History	47
5 The Expansion of European International Society	60
Conclusions to Part II: Theorizing International Society as Social Structure	78
<b>Part III Normative Orientations: Pluralism and Solidarism</b>	<b>81</b>
Introduction	83
6 Classical Pluralism and its Successors	89
7 Pluralism in Historical Perspective	97



8	Classical Solidarism and its Successors	113
9	Solidarism in Historical Perspective	134
	Conclusions to Part III	164
10	Ongoing Debates and Emergent Agendas	168
	<i>Notes</i>	188
	<i>References</i>	194
	<i>Index</i>	223

# PART I BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

---



# INTRODUCTION

---

The three short chapters in this part set the context for the longer looks at the main lines of work in the English School in parts II and III. Chapter 1 gives a brief history of the English School, and chapter 2 sets out the key concepts, distinctions and understandings used in its literature. Chapter 3 addresses its methodology and theoretical standing, and surveys how it stands in relation to other mainstream approaches to thinking about international relations.



# 1 THE EVOLUTION OF THE ENGLISH SCHOOL

---

A reasonable date for the beginning of the English School is 1959, when the British Committee on the Theory of International Politics (hereafter, the British Committee) first met. But, like the association between 1648 and the sovereign state, any such date marks a fairly arbitrary median point in a longer process. In organizational terms, the origins of the British Committee can be traced back to the mid-1950s (Vigazzi 2005: 109–16; Epp 2010). In conceptual terms, the idea of ‘international society’, often seen as the flagship concept of the English School, is not original to it. The German historian Heeren’s (1834) discussion of states-systems was influential on early English School thinking (Keene 2002; Little 2008b), and the term has been intrinsic to international law since at least the nineteenth century (Schwarzenberger 1951).

The name ‘English School’ was not coined until Roy Jones (1981) used it in calling for its closure. In a sweet irony, it became a label accepted both by those within and those outside the School (Suganami 2003: 253–7). Like many such labels, including ‘realism’ and indeed ‘international relations’ itself, ‘English School’ is a poor fit with what it represents. Some of its founding figures were not English – Hedley Bull was Australian, Charles Manning South African – and its focus has always been on history and theory for the global level of international relations. It never had any particular interest in British foreign policy. More arguably, there is nothing particularly English about its ideas, which might better be understood as a European amalgam of history, law, sociology and political theory. The key classical theorist with whom the English School is most closely associated is Grotius, a Dutchman. Somewhat embarrassingly, its initial funding came from American foundations (initially Rockefeller, later Ford). But

'English School' has now become an established brand name, pushing alternatives ('British School', 'classical approach', 'international society school') to the margins.

Why 'School'? Dunne (1998: 1–22) sets out the various criteria of self-identification, external recognition and shared intellectual foundations that justify the use of the term in this case. More abstractly, Suganami (2010) offers a helpful way of thinking about the ontology of the English School by distinguishing between a club and a network, and between a grouping and a succession of scholars. How did this 'School' unfold?

Initially, there was just the idea of a society of states/international society. This was a more historical, legal, philosophical and, up to a point, sociological way of thinking about international relations than the more mechanistic idea of international system that was becoming dominant in the field of International Relations (IR) in the US after the Second World War. As Wight (1991) sets out in detail, the idea of international society offered a kind of middle ground, or what later became labelled the *via media*, between the extremes of liberal, or revolutionist, and realist views of international relations. The English School conception of IR had, as Epp (2010) puts it, right from the beginning 'seen a somewhat different subject all along'. Robert Jackson (1992: 271) nicely sums up this conception of the subject of IR as:

a variety of theoretical inquiries which conceive of international relations as a world not merely of power or prudence or wealth or capability or domination but also one of recognition, association, membership, equality, equity, legitimate interests, rights, reciprocity, customs and conventions, agreements and disagreements, disputes, offenses, injuries, damages, reparations, and the rest: the normative vocabulary of human conduct.

Thinking along these lines was developing inside several heads well before the first meeting of the British Committee, not just Schwarzenberger's but also those of Martin Wight and Charles Manning, both teaching at the London School of Economics (LSE) during the 1950s (Manning since 1930). De Almeida (2003: 277–9) goes so far as to argue that the British Committee was not just constructing a *via media* between realism and liberalism. Under Wight's leadership it was recovering a fully fledged third position of thinking about IR – *rationalism* – with its roots in the works of Grotius, Locke, Hume, Burke and de Tocqueville, that had got lost during the great world wars of the twentieth century.

Following on from the idea of international society came that most English of things, a club. The British Committee was a self-selected group of scholars and practitioners mixing academics from History, Philosophy,

IR and Theology with practitioners from the Foreign Office and the Treasury.<sup>1</sup> The British Committee eschewed current affairs and policy questions and focused on developing a general understanding of international relations around the concept of international society. It was perhaps more successful as a discussion group, sharpening up and pushing forward the thinking of its individual members, than it was as a project group generating publications. One cannot divorce the outstanding individual works of those who participated in it from the deliberations of the British Committee.<sup>2</sup> It did, however, produce two landmark edited volumes in its own right: *Diplomatic Investigations* (1966), edited by Butterfield and Wight, and *The Expansion of International Society* (1984), edited by Bull and Watson. The British Committee also inspired independent but linked projects. Porter (1972) has a strong English School content, and a parallel project group based at the LSE published three edited volumes picking up and extending on many of the themes within the British Committee's work on the idea of international society.<sup>3</sup>

Being a club with a clear set of participants, the British Committee generated unhelpful disputes about the membership of the wider School: who was in and who was not, as members of the English School network more broadly (Dunne 1998; Linklater and Suganami 2006: 12–42; Suganami 2010). The participants in the British Committee are on record (Vigazzi 2005), and there is no question that Herbert Butterfield,<sup>4</sup> Hedley Bull,<sup>5</sup> Adam Watson<sup>6</sup> and Martin Wight<sup>7</sup> were the key players. The principal exclusions from this club were Charles Manning<sup>8</sup> and E. H. Carr, both of whom have their backers as foundational figures for the English School. Manning was an influential thinker who did much not just to establish IR as a distinct field of study in Britain but also to embed a sociological, constructivist way of thinking about 'international society' as a 'double abstraction', with imagined states imagining themselves to be members of an international society. His idea that international society is a game of 'let's-play-states' (1962: 165) is one that might well resonate with contemporary poststructuralists, as might his use of extravagant metaphors. Since, in Manning's view, both states and international society are social constructions, they are, in contrast to realist conceptions, malleable.

Carr's most influential work for IR (Carr 1946) had no obvious sympathy for the idea of international society. In it he argued against harmony of interest liberalism and saw international society largely as an artefact of the dominant powers, whom he described as 'masters in the art of concealing their selfish national interests in the guise of the general good' (ibid.: 79, 95–7, 167). Yet he did allow for something like international society to exist, albeit with its terms very much set down and manipulated



by the dominant powers rather than being in some sense independent of them (ibid.: 143). His dialectical critique of both utopianism (as dangerously divorced from the nature of things) and realism (as politically sterile and fatalistic), and his argument for the necessity of blending power and morality in international relations, seemed to leave room precisely for a *via media* of the type offered by the English School's idea of international society (Dunne 1998: 23–46). At the same time, however, the oppositional tensions between realism and idealism tended to diminish the space for thinking about international society. It was not uncommon for the founding writers of the English School to think that the extremes of Cold War politics were squeezing out international society (e.g., Wight 1991: 259–68).

Two others, also not part of the British Committee, John Burton (1972) and Evan Luard (1976, 1990; Roberts 1992), worked on similar themes around this time. Luard wrote about international society, and Burton, prefiguring what would later become the debates about transnationalism and the transcendence of the state system, about world society. They worked in Britain, but are not generally considered to be part of the English School because, despite some commonality of terms, they did not relate to its concepts and discussions. Indeed, Burton and the English School rather saw each other as enemies (Brown 2001: 429–32).

Following Suganami's lead, one can see that by the 1970s, and certainly during the 1980s, the English School was becoming more of a network of scholars than a specific club, and increasingly a succession of scholars across generations rather than a particular grouping in place and time. The club element faded away during the 1980s and was replaced by a looser and more global network and generational succession of scholars during the 1990s. Among other things, this made debates about who was in or out much less relevant. In this book, I take a broad view – the English School is a 'great conversation' comprised of anyone who wants to talk about the concepts of international and world society and who relates in some substantive way to the foundational literature on those topics. It is not a School in the narrow sense of representing a specific line of thought on which all adherents are agreed.

Thanks in no small part to the impact of Bull's (1977) *The Anarchical Society*, the main elements, or themes, of this 'great conversation' were already pretty well worked out by the end of the 1980s and set the template for much of the English School literature that would follow during the 1990s and beyond. There were two reasonably distinct historical projects. One, mainly comparative, was initiated by Martin Wight and carried forward by Adam Watson. This project, discussed in chapter 4, looked back into history to find other cases of international society that could be compared with each other and with the European case (Wight 1977; Watson