

English School of international relations

Introduction

The English School theory provides the basis for the study of international and world history in terms of the social structures of international orders. Unlike many theories that claim a certain sector of the subject of International Relations, the English school provides a holistic approach to the subject, attempting to see the world as a whole.

Two core elements define the distinctiveness of the English school: its A) three key concepts and its B) theoretically pluralist approach.

A) It is built around establishing distinctions between three key concepts: international system, international society and world society.

B) Its primary focus has centred on a synthesis of realism and rationalism.

The English School can be summed up 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, offences, injuries, damages, reparations, and the rest.

Prominent Theorists:

Herbert Butterfield

Barry Buzan

Martin Wight

Adam Watson

Richard Little

Ole Waever

International society

International society is about the institutionalization of shared interest and identity amongst states. It puts the creation and maintenance of shared norms, rules, and institutions at the centre of international relations theory.

An international society exists when a group of like-minded states conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules and norms in their relations with one another and participate in the working of common institutions.

In other words, an international society is a group of independent political communities which not merely form a system, in the sense that the behaviour of each is a necessary factor in the calculations of the others, but also have established by dialogue and consent common rules and institutions for the conduct of their relations, and recognize their common interest in maintaining these arrangements.

World society

The concept of World Society is crucial for the English school framework. However, it is the most problematic feature, and there are many diverging definitions and ways of seeing this concept.

World society subscribes to the Kantian /revolutionist tradition, which is mostly about forms of universalist cosmopolitanism. It is aimed at socially constructed non-state systems. Hence, it takes individuals, non-state organisations and ultimately the global population as a whole as the focus of global societal identities and arrangements.

World society is associated with a political system where political activity is principally focused upon individuals rather than institutionalised collectivities (states are not the predominant actors, although this does not mean they disappear) and where normative progress is understood in universal terms.

World society is not merely a degree of interaction 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. The concept stands to the totality of global social interaction.

Adam Watson's spectrum of relations

In states systems, there is an inevitable tension between the desire for order and the desire for independence. Order promotes peace and prosperity. As a result, the desire for order makes constraints and voluntary commitments acceptable.

However, there is a price since order constrains the freedom of action of communities and, in particular, their rulers. In so far as the order is imposed by a hegemonic authority's actual or potential force, it can be felt as oppressive. This is especially the case with imperial and other authorities which intervene in the domestic policies of members.

The desire for autonomy, and then for independence, is the desire of states to loosen the constraints and commitments imposed upon them. But independence also has its price, in economic and military insecurity.

In order to classify the level at which different communities have opted for greater freedom or order, Watson introduced a spectrum between absolute independence and absolute empire.

The two marginal positions are theoretical absolutes that do not occur in practice. For comparison purposes, he divided the spectrum into four broad categories of relationship: independence, hegemony, dominion, and empire.

In order to classify the level at which different communities have opted for greater freedom or order in their relations inside a states system, Watson introduced a spectrum of four broad categories of relationships: independence, hegemony, dominion and empire.

Independence: this term states system indicates political entities

that retain the ultimate ability to take external decisions as well as domestic ones.

Hegemony: when some power or authority in a system is able to 'lay down the law' about the operation of the system, that is to determine to some extent the external relations between member states while leaving them domestically independent

Dominion: covers situations where an imperial authority to some extent determines the internal government of other communities, but they nevertheless retain their identity as separate states and some control over their own affairs.

Empire: no more absolute in practice than independence, meaning direct administration of different communities from an imperial centre.

Keep in mind that the relation of the various communities to each other shifts constantly along the spectrum over time. Systems tighten or loosen, and hegemonic or imperial powers replace one another. There is also a variation in space. Communities involved in a system do not all stand in the same relationship to each other, or to an imperial power.

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