System, State and Society: How Does It All Hang Together?[1]

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Barry Buzan's *From International to World Society? English School Theory and the Social Structure of Globalisation*[2] is the culmination of a long engagement with the English School. Buzan's first direct intervention in this literature was his 1993 *International Organization* article 'From International System to International Society'.[3] His much later book evinces the same desire to speak to a wide audience and to advance a dialogue with alternative accounts of world politics, especially the three major US-based paradigms of neorealism, neoliberalism and constructivism. Such a move marks a welcome departure from traditional English School scholarship, which all too often sought to be judged only by those who shared its assumption and approach.

Buzan's intellectual voyage has been driven throughout by the same quest: to sharpen our accounts of the fault-lines between international society and the international system (in the *International Organization* article) and world society (in the 2004 book). In so doing, they go to the heart of metatheoretical debates within the English School as to the properties of the three 'elements' and the relationship between them. There is no doubt that the English School characterisation of the world political system is in need of conceptual clarification. The crucial question here is whether Buzan's reconstructive surgery has succeeded in advancing English School theory.

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1. This phrase is from John Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (London: Penguin, 1995), xi. I would like to thank Felix Berenskoetter, from the 2004 editorial team, who initiated this Forum. From the current editorial team, Mireille Thornton, Douglas Bulloch, Annika Bolten and Huss Banai provided helpful comments on an earlier draft. Chris Brown and Colin Wight gave me very useful feedback. Lastly, I would like to acknowledge conversations on this topic with Chris Brown, Barry Buzan, Iain Hampsher-Monk, Milja Kurki, Richard Little, Nick Wheeler and Maja Zehfuss.

2. Barry Buzan, *From International to World Society? English School Theory and the Social Structure of Globalisation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). Hereafter referred to in the text as *FIWS?*.

3. Barry Buzan, 'From International System to International Society: Structural Realism and Regime Theory Meet the English School', *International Organization* 47, no. 3 (1993): 327-352.

 ISSN 0305-8298. Vol.34 No.1, pp. 157-170

In the argument offered below, I offer grounds for being cautious as to whether the path Buzan has gone down is likely to produce the desired results. In particular, I question his characterisation of international society and his representation of what is problematic about the international society/world society boundary in recent English School theory. In the position I sketch out – albeit one highly incomplete in comparison to Buzan's – I effectively support one of his claims; namely, that contemporary English School thinking is fractured. Even here, however, our precise framing of the rift is different. I maintain that it is not a matter of the difference between a 'structural' versus a 'normative' approach in the way that Buzan characterises it[4] – it seems to me that the best work in the English School is *both* normative and attentive to social structure. My characterisation of the dispute is one between those who are drawn towards historical narratives of how the international social structure has evolved/changed, and those searching for analytical explanations of the various domains and sectors and how these all hang together.[5] It would not be too far fetched to represent this dialogue in terms of Isaiah Berlin's famous distinction between 'hedgehogs', who are more inclined to focus on one big and important thing, and 'foxes', who are more inclined to analytical differentiation.[6] The former tend to privilege the study of international society and how it has been modified as it has globalised.[7] The latter are unsatisfied with the singularity of this agenda and are thereby drawn to consider the relationships between the various units and their properties.[8] Can hedgehogs and foxes coexist productively in the English School garden? Or does the disagreement

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4. Buzan, *FIWS*, 15.

5. Searle, *Construction of Social Reality*, xi.

6. The metaphor is taken from a fragment in the writings of the Greek poet Archilochus. The essence of the distinction is that 'The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing'. Isaiah Berlin uses the metaphor to show how the hedgehog always trumps the fox. The 'one big thing' that the hedgehog knows always limits the 'many little things' that the fox knows. I am grateful to the *Millennium* editors for shedding light on Berlin's use of the metaphor.

7. In English School writings, this would include David Armstrong, *Revolution and World Order: The Revolutionary State in International Society* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993); Robert H. Jackson, *The Global Covenant: Human Conduct in a World of States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Hidemi Suganami, 'British Institutionalists: or the English School, 20 Years On', *International Relations* 17, no. 3 (2003): 253-272; and Nicholas J. Wheeler, *Saving Strangers: Humanitarian Intervention in International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

8. In English School writings, this would include Barry Buzan and Richard Little, *International Systems in World History: Remaking the Study of International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Richard Little, 'The English

suggest that contemporary English School theory lacks the kind of agreement on method and scope which is evident in leading mainstream American approaches to International Relations (IR)?

Buzan's Boundaries in Question

There is much to admire in *FIWS?* First and foremost, it is remarkable both in its ambition and in its theoretical innovation. Buzan's theory redresses the bias towards statism found in much of the classical international society literature and brings in the dense web of economic interactions among states, corporations and individuals. Just as Hedley Bull's *The Anarchical Society*[9] can be read as an attempt to restate the case for international society in response to the challenge from the pluralist paradigm, Buzan's *FIWS?* repositions English School theory to account for globalisation.

While Bull often remarked about the need to take political economy seriously, Buzan has actually done so.[10] For the first time, firms and other transnational actors and networks now feature prominently in the analytical framework. Related to this move is another innovation concerning the geographical scope of international relations. Buzan is critical of English School theory for presuming universality in the post-colonial period. By relaxing the assumption of universality underpinning conceptions of international society and world society, Buzan has enabled new insights and further avenues of research.

Even though I am persuaded of the importance of the economic sector and the need to see regional dynamics at play in international/world society, I am reasonably sure that the author himself will evaluate the book's success not on these terms but rather on the extent to which he succeeds in shifting the theoretical terrain of the English School. While it would be safe to predict that the book will take English School theory to a new level, will it transform it to the extent that Waltz transformed realist thinking in *Theory of International Politics*? The answer is, of course, that it is too soon to tell. However, there should be no doubting that Buzan believes the English School to be capable of

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School's Contribution to the Study of International Relations', *European Journal of International Relations* 6, no. 3 (2000): 395-422; Adam Watson, *The Evolution of International Society: A Comparative Historical Analysis* (London: Routledge, 1992); and Ole Wæver, 'Four Meanings of International Society: A Transatlantic Dialogue', in *International Society and the Development of International Relations Theory,* ed. B. A. Robertson (London: Pinter, 1998), 80-144.

9. Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (London: Macmillan, 1977).

10. Further developed in Barry Buzan in *International Society and its Critics,* ed. Alex Bellamy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 115-134.

developing grand theory able to challenge mainstream US-centred theories of IR, as well as recent theories of globalisation.

It is the category of world society that, according to Buzan, holds 'the key to linking English school to the debate about globalisation'. The problem with the existing classical account of world society is that it is has placed too much emphasis on 'human rights concerns' at a cost of analytical clarity. As Buzan boldly puts it, traditional English School thinking has treated world society as a 'dustbin', a 'residual category' in which it placed all kinds of entities that do not fit into the system or societal sectors. This problem is compounded by the fact that too much writing on world society has been framed around normative theoretical concerns about the rights of states versus the rights of individuals, replaying an old debate between positive and naturalist conceptions of international law.[11] In the context of today's human rights culture, the effect of this move is the 'merging' of the two pillars, to the detriment of analytical progress. By obscuring the domain of political economy and holding fast to what Buzan calls the fallacious 'global scale assumption', the English School have lost sight of regional dynamics, where shared values and institutions are most in evidence. The tendency to frame the question of the degree of convergence of values in terms of pluralism and solidarism has further impaired our vision of the boundary between international and world society.

Buzan's reconstructive surgery of the English School rests on the following moves. Abandoning the category of the system on constructivist grounds, Buzan focuses on the interstate/world society boundary. Each side of this divide is subject to extensive rethinking. Interstate society is opened up to a spectrum of variations, from 'thin' to 'thick'.[12] In addition, it is a layered phenomena where the global institutional order is accompanied by sub-global structures, each of which can be mapped according to the degree of social solidarity on the thin-thick spectrum. The global and regional macro social structures are held together by an admixture of coercion, calculation and belief. Using these analytical categories, it is possible to see how the international social structure has changed historically, something that Buzan hints at in his conclusion. The classical English School treatment of world society is reworked by way of a distinction between the transnational domain and the inter-human domain (the society of peoples).

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11. See, for example, Hedley Bull, 'The Grotian Conception of International Society', in *Diplomatic Investigations: Essays in the Theory of International Politics*, eds. Martin Wight and H erbert Butterfield (London: Allen and Unwin, 1966), 51-73.

12. Buzan refers to these models as: Asocial, Power Political, Coexistence, Cooperative, Convergence, Confederative.

This is how Buzan sets out the relationship between these three domains:

> The three domains [transnational, inter-human and interstate] are now separated by the hard boundaries resulting from defining them in terms of different types of constitutive unit. They are *not* a spectrum as the three traditions of the classical English school model were generally taken to be (Mayall 2000: 13). Consequently, interest shifts from what defines these borders (now clear) to how the three domains as so constituted interact with each other. . . The key English school idea that the three traditions are understood to be simultaneously in play is preserved, but now on the grounds that social formations involving the three types of unit are always expected to be present in international systems to some degree. At a minimum, each domain in the triad constitutes part of the operating environment for the other two. At a maximum, conditions in one domain may determine what options are possible in others.[13]

Later in the book, Buzan subjects the triad to one final revision in which the inter-state domain is differentiated along a pluralist – solidarist spectrum, with 'asocial, power political, and coexistence' forms of international society at the pluralist end, and 'cooperative convergence and confederative' at the solidarist end.[14]

There is a curious twist in the tail to Buzan's argument. Having striven for greater analytical clarity in the fundamental concepts of English School theorising, Buzan reintroduces the ideas of international and world society towards the end of the book in ways that cut across the domains so painstakingly distinguished in the preceding six chapters. The conceptual indetermination he was critical of in the classical literature – in, for example, the use of international society to mean in Buzan's language both 'inter-state' as well as the 'inter-human' realms – now reappears as a useful ambiguity.

The preceding discussion does no more than give a flavour for the analytical revisions outlined by Buzan. What follows are a series of theoretical responses to the argument in *FIWS?*, in particular to the position from which Buzan starts. They have been stimulated by Buzan's challenge to those writers identified with the normative wing of the English School to reflect on the limits of their approach. And consistent with the civilised manner of his provocations, this contribution to the roundtable is designed to provoke further discussion as well as to suggest that Buzan's intervention does not necessitate a wholesale revision to the English School's on-going research agenda.

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13. Buzan, *FIWS?*, 133-34.
14. On this, see ibid., Chapter 5.

Reality and Truth

FIWS? invokes a standard social science understanding of theory. It rests implicitly on the view that there is one world out there and the job of theory is to explain and evaluate it. Similar to the position adopted by Alexander Wendt in his *Social Theory of International Politics*, Buzan believes that positivist methods can be utilised to comprehend a post-positivist ontology.[15] Critics of positivism argue that the reality of world politics lends itself to an indeterminate number of interpretations. Since there can be no easy read across from reality to truth, there can be no neutral way of evaluating rival truth claims about politics and society on a global scale. This leads critics to embrace a different view of theory in which the test is not measured in terms of analytical leverage so much as critical potential.[16]

The classical English School's framing of the question of the nature of international reality is a very familiar one. It rejects the realist representation of international anarchy in which relations among 'units' are anomic. It rejects the idealist representation of a world order in which authority and legitimacy rest with a world government or in the collective hearts and minds of the great society of humankind. In between we find a middle position anchored by the claim that an international society is possible under conditions of anarchy. This social order confers an identity on states and is the source of their binding obligations.

There are many possible interpretations of the *via media*, which is no doubt one reason why there have always been significant disputes between members of the English School – arguably even within the writings of individual scholars.[17] It is worth dwelling on how Buzan conceives of international society as this is where differences with the classical tradition are thrown into sharp relief. He argues that within the English School there are three answers to the question: What is international society? It either exists 'as a set of ideas to be found in the minds of statesmen' (Manning being an exponent), or 'as a set of ideas to be found in the minds of political theorists' (which he likens to a Wightean approach), *or* 'as a set of externally imposed concepts that

15. See the discussion in Buzan, *FIWS?*, 23-25.

16. The key writer drawing out the critical potential of English School theory is Andrew Linklater. See his *The Transformation of Political Community* (Cambridge: Polity, 1998).

17. On this, see Tim Dunne and Nicholas J. Wheeler, 'Hedley Bull's Pluralism of the Intellect and Solidarism of the Will', *International Affairs* 72, no. 1 (1996): 91-107.

define the material and social structures of the international system'.[18] Buzan privileges this third conception in his book.[19]

What is at stake in privileging an analytical representation of international society over a hermeneutic engagement with what actors have believed and philosophers have advanced? As I see it, there is danger of confusing reality (what there is) and truth (what we make of it). First, if we want to understand the social order that states inhabit, we need to penetrate the web of meanings within which they are constituted. States have no actor qualities independent of institutional contexts in the same way that weapons cannot make war and territory cannot constitute sovereignty. Thus, for instance, what makes sovereignty a license for imperial aggrandisement in one century and a signifier of membership in a post-colonial order in another is something that can only be understood by uncovering the 'handiwork'[20] of diplomats, lawyers, and leaders of independence movements. Therefore, to understand the impact of decolonisation norms on international society, we first need a good account of why practitioners followed the script of decolonisation (and why others departed from it); a corollary to that inquiry – but not reducible to it – would be a defence of why a post-colonial order is preferable to an imperial one. Running these two together, we ought to have the beginnings of an interpretation of how new principles of legitimacy emerged and why/how these were adopted. It would be impossible to tell such a story without recourse to the other two meanings of international society Buzan neglects: as a set of beliefs in the heads of practitioners (evident in Manning and Wight's work), and as an institutional arrangement that ought to lessen global inequalities and injustices within the limits of international order (evident in Bull's later work).

What I am suggesting here is that international society *is not intelligible without incorporating the hermeneutic and the critical conceptions*. In their absence, it must be doubted how far an elaborate conceptual design favoured by Buzan can actually reveal the 'reality' of international society? Returning to the example of decolonisation: how and where we locate the interplay of actors (self-determination movements, states, international institutions, and transnational

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18. Buzan, *FIWS?*, 12.

19. In my applied work on international society – co-authored with Nicholas J. Wheeler – I privilege the first meaning (i.e., practices) measured against a normative benchmark informed by the second category (i.e., international political theory). I would accept Buzan's criticism that this work has proceeded without sufficient conceptual clarity.

20. Robert Jackson's hermeneutic metaphor.

corporations) and the saliency of sectors (military, economic, cultural/social), is a contingent choice we make based upon the particular story we are telling. In this respect, it is unclear to me how our concepts 'define the material and social structures of the international system', in this case, the material and social structure of colonialism and the process of decolonisation. In constructing conceptual designs we are seeking to make sense of that reality, we are ascribing qualities to it. But to confuse our conceptual designs, or narratives, for 'reality' is to commit the error of reification. What is required is greater awareness of how our designs represent reality, and what criteria we have for judging their adequacy. In other words, an adequate theory of international society requires not only sophisticated explanations of ontology - but also an interrogation of agency and the values that animate their interaction.[21]

The Co-Constitution of International Society and World Society

The question whether one proceeds with an expansive understanding of international society – which includes a multiplicity of actors all enmeshed in international order – or a more restrictive one (simply the inter-state domain) is an analytical choice. I happen to believe that these myriad of actors are located inside state boundaries even if the practices they are engaged in often contest and undermine it. For this reason, I have in the past sought to elaborate variations in how we understand international society, with market-based accounts (instrumentalist) vying with alternative formations based on legitimacy, and coercion.[22]

For normative and historical reasons it makes sense for an IR scholar to begin with the inter-state order and the elaborate framework of rules and institutions in which states and other actors are embedded. But it is entirely appropriate to start 'somewhere else'; say, with the idea that there is a single communication network stretching across the globe,[23] or that a single world polity has come into being by processes of

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21. I am grateful to Colin Wight for helping me work through this point.

22. Tim Dunne, 'Sociological Investigations: Instrumental, Legitimist and Coercive Interpretations of International Society', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 30, no. 1 (2001): 67-91. Such a frame is also vulnerable to the critique that this is nothing other than a contingent choice that cannot be validated independently of an account of how agents 'x' acquired the characteristics of 'y' (i.e., how states acquired the right of nonintervention, or how refugees came to be thought of as actors in need of legal projection and whether this regime has succeeded or failed).

23. See, for example, Mathias Albert and Lena Hilkermeier, eds., *Observing International Relations: Niklas Luhmann and World Politics* (London: Routledge, 2004).

integration across a variety of institutional sectors, both governmental and non-governmental.[24] In our globalised world, the argument for starting with world society is intuitively persuasive: there are over 4,000 International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) involved in elaborating standards in diverse areas such as medical science, school curricula, weights and measures, statistics and census data, sports, and professional codes of conduct for lawyers, accountants, medics, and so on.[25] But even if world society were the starting point, an adequate macro sociological frame of international relations would have to accord a significant space to the inter-state realm. At the start of the twentieth century, it is hard to think of trans-border interactions that are independent of the sovereign based legal order. What is crucial here is not whether one begins with international society *or* world society but rather how a theoretical account incorporates both elements.

There is not much distance between myself and Buzan on this issue. His account is, after all, the most developed reading of the linkage between international society and world society that has yet been produced within the English School. However, there is one note of warning I want to sound: Buzan writes at times as though he was working with three ontologies. The danger with relativising ontologies is that of sliding into a theoretical realm in which there are 'three worlds' corresponding to system, society, and world society. But this is inconsistent with the claim at the beginning of *FIWS?* that the English School is on the right side of contemporary thinking in IR in that it is opposed to incommensurability.[26] Surely the thrust of Buzan's typologies is to more accurately represent the complex 'reality' of international and world society.

How then, ought we to theorise the co-constitution of international society and world society? For illustrative purposes, let me focus briefly on the question of the United States government's violations of international human rights standards in the context of the war on terror. These norm violations matter principally because US decision-makers have sought to challenge the conventional interpretation of what is and is not permissible in a states' conduct towards detainees. Apart from the

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24. This argument has been developed by the Stanford School of sociologists. See, for example, John Boli and George M. Thomas, eds., *Constructing World Culture: International Nongovernmental Oganizations Since 1975* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

25. The figure is given by Boli and Thomas. They note that 'nearly 4,000' INGOs were in existence in 1980 and I am assuming this number has increased. *Constructing World Culture*, 14.

26. Buzan, *FIWS?*, 25.

intrinsic importance of the political issue, what matters is not the act of rule-breaking per se – this happens in all social orders – but the fact that officials sought to *challenge* the rules. As Bull reminds us, a contest over the rules of the game is dangerous because it signifies a wider contest over legitimacy.

So far, the Bush administration has been able to breach conventionally understood norms on the detention and treatment of prisoners. Protests from human rights INGOs, and dissenting voices in domestic public opinion, have not deflected the US from its course. That said, it is early days, and critics of US policy can find a crumb of comfort in the thought that long after he has left office, Donald Rumsfeld and his crew will be consulting lawyers before accepting invitations to deliver speeches in foreign countries.[27] In the nearer term, US soft power influence is likely to be diminished by its breaches of human rights norms. What does this illustration mean for the framing of international/world society? My hunch is that a sophisticated account of the US government's breaches of human rights violations would not be so concerned with separating the inter-state from the 'transnational' and the 'interhuman'; rather, it would show the complex interplay between language and power. Such a hermeneutic endeavour would pay close attention to the justifications given by actors looking to modify the rules of the game, and the extent to which innovations met resistance from a variety of state and non-state agents.

Bringing the Normative Back In

For much of the 1990s the normative debate within the English School fractured along a pluralist/solidarist divide. On one side of the divide, Robert Jackson made a forceful case for upholding pluralist norms,[28] while on the other, Nick Wheeler set out a persuasive argument in defence of a solidarist account of rights and duties.[29] Buzan is right to argue that one of the negative consequences with the debate between pluralism and solidarism is that it assumed normative density was an issue primarily for the inter-state realm rather than understanding how it shapes and enables the transnational and inter-human domains.

Such critiques offer lessons to those working on the politics of humanitarianism. Not the least of these is against the complacent assumption that coercion has given way to' belief' as the dominant

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27. For an excellent discussion of these issues, see Kathryn Sikkink, 'US Compliance with International Human Rights Law', International Studies Association paper, Hawaii, March 2005.

28. Jackson, *Global Covenant.*

29. Wheeler, *Saving Strangers.*

mechanism of norm transmission. What we must not lose sight of, however, is the fact that the pluralist-solidarist debate advanced English School thinking in important respects. It brought to our attention the relationship between context and action. Wheeler, for example, skillfully deploys Skinner's injunction that 'any course of action will be inhibited to the degree that it cannot be legitimated'.[30] Such an insight is crucial to informing an understanding of normative change and how this comes about. At a wider level, work by those who Buzan characterises as Vincentians brought ethical considerations to the fore, and in doing so further underlined the different enterprises that realism and the English School are embarked upon. It is worth noting in this respect that both pluralists and solidarists were addressing the same central question: is the purpose of international society to maintain inter-state order (even if it is unjust) or ought the goal to be to provide for the conditions of justice everywhere (the only stable order).

In Buzan's text, analytical rigour is privileged over normative evaluation and critique. Such a position is vulnerable to the criticism that even if we could accurately arrive at the ontology of international society in terms of a sophisticated series of categories and reformulations, these will only ever amount to a theoretical 'first cut'. The trickier question – which no model can capture – is which kinds of institutional orders are better at delivering certain moral ends. At this point we see that the is/ought distinction that underpins Buzan's analysis[31] comes unstuck. Our understanding of international society and world society is intimately connected to what moral values and purposes we ascribe to social relations. The meta-values of international society constitute the range of possibilities for the actors. In other words, I do not see how we can be agnostic about the moral purposes of international society (preferably revealed by a complex account of how such values were transmitted by states, institutions and non-state actors). It is precisely this quality that has attracted many of the 'next generation' to the work of Bull in particular. Although painstakingly cautious in his analysis, Bull never lost sight of the fact that it was within world society that the normative benchmark for judging international order resided. No matter how significant the inter-state realm was in

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30. Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics, Volume 1: Regarding Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 156.

31. It seems to me that the Wendtian distinction – adopted by Buzan – between norms and norma*tive*, enables the re-emergence of a fact/value distinction favoured by positivists. The conventional interpretation of Emile Durkheim as a positivist, despite his injunction to treat social facts as things, illustrates this point. See Buzan, *FIWS?*, 14.

analytical terms, it was individuals who were 'the primary referent'. The extent to which moral universalism really exists, or whether it is instead a dangerous quest, has been hotly debated in much of the most innovative contemporary English School writing.[32]

Buzan's preference for separating the study of norms from normative theorising per se leads me back to question the starting point of *FIWS?* One of the reasons why the world society frame is underdeveloped is that, to my knowledge, until now nobody in the English School has sought to reveal its essence as though this could be separated from states, institutions, and the rule structure which in part constitutes world society. Indeed, Martin Wight's path-breaking essay on 'Western Values in International Relations' linked the meaning of international society explicitly to the existence of 'an international social consciousness, a world-wide community sentiment'.[33] Such a thought suggests that international society presupposes world society.

Where Has Causality Gone?

Buzan is right to argue that the problem with the classical writings on system, society, and world society is that the determination of each domain is undertheorised. Recent exchanges involving American scholars have brought this problem to the fore. 'How is it', asks Martha Finnemore, 'that politics moves from an international system to an international society, or from an international society to a world society?'. While American IR is driven by the search for causal explanations, Finnemore ruefully notes that she is 'not sure that the English School shares this interest'.[34]

Given that *FIWS?* is driven by the desire for greater analytical leverage, it is curious that Buzan is not more interested in causation. In the concluding chapter, which offers a 'trial run' for his taxonomy, he admits that this falls short of the hard 'cause-effect' relationships so beloved by positivists.[35] Yet if we cast our eyes back over the quotation cited above we are reminded of the author's hope that theoretical reconstruction will show how 'conditions in one domain may determine what options are possible in others'. What is missing here is an account of how constitutive causation works. Here again I would argue that an interpretive account holds out productive possibilities: an explanation

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32. I have in mind here particularly Wheeler, *Saving Strangers.*

33. Martin Wight, 'Western Values in International Relations', in *Diplomatic Investigations*, 91.

34. Martha Finnemore, 'Exporting the English School?', *Review of International Studies* 27, no. 3(2001): 513, 510.

35. Buzan, *FIWS?*, 230.

for why x or y happened is the reasons given by the actors themselves, an account that needs to be recovered in the context of other prevailing beliefs and societal norms.

Even in the absence of a compelling account of causation, I am inclined to argue that Buzan's taxonomy provides many insights into the complex dynamics of the contemporary order; such as the shift to coercion and away from legitimacy and belief as the cement of the rule structure. Whether these insights represent a return on the conceptual investment of the previous seven chapters is something readers will judge after engaging with Buzan's 'portrait of contemporary interstate society'.

Conclusions

I will end this contribution to the Forum with a plea that the system/society boundary not be overlooked by either the historical/normative or the structural/analytical wings of the English School. Bull's treatment of the boundary is flawed for the reasons that Buzan suggests,[36] but that does not mean we must dispense with it altogether. Sociologically speaking, it is a useful category to signify the boundary between interactions that are social and interactions that are anomic. If a particular state, for example, is indifferent to the rules and sensibilities of other members of international society then one could usefully argue that it is in the system but not in the society. Given the density of interactions in world politics today, it is unlikely that such a distinction will be categorical: one could argue that under George W. Bush, the United States is transgressing the society/system boundary in its treatment of prisoners of war, but is inside international society on a whole range of other issues. The systemic category is also useful for highlighting that which is 'given' in world politics: the role played by geography and technology; the structural features of the international system that are determined by general war;[37] the level of 'interaction capacity' in the system;[38] and possibly hard-wired behavioural logics that propel evolution forwards.

Buzan acknowledges many of these same forces but his preference is to treat them as part of the 'physical environment' rather than bringing them in to his determination of the international social structure.[39] It is not self-evident that bringing the system back in requires a concession to

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36. Ibid., 98-106.

37. What Bull describes as 'a basic determinant of the shape the system assumes at any one time'. Bull, *Anarchical Society*, 187.

38. See Buzan and Little, *International Systems*, 8-9.

39. See Buzan, *FIWS?*, 261-263.

positivism, as Buzan claims at the beginning of the book (although pulls back from somewhat in the Conclusion). There is no a priori reason why an interpretive approach cannot incorporate the existence of systemic logics such as brute facts and material capacities, while showing how these impact on the behaviour of individuals and communities.

Buzan's book has achieved greater analytical clarity than any English School book since *The Anarchical Society.* In addition, new avenues have been tapped, including the question of the relationship between global international society and regional international societies. Does this mean that the body of English School theory should follow Buzan (and his co-author Richard Little) down the analytical avenue? Or should those inclined to an 'insider account' of the social world hold out for a proper statement of the classical approach?[40] Or is Buzan right to believe that the analytical/structural and historical/normative approaches are compatible? The preceding discussion reveals that I am in broad agreement with this view although I believe that this project demands greater engagement with the latter than is evident in *FIWS?.* For the English School to flourish, it needs to maintain its attention to practice – the meanings and justifications agents give for their actions – while at the same time drawing on insights from international political theory to inform moral judgments about the state we are in. The author of *FIWS?* could reasonably claim that the book is simply a corrective to the over emphasis that has been given to these domains in previous writings. If that is indeed the case, then a valuable space has been opened up for future research of a synthetic character. And it would seem that there is room for both hedgehogs and foxes in the English School garden.

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40. An opening here is Richard Shapcott's 'IR as Political Philosophy: Defining a "Classical Approach"', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 6 (2004): 271-291.