The Missing Tradition of the English School
adding Nietzschean Relativism and World Imagination to Extranational Studies
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The Missing Tradition of the ES: Including Nietzschean Relativism and World Imagination in Extranational Studies

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Starting from Barry Buzan and Richard Little’s recent assertion in *Millennium* that ‘international relations has failed as an intellectual project’, I argue that if the study of international political theory is to learn anything from this failure, it is the need for a conversation that encourages heterologue. If such a conversation is to be of any value at all then it needs to escape the binary dualisms or ‘debates’ that are too often said to characterise the discipline of International Relations (IR). Instead, I argue that a reformulated English School (ES) could serve as a medium for such a conversation, providing that the missing tradition of Nietzschean Relativism is included in the heterologue. The inclusion of postmodern insights encourages us to acknowledge that states (and therefore also the idea of ‘international’) are important fictions which rest on a world imagination. Finally, I argue that if we seek to overcome the failure of IR and engage in a conversation about international political theory that includes the missing tradition, then we will also have to acknowledge that a reformulated ES should better be understood as ‘Extranational Studies’.

Barry Buzan and Richard Little have recently asserted in *Millennium* that ‘international relations has failed as an intellectual project’ which ‘remains curiously insulated from the other social sciences and history’.¹

I am very grateful to Mathias Albert, Barry Buzan, Thomas Diez, Mervyn Frost, Stefano Guzzini, Catarina Kinnvall, Anna Leander, Ben Rosamond, Hidemi Suganami and Richard Whitman for their helpful comments.


The fact that two respected conventional IR theorists admit to what many readers of *Millennium* have thought for a long time raises an interesting question of whether anything should be done about such a failure? Unlike Roland Bleiker’s call to ‘forget IR theory’ or Cynthia Weber’s concerns about attempts to ‘resurrect IR theory’, Buzan and Little argue in favour of picking up the English School in order to reverse this failure. Their argument for using this ‘underexploited resource’ is part of a wider call for reconvening the English School as a vehicle for cultivating theoretical pluralism in a grand theory project.

I welcome the admission by Buzan and Little of the problems of IR as an intellectual project and understand their choice of the English School (ES) as providing the foundations for rebuilding the discipline. However, the purpose of this article is to encourage them, and all interested in international theory, to reflect on the extent to which any attempt to do something about the death of IR needs to encourage heterologue and understanding, not incorporation and introspection. In this respect, I will consider the extent to which current attempts to reconvene the ES are welcome insofar as they bring to our attention the historical precedents of IR writing in positivist, interpretivist and critical theory traditions. However, I will also argue that the ES was, and is, missing a tradition; without which it can only reproduce the disciplinary barriers it seeks to dissolve in order to rescue IR. If the ES is genuinely committed to theoretical pluralism and dialogue, then an engagement with the missing tradition would go some way towards doing something about the failure of IR as an intellectual project.

In the following six sections I will argue why a reformulated ES, including the missing tradition, would serve as a good medium for a conversation, rather than a grand theory project. I will do this by first reflecting on the problems of IR as an intellectual project and argue that conversation rather than synthesis should be the means to do something about the failure of IR. Secondly, I will revisit Martin Wight’s three traditions of the ES and argue that the positivist assumptions of realism, the interpretivist approach of rationalism, and the critical theory approach to knowledge of revolutionism are missing a fourth tradition.

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4. I will use the term ‘ES’ instead of referring to the ‘English School’ but it should not be assumed to be simply an acronym. I see the label ‘English School’ as being one of the greatest barriers to the reception of some of the ideas discussed here. I will discuss this under ‘The Possibility of ES’ later.
Thirdly, I will argue that the missing tradition combines an interpretivist approach to ontology (rationalism) with a critical approach to epistemology (revolutionism) in order to remind us that states (and therefore also the idea of ‘international’) are important fictions which rest on a world imagination, as revealed by Nietzschean relativism. Finally, I will argue that including the missing tradition of Nietzschean relativism and the concept of world imagination forces us to rethink the possibility of ES as a medium for a heterologic conversation about world politics. Rethinking the possibility of ES in this way draws our attention to the need to overcome the failure of IR as an intellectual project through a conversation about ‘Extranational Studies’, rather than the reproduction of inside/outside distinctions of politics and IR.

The Problems of IR as an Intellectual Project

To say that IR is in trouble would be somewhat of an understatement as commentators with many voices have agreed:

An empire collapsed and many, if not most, practitioners of international relations were entirely unprepared. It seems that precisely when theories of international relations should have best served us, they failed rather strikingly overtaken, as it were, by politics itself.\(^5\)

Rumours of the death of IR... are premature... Not even ageing and other cruel temporal tricks... have blighted IR’s blockbuster appeal — something one surely could have expected after IR’s failure to predict the end of the Cold War or to come up with a compelling vision of the future (not to mention a coherent theory of the present).\(^6\)

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As a discipline, IR has accumulated a huge intellectual balance of trade deficit. Little produced in the discipline has found its way into other disciplines. IR scholars do not seem to lead or influence public debate. The past decade was characterised by tumultuous and far-reaching changes that exposed the irrelevance of the discipline’s accumulated knowledge about international relations.\textsuperscript{7}

Those who are aware, with at least some vague recognition, of the theoretical fields of economics, law or sociology are rarely conscious of any such body of work pertaining to the international. At the same time, the increased awareness of matters international in other social sciences, notably geography, history and sociology, has paid little attention to the work of IR specialists. The result is, in the broader intellectual climate of the times, IR remains largely an ‘invisible discipline’.\textsuperscript{8}

When such diverse scholars agree with Buzan and Little that IR has been ‘strikingly overtaken’ with no ‘coherent theory of the present’ exposing its ‘irrelevance’ as an ‘invisible discipline’, then perhaps IR has failed as an intellectual project. In the past two years two parallel movements have emerged in Europe and the US which, although addressing different audiences, share similar commitments to addressing the failure of IR and the irrelevance of political science. In Europe, the increasing invisibility of IR has led Buzan and Little to call for a reconsideration of the ES as ‘the key to reversing the failure of IR’.\textsuperscript{9} In the US the increasing irrelevance of political science has led Gregory Kasza to call for perestroika in the form of an ecumenical (i.e., methodologically pluralist) science of politics.\textsuperscript{10} What these two movements share is a desire to revive problem-driven research priorities based on philosophical and methodological pluralism, and to encourage interdisciplinary inquiry that is historically located.\textsuperscript{11} These two movements have much in common and would benefit greatly from a

\textsuperscript{9} Buzan and Little, ‘Why International Relations has Failed’, 38.
\textsuperscript{11} Buzan, ‘The English School’ and Kaska, ‘Perestroika’. 

244
much greater degree of mutual awareness. However, a striking difference tells us much concerning the challenge of doing something about the failure of IR without just imposing a different form of hegemonic project. The call of the perestroika movement in the study of politics is a cry by American scholars trying to revive their field from death at the hands of the 'hard-scientific fetish' of methodological scientism. Their call is one for openness that celebrates diversity in order to escape the tyranny of grand theorising. In contrast, the call to reconvene the ES is an attempt by predominantly non-US scholars to help IR escape the self-imposed 'Westphalian straightjacket' of an 'economic, natural science based understanding of the social world'. Their call is more conditional than that of the perestroika movement, as on the one hand Buzan shares Wight's commitment to an openness embodied in a 'great conversation', while on the other hand he seeks to 'synthesise quite a few [but not all] of the main lines of IR theory, and thus revive a "grand theory" project'. In this article I will argue that this difference between conversation and synthesis is significant and that, as Buzan suggests, 'the ES itself will need to be substantially upgraded' in order to resolve this difference through the inclusion of a missing fourth tradition in the ES.

Revisiting the Three Traditions of the ES

In order to reflect on the contribution which the ES might bring to the study of IR it is useful to revisit some of its basic definitions as presented by Hedley Bull in The Anarchical Society. As part of an attempt to clarify these insights it is also useful to compare how they can be situated within Little's pluralistic approach to Wight's three traditions, before moving on to suggest what 'tradition' the ES has missed.

re-examining who said what to whom about international society during the inter-war and post-war periods in Britain.18

The first concept presented by Bull was that of an international system defined as being ‘formed when two or more states have sufficient contact between them, and have sufficient impact on another’s decisions to cause them to behave — or at least in some measure as parts of a whole’.19 The notion of international system is extremely limited in that it gives primacy to states and the interaction between them, rather than other features of humanity (see world society below). This approach is strongly positivist with a focus on observable contact and mutual impact, and disregards the idea that an international system is constituted by the beliefs of the people who inhabit it, be they humans or groups of humans. Little has suggested that the concept of international system and the assumptions of positivism belong in Wight’s tradition of realism, a categorisation that few would disagree with.20 Steve Smith’s exploration of ‘positivism and beyond’ is helpful here in defining positivism as ‘a commitment to a unified view of science, and the adoption of methodologies of the natural sciences to explain the social world’.21 Thus, the international system approach seeks neither to question the mechanistic and naturalistic assumptions of the study of human existence, nor the positivist assumptions regarding the structure of human knowledge. Therefore I argue that the concept of an international system is grounded in a positivist acceptance of the world ‘as it is’, built on a positivist approach to epistemology and a positivist approach to ontology.

The broadest, and most encompassing concept presented by Bull was that of a world society defined as ‘not merely a degree of interaction


The Missing Tradition of the ES

linking all parts of the human community to one another, but a sense of common interest and common values, on the basis of which common rules and institutions may be built’. Clearly then, this concept went far beyond that of a mere degree of interaction suggested by an international system, and some way towards a common sense of human community. It placed emphasis on common consciousness and values. Little has argued that the concept of world society can be tied to Wight’s tradition of revolutionism and Critical Theory in IR. However, there is a tension here in that Wight’s revolutionism was clearly intended to include Marxist thinkers such as Immanuel Wallerstein and his ‘world system’ theory set firmly in the structuralist ‘paradigm’ of historical materialism. However, Critical Theorists try to distance themselves from the structuralism of Marxist thinking and its focus on historical materialism in order to refocus on the post-positivist approaches of discourse ethics. Thus, placing Critical Theory in the tradition of revolutionism is a move that still needs some choreographing.

However, the concept of world society is clearly emancipatory in its goals and, like Critical Theory, challenges empirical claims about knowledge in a social world. The concept of world society is crucial in overcoming the limitations of a national or international society (see below), as Jürgen Habermas has observed, ‘a sociology that construes “society” almost always as an object delimited by the nation-state, in other words as a national society, encounters conceptual difficulties when it comes to a politically underdetermined structure such as “world society”’. World society and Critical Theory are based on a recognition of the connection between knowledge and human interests and thus seek to challenge the rational or positivist foundations of human knowledge. Historically, less attention has been paid to the question of positivist or post-positivist ontology by critical international theorists working in Wight’s tradition of revolutionism, possibly reflecting residual Marxist-inspired structuralism. Thus, I argue that the world

25. Ibid., 279.
society goals of Critical Theory are located in a post-positivist approach to epistemology and a positivist approach to ontology.

The third concept presented by Bull, and for which the ES is best known, is that of an international society which ‘exists 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 each other, and share in the working of common institutions’. In contrast to the concept of world society, the focus is on states, but international society goes beyond the simple description of interaction between them and looks instead at a common sense of international community. Like the concept of an international system, Bull’s international society leaves little room for the non-state actors of a world society. Little has suggested that the concept of international society and the interpretivist approach to a self-conscious international community belong within Wight’s tradition of rationalism.

Many scholars using ES concepts have been keen to suggest that the notion of an international society represents a kind of via media between realism and idealism, and have recently tried to link to, or usurp, IR-variant social constructivism. Bull argued that Wight’s tradition of rationalism was based on ‘partaking of the realism of the Machiavellians, without cynicism, and the idealism of the Kantians, without their fanaticism… a via media’. Both R.B.J. Walker and Ole Waever have pointed out that the ES could be interpreted as ‘a via media between the supposed extremes of realism and revolutionism’, or an ‘attempted rapprochement between reflectivists and rationalists’, pre-empting Emanuel Adler’s call to ‘seize the middle ground’. Paul Howe

has also suggested that E.H. Carr’s scholarship ‘emerges out of the important middle ground between absolutism and relativism’. However, as Wæver has pointed out, Tim Dunne has argued most consistently and persistently that ‘the English School is constructivist’. Iver Neumann, Wæver and Little all take issue with Dunne on the idea that the ES can be equated to IR-variant social constructivism in this way. I would agree with Wæver that although there is some ‘small truth’ to the interpretation that international society and IR-variant social constructivism may share an ontological and epistemological position, there is ‘great truth’ to the argument that the ES is not constructivist. Thus, I argue that the concept of international society is located in an intersubjective interpretation of the world through a post-positivist approach to ontology, but explained through a positivist approach to epistemology. However, I would distinguish between the ‘contradictory, open-ended framework’ of the ‘ethical debates’ surrounding international society and the ‘scientistic study of ideas’ in IR-variant social constructivism.

The Missing Tradition

I have suggested a triple classification to cover all the phenomena... But a good argument might be made for at least a quadruple one which would distinguish soft revolutionists... from hard revolutionists...

Martin Wight had suggested three traditions within the ES, but was clearly open to an argument in favour of a fourth tradition from the most revolutionary scholars in the discipline. I will now suggest that it is the revolutionary insights of postmodern political theory that provide the missing tradition of the ES. In its broadest form, the ES represents more than the via media or rapprochement of the international society
approach. Instead it represents a ‘pluralist approach... that aims to draw the disparate threads together’, but in order to more genuinely reflect a pluralist approach the ES needs to encompass at least one more ‘tradition’, and pay attention to at least one group of absent voices in ES international theory. As Little suggests, ‘from an English School perspective, a comprehensive understanding of International Relations must embrace all three traditions’, but in attempting to do so it is clear to me that the ES has silenced vital voices in international theory (feminist theories) and is missing one tradition (relativism).

The Missing Voices of Feminist Theories

Being primarily situated in the post-war milieu of the 1950s, and 1960s, it is perhaps surprising that the foundational work of the ES overlooked the gender bias in its work. However, given that the seven ‘central figures’ or ‘founding fathers’ of the school were male, we should be unsurprised that Wight’s three traditions had no space for feminist theories. As Christine Sylvester suggests, Bull’s defence of ‘traditionalism’ in IR during the 1960s revealed ‘the pervasiveness of gender power’. In the 1980s and 1990s, as the body of people working on ES topics grew to 32 ‘regular contributors’ including four women,


250
and at least ten female ‘participants’, there was still little room for feminist empiricism, feminist standpoint, feminist postmodernism, or postmodern feminism. Unexpectedly, Weber’s reading of Wight’s ‘history’ leaves the ‘body’ of feminist identity in the footnotes rather than being more overtly represented in the performance. Perhaps it is true, as Dunne suggests, that ‘from the academic “watchtower”… princes kept the view… while all the women came and went’, unseen by the ES. A similar situation appears to exist for the academic prince who is to be found unaware of the ‘silent security dilemma’ resulting from the gender ‘blank spots’ for the Little Mermaid in the Copenhagen School of security studies. Clearly, any ‘comprehensive understanding of international relations’ must attempt to engage feminist (re)visions of international relations if it is to escape the ‘relatively limited scope’ of the early ES.

The Missing Tradition of Postmodern Theories

The ‘missing tradition’ is clear enough, as both Carr and Manning seemed to have realised, that the ‘three Rs’ which Wight developed in the 1950s were unable to account for the dependency of the fiction of states and international society on the beliefs and imagination of people. Buzan has put this most coherently when he argues that:

Both Carr and, at much greater length, Manning make much of the fact that states (and therefore also the idea of a society of states) are in an important sense fictions, whose status rests on the strength and breadth of people’s willingness to believe in, or merely accept, their reality.\(^53\)

Buzan seems to be agreeing with Kubálková’s suggestion that Carr understood the most important ‘political power in the international sphere… [is] over opinion’.\(^54\) In this respect, Carr appreciated that the power to shape the fiction of the state, the society of states, and the study of that power in political science was one and the same: that in natural sciences ‘facts exist independently of what anyone thinks of them. In the political sciences, which are concerned with human behaviour, there are no such facts’.\(^55\) Kubálková goes further to suggest that ‘when we examine… post-structuralist, post-Marxist, Foucault’s idea of power-knowledge and discourse, Carr’s idea of “power over opinion” comes to mind’.\(^56\) Similarly, Nicholas Wheeler acknowledges the extent to which Manning understood that international society is a ‘communal imagining’ which is ‘like a game, and like any other game, it has to have rules and compliance with the rules’.\(^57\) Wheeler and Dunne have pointed out the extent to which Bull’s ‘imagined community’ is similar to the pragmatism of Richard Rorty.\(^58\)

Carr’s suggestions about power over opinions and no such facts, Manning’s ideas about the roles of imagination and the game of international relations, Bull’s imagined community, together with Buzan’s observations about the fictions of states and a society of states based on the production of knowledge and people’s willingness to

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\(^56\) Kubálková, ‘Twenty Years’ Catharsis’, 37.


accept that knowledge, lead me to the conclusion that the ‘missing tradition’ is that of postmodern relativism:

It is possible to conceive the world of postmodern knowledge as governed by a game of perfect information, in the sense that the data is in principle accessible to any expert: there is no scientific secret. Given equal competence (no longer in the acquisition of knowledge, but in its production), what extra performativity depends on in the final analysis is “imagination”, which allows one either to make a new move or change the rules of the game.59

Building on these observations by Manning, Carr, Bull and Buzan, I would further argue that the tradition of ‘relativism’ should find its expression in the ES through the concept of world imagination. I use the term ‘world’ to convey the idea of Manning’s communal imagining, Buzan’s fictional reality and Lyotard’s world of postmodern knowledge. I use the term ‘imagination’ to reflect Wight’s problem that international theory is, ‘a tradition imagined as the twin of speculation about the state to which the name “political theory” is appropriated’ which, as Weber points out, ‘is a problem for Wight, for, as he continues, “international theory in this sense does not, at first sight, exist”’.60 Thus, a world imagination is supported by Carr’s political science with no facts, and which sustains the previous ES concepts through the power over opinion exercised through the performativity of world leaders, diplomats, entrepreneurs, and scholars. A world imagination might therefore, drawing on Buzan, be defined as being ‘the important fiction that states (and therefore also the idea of international), whose status rests on the strength and breadth of people’s willingness to believe in, or merely accept, their reality, is a world imagination’.

In contrast to the previous ES concepts, the notion of world imagination is open-ended in that it gives primacy to ideas, beliefs, opinions and discourses which sustain the idea of a world society, an international system, or an international society. Similar to the concept of international society, this approach challenges the conventional understanding of the way in which the reality of international relations

is constructed, thus ‘anarchy is what imagination makes of it’.\textsuperscript{61} Again, similar to the concept of world society, this approach challenges the conventional understanding of the way in which knowledge about IR is built, thus ‘knowledge is always for something else’.\textsuperscript{62} Following this line of argument, and reflecting Little’s pattern of ES methodology, tradition and concept, I might suggest that the practices of postmodern science belong in the ‘missing tradition’ of Nietzschean relativism with the concept of world imagination.\textsuperscript{63}

Within the broad tradition of Nietzschean relativism, it is possible to identify several types of postmodern scientific methodologies, including deconstruction, genealogical reconstruction and dialogical imagination.\textsuperscript{64} Jacques Derrida’s methodology of deconstruction is central to postmodern readings of international relations, in particular that of intertextuality through examining a chain of texts.\textsuperscript{65} Michel Foucault’s methodology of genealogical reconstruction can also be used in postmodern (re)readings of international relations ‘to trace the history of a contested idea without boiling it down to an ahistorical essence’.\textsuperscript{66} Mikhail Bakhtin’s methodology of dialogical imagination allows ‘a constant interaction of meanings, of points of view, of otherness, resisting any reduction to a single position, a monologue’.\textsuperscript{67} These methodologies, located in Lyotard’s ‘postmodern science’ are aimed at


\textsuperscript{63} ‘In keeping with current conventions, I treat postmodernity as a broad term encompassing a complex historical condition, and poststructuralism as a reference to a more specific response to philosophical dilemmas that have become especially pressing under postmodern conditions’ — Walker, \textit{Inside/Outside}, 188-89 n. 8.


‘producing not the known, but the unknown’ in order to ‘wage a war on [the] totality’ of metanarratives.68 For Lyotard, ‘postmodern science — by concerning itself with such things as undecidables, the limits of precise control, conflicts characterised by incomplete information, “fracta”, catastrophes, and pragmatic paradoxes — is theorising its own evolution as discontinuous, catastrophic, nonrectifiable, and paradoxical. It is changing the meaning of the word knowledge.’69

The concept of a world imagination shares an intersubjective interpretation of the world with the concept of an international society through a post-positivist approach to ontology. Similarly, a world imagination shares a human interest or subjective structure of communication and knowledge with the concept of a world society through a post-positivist approach to epistemology. Thus, I argue that the world imagination of Nietzschean postmodern relativism is understood through a post-positivist approach to ontology and a post-positivist approach to epistemology.

Why is a Fourth Tradition Important?

I have argued that alongside Wight’s ‘three Rs’ of realism, rationalism, and revolutionism, it is necessary to introduce a fourth ‘R’ of relativism as represented by a focus on world imagination presented here. This is an important move for three reasons — (post)modernisation, pluralism, and dialogue. Firstly, the ES has often been seen in the past as being too introspective, with a focus on ‘classical’, ‘traditional’ and ‘realist’ studies of international relations. Examples of this discourse include references to the ES such as Robert Gilpin’s ‘classical wing of realism’; Mark Hoffman’s ‘practical realism’; John Gerard Ruggie’s ‘realist theorists of the day’; Jim George’s ‘traditional realist’; Robert Jackson’s ‘classical

68. Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition, 53 and 82.
69. Ibid., 60.
realism’, Christine Sylvester’s ‘traditionalism’; and Wæver’s ‘reformist realists’ or ‘British ‘traditionalism’.\textsuperscript{70}

Wæver and Dunne both admit that the ES is seen as a ‘respectable, traditional approach’ that many criticise for being ‘just a tamer version of realism’.\textsuperscript{71} Nicholas Rengger suggests that one option ‘would be to move beyond the relatively straightforward communitarianism manifested in the classical school [ES] and... into postmodern interpretations of our contemporary circumstances’.\textsuperscript{72} Following Rengger’s suggestion may overcome the problem that the image of the classical, traditional, realist approach dissuades many from examining ES ideas and certainly is a hindrance in encouraging a more open research approach. Thus, the introduction of more recent insights from the (post)modernisation of IR would help the ES enter its sixth decade as a healthier and more pluralistic research endeavour. Secondly, as Wæver argues:

The [ES]... can easily be linked to more or less post-modernist notions, an emphasis on the cultural colouring of international systems and especially the general “radical” interest in thinking the basic categories of the international system instead of taking them as mechanical givens.\textsuperscript{73}

But if the ES is ‘linked’ with ‘more or less post-modern notions’ in an attempt to provide a via media, rapprochement, or middle ground in the study of IR then it will first have to come to terms with postmodern insights in order to be honest in its claim to represent a pluralistic methodological approach. If the ES is able to encourage such pluralism


\textsuperscript{73} Wæver, ‘The European Security Triangle’, 169-70.
then it may be possible to allow a dialogue between a variety of writings that may blend or clash.  

Thus, the inclusion of postmodern writings is innate to the idea that, 'the [ES] approach [is] informed by methodological and ontological pluralism'. As the ES appears to have already embraced the post-positivist approach to ontology found in Grotian rationalism, and the post-positivism of the 'collapsed subject/object distinction' found in the epistemology of Kantian revolutionism, then the combination of these two approaches should not be as impossible as might be thought. As Waever and Little have argued, the important contribution that the ES has to offer is its commitment to forego closure in favour of the 'continuous coexistence and interplay' that a dialogue between these diverse approaches might provide so that, 'the many stories about international politics' might be heard.

Having now considered the four concepts of international system, international society, world society and world imagination, as well as the four traditions of realism, rationalism, revolutionism and relativism, I have tried to indicate how these relate to ontological and epistemological questions with the help of an illustrative diagram.

*Figure 1: Ontology, Epistemology and the ES*  

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<tr>
<td>positivist</td>
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<td>Positivism, Realism and the International System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Theory, Revolutionism and World Society</td>
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</tbody>
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79. Draws on Little, ‘The English School’s Contribution’. Note that there are no lines on the figure — the notions of positivist and post-positivist are relative to each other, not absolutes.
The Possibility of ES: Existing Status, Enlightenment Scholasticism, or Extranational Studies?

Having argued the case for a fourth tradition, I will now ask ‘what exactly is the ES?’ and ‘what does it have to contribute to the study of international relations generally?’, in order to reflect on the possibility of ES. I have distilled possible responses to the first question, regarding the nature of the ES, into three simplified positions which I have labelled ‘Existing Status’, ‘Enlightenment Scholasticism’, and ‘Extranational Studies’. Unlike practically every other scholar engaged in this kind of representational manoeuvre, I do not intend to seize the middle ground — as the previous section set out, my personal approach is very much in favour of the broadest position — that of ‘Extranational Studies’.

The ‘Existing Status’ position is the narrower approach, which reflects the way in which most scholars unaware of the ES equate its currently existing status with the concept of ‘international society’ and not much else. This approach to ES centres on the British Committee and the study of Wight’s rationalist tradition of International Society. Of the three ES positions, this is clearly the most traditional and the narrowest as it seeks to exclude the ‘many unsettling and disturbing insights’ which a broader approach might bring.80 The ‘Enlightenment Scholasticism’ position seeks a more pluralistic approach and equates most closely to the broader parameters of the ES offered by Buzan and Little. This approach to ES moves beyond the claim to being solely located in the rationalist tradition with a focus on international society, and instead suggests that Wight’s three traditions are all part of the pluralistic ontology and methodology of the ES. I use the term ‘enlightenment’ because this position does not seek to fundamentally challenge the role of epistemology as developed in enlightenment philosophy. I use the term ‘scholasticism’ to suggest that this position involves an adherence to the three ES traditions, but also the method of dialogue between these traditions.81

The ‘Extranational Studies’ position is more inclusive and equates most closely to the ‘more contradictory, open-ended framework’ offered by Wæver. 82 This approach to ES extends Wight’s three traditions by including a fourth, that of postmodern relativism, in order to better capture the ‘multiple realities of the ES’. 83 Furthermore, this position moves beyond the constrictions of enlightenment scholasticism to include the postmodern deconstruction of epistemology over the past 30 years for, as Jackson argues, ‘there is nothing to prevent any approach which acknowledges the humanistic and thus fundamentally normative character of international relations from being taken up and incorporated’. 84 I use the term ‘extranational’ to indicate the willingness to include all four traditions and methodologies, not just following limited traditions which are essentially closed to critical approaches and are generally based on the difference between ‘inter’ and ‘national’. I use the term ‘studies’ as an indication that this position extends the scope of the ES to include those studying not just international relations, but also world politics, and thus ‘incorporates insights from positivist and post-positivist theories’. 85 Figure 2 illustrates these three positions on the nature of ES and their relationships to philosophical traditions (adapted from Wight), ES concepts (adapted from Bull), international theories and methodology (both adapted from Little). 86

83. Ibid.
86. Both Andrew Hurrell and Stefano Guzzini raise questions about equating methodologies with traditions, but they differ on whether such methodologies can be combined (Hurrell) or not (Guzzini) — I tend to side with the latter. See Andrew Hurrell, ‘Keeping History, Law and Political Philosophy Firmly Within the English School’, Review of International Politics 27 (2001): 489; and Stefano Guzzini, ‘Calling for a Less “Brandish” and Less “Grand” Reconvention’, Review of International Studies 27 (2001): 499.
### Figure 2: ES and International Theory

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<th>Extranational Studies</th>
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The missing voice here is that of Buzan as the leading figure in the call to ‘reconvene’ the ES, and its current chronicler — see the latest version of ‘The English School: a Bibliography’. On first inspection, Buzan takes an agnostic view on the question of the nature of the ES and how inclusive it should be by merely seeking to ‘list’ the key works related to the ES. However, like all empirical undertakings, this listing performs a normative function as a closer reading makes it clear that he takes a ‘wide rather than a narrower view’. Given that his list includes Chris Brown, James Der Derian, Andrew Linklater, Iver Neumann, and Ole Wæver as ‘regular contributors’, as well as Mathias Albert, Jens Bartelson, Jim George and Cynthia Weber as ‘participants’, I would suggest that Buzan should be willing to subscribe to the broader position. It would be a strange ES indeed that encouraged post-structuralists Albert, Bartelson, Der Derian, George, Neumann, Weber, or Wæver to contribute and participate, but then denied the validity of their work to the study of international theory.

A closer reading of Buzan’s published proposal for reconvening the ES reveals a number of insights that indicate his understanding of the need to utilise a multi-paradigm or methodologically pluralist approach, rather than competing paradigms, which transcends the binary oppositions of IR theory. Although many will find his anti-foundationalism interesting, he does suggest that ‘[t]he built in historicism also offers a useful opportunity to challenge the Westphalian-dominated foundations of much mainstream IR theory’. In particular, Buzan identifies the need for ‘core theoretical and definitional debates about the nature of international and world society, how they relate to each other, and how they are constructed and deconstructed’. I leave the final word to Wæver who persistently argues for keeping ‘some of the post-structuralist impulses alive’ in order to avoid losing ‘important dimensions of a reinvigorated ES’.

Why a Missing Tradition and Extranational Studies?

In this article, I have advocated the need for ‘extranational studies’ in order to encourage theoretical pluralism and dialogue as part of doing something about the failure of IR as an intellectual project. In some way, the notion of extranational studies is also a proposal to undo the Wightian movement of divorcing international theory from political

88. Ibid.
90. Ibid., 480.
91. Ibid., 482.
theory. I will attempt to conclude by suggesting what I consider some of the advantages of adopting a historically open and theoretically pluralistic ES approach and how this might contribute towards rethinking the possibilities of politics.

The ES avoids many of the problems of closure in conventional presentations of international theory by arguing the historical contingencies of different international systems and international societies in world history. This historically open approach to world politics encourages broader reflection on the notion of the modern states system to include pre-modern states and systems, non-modern states and systems, and post-modern states and systems. The weakness with much writing within this ES approach is the tendency to assume progress in the universalisation of the modern international system and to overlook the importance of writing performativity on which the IR discipline is currently founded.

The ES is not so much a school as a dialogue about international theory pursued through a debate between co-existing groups of thinkers representing differing philosophical traditions. Martin Wight, the key figure in the ES representation of traditions, did not seek "A Theory of International Relations" that would put an end to disagreement and uncertainty, Wight saw as the outcome of his studies simply an account of the debate among contending theories and doctrines, of which no resolution could be expected. Thus, the ES appears open to the irresolvability of truth and a commitment to pluralism in theory — 'the truth about international politics had to be sought not in any one of these patterns [traditions] of thought but in the debate among them'. Forty years after Wight suggested such a debate, Richard Little argued that the ES's contribution to international theory was first and foremost its methodological pluralism characterised by Wight's traditions of realism, rationalism and revolutionism.

It should be borne in mind that the ES pluralism I have imagined here is not a theory or metatheory; it is simply a means to encourage a

95. Bull, 'Martin Wight and the Theory of International Relations', xi.
96. Ibid, xvii.
97. Little, 'The English School's Contribution'.

262
conversation in IR that escapes the binary dualisms that mark the invisible discipline like no other in the social sciences. Such a dialogue would need to be a tetralogue, or perhaps 'heterologue', between the traditions, with the intention of achieving a 'great conversation' that allows 'polyphonic discourse'. What is equally important to reiterate is that a conversation is not the same as a synthesis — if the ES is seen, or sees itself, as a 'grand theory project', then it is doomed to exclude alternatives at the very same moment as it seeks to incorporate different voices. Thus, any attempt to do something about the death of IR needs to encourage heterologue and understanding between differing voices and approaches, not incorporation and introspection with reductive results.

There is, of course, an obvious criticism of the extranational studies I have suggested — that the ES will end up comprising everything and become another name for IR. In defence, it should be obvious that the conversation between the four traditions I have proposed here in no way includes all philosophical traditions or theoretical approaches. As I have suggested by briefly reflecting on the exclusion of feminist theories, as well as theories of race and class, the ES would need to be radically reformulated in order to comprise everything. In addition, the definitions of terms and concepts such as 'rationalism' and 'world society' remain particular to the ES. Importantly, the concept of international society remains a touchstone for all those involved in the ES, although the inclusion of world imagination would raise questions about the solidarity of that stone. As I have argued in this article, the proposed conversation is an extension of the previous practices of Wight's approach to studying and teaching the three traditions — it may ultimately be the case that the main benefit of a four-sided conversation is the value it brings to the teaching of world politics.

All these arguments are valuable and appropriate for the study of world politics, but the final question really is — why do we need them? It would seem, particularly from the discussion of 'international society', that the ES intended to primarily study international theory — thus leaving us lost again in our attempt to do something about the death of IR that does not simply reproduce the inside/outside distinctions. For me, the benefit of a broader ES is the way in which the four traditions are located in political philosophy rather than political or international theory. Thus by drawing on, but not binding ourselves in, the philosophies of Hobbes, Grotius, Kant and Nietzsche we can go

s someway to transcending the twentieth century divergence between political and international theory. Again, this might seem ironic, as the ‘foundational significance’ of Wight’s claim that there was ‘no international theory’, marks for many the birth of the ES and therefore a crucial moment in the partition from political theory that began in the early twentieth century.99 Thus by invoking ES we can engage in a discussion of the relative strengths, merits and implications of competing discourses in the study, explanation and understanding of world politics that account for the imagined/constructed nature of the differences between the inside and the outside, and between political theory and international theory.

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