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Further Thoughts on *Critical Theory of World Politics*

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I must begin by thanking all five reviewers for engaging with themes developed in *Critical Theory and World Politics*: *Citizenship, Sovereignty and Humanity* (hereafter CTWP). Each essay raises important issues that will long be the subject of discussion in International Relations and in cognate fields. Collectively, they provide a window onto problems and issues that are now central to contemporary debate and analysis. That comment has influenced the following response to the reviewers. My aim is not to respond to every criticism that has been raised – which would require a very long paper indeed – but to highlight issues that raise more general questions about the study of international politics at present – and about possible future directions and challenges. The following response is organised around four main headings: humanity, the state, harm, and community and civilisation.

Humanity

About thirty years ago, Habermas argued that the idea of humanity is no a longer utopian ideal but a practical necessity (McCarthy 1982: 133). The point was that humanity is no longer what Hegel thought it was, namely 'an ought to be' that points beyond the state and clashes with political 'reality'; rather the highly interconnected nature of social and political life has confirmed Kant's sense of the need for cosmopolitan responses to problems that now affect people everywhere (see Thame for a more 'Hegelian' standpoint). Environmental challenges illustrate the importance of what has been called Kant's Copernican Revolution in political thought which shifted the focus from the organisation of the state to the organisation of the human race as a whole (Gallie 1978: ch. 2). More than any other phenomenon, climate change has produced a widespread sense of belonging to an interdependent species that needs to develop common strategies to ensure that life continues on the planet, or at least to move towards a condition in which the life-styles that have become prevalent in many parts of the world do not compound the everyday problem of security and survival that is the reality for millions of people.

Humanity refers to the simple interweaving of social groups and to common challenges - that is, to the simple fact that there is such a thing as humanity understood as a network of social and economic relations that extends more or less everywhere. It also refers to the need for certain ethical principles that ensure fairness between peoples, as in arguments that those who have caused, or are causing, the greater part of environmental degradation should accept a proportionate share of the burden of reversing environmental damage, promoting technology transfer, compensating vulnerable peoples for past harm, and so forth.

The difficulty of creating global principles that will enable societies to cope with the challenges of interconnectedness is illustrated in many ways – for example, by the recent debates at Copenhagen, and by long-standing disputes over global economic justice. They reflect the struggle that societies have in establishing global principles that will regulate current and future interconnectedness; they are unsurprising in a world where people have been thrown together by forces that they do not always understand and cannot control; they illustrate the difficulty that societies have in acquiring a more global perspective on the structures and process that affect them all (Elias 2007). Whenever pressures to move decision-making to 'higher level' organisations exist, traditional political actors are forced to reflect on the principles that should govern high levels of interconnectedness (Mennell 2007: 247). Such pressures are now evident on a global scale – the question for societies that jealously guard their power, prestige and autonomy is what those global principles should be, how they should be created, whether they can be enforced, and whether they can be so deeply embedded in the emotional lives of millions of people and in the emotional climates of countless organisations that they are observed voluntarily – more or less as a matter of course. That is the necessary starting-point for moral and political reflections on the modern world that are not just theoretical (although some approaches necessarily have that character) but address, in one way or another, the problems associated with rising levels of interconnectedness.

Attachments to nations or nation-states need to be seen in that context. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with, and indeed much to welcome in, local attachments – as long as they are not narrowly self-centred or hostile to other peoples. The crucial question is how to combine them with loyalties to wider associations – with responsibilities that are not easy to create given the increasing power and pull of nationalism and the state, and which many people do not regard as necessary or which they reject outright as a threat to their collective identity and interests. Specific loyalties have often been combined with distrust or disdain or contempt for other societies. It seems difficult for humans to live without stereotypes that confer prestige on their own group, but somehow such tendencies have to be checked and redirected (Elias 2009).

The discussion of citizenship and humanity in the first part of CTWP (which has its origins in doctoral research conducted in the early 1970s) was not concerned with those issues directly – they have been more central in more recent work on cosmopolitan citizenship or good international citizenship which features in the second part of CTWP, and in the more sociological writings that are included in part three. Part two of the book considers ways in which the modern vocabulary of politics looks beyond local attachments that automatically privilege the interests of insiders, or which have the consequence of moving the claims of humanity to the margins of political life or of stigmatising them as utopian. The four chapters in that section focus on the part that concepts such as cosmopolitan citizenship or good international citizenship can play in overcoming the tensions between citizenship and humanity as part of the labour of creating new forms of political community that deal with the problems of global interconnectedness.

As the reviews of CTWP reveal, the idea of humanity continues to arouse suspicion. Fears arise that universal moral and political principles will be harnessed to some project of forcing people together in ways that serve the interests of their oppressors (see Thame on the dangers of hegemonic control over many different conceptions of the human subject, and Talbut and Yearwood on the 'Schmittian'

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critique of liberal cosmopolitanism and the argument that all universals contain the danger of domination). But that point apples to principles at all levels of social existence including the nation-state. It is important to ask if objections to ideas of humanity are anchored in the desire to protect national communities from any 'higher court of appeal' or to minimise accountability to others. Such motivations underpinned Schmitt's assault on humanity and may have informed his bizarre claim that a world state is simply impossible (see Yearwood for a discussion of Schmitt on the world state). Many theorists stand on different ground, namely that there is no real alternative to the state - adding that ideas of humanity are a distraction from preserving and improving actually-existing bounded communities, albeit in ways that improve their prospects of co-existing amicably (Miller 1999; see also the parallels between Thame's reliance on Walzer to defend a 'pluralist' ethic of co-existence, and Yearwood on the political challenge of enabling communities to live together).

But that last formulation conceals the fact that it is no longer simply a question of working out how communities can co-exist but rather how people generally can be protected from global processes over which national communities have little control. The recent global financial crisis underlines the need for principles that address the problem of how people are interconnected globally. That is not to suggest that concerns about the dangers that may reside within any discourse of humanity can dismissed as trivial – exactly what those principles should be and how they should be created are enormously difficult questions that are central to international political theory. But those concerns can all too easily be an excuse not to confront the challenges head-on; or, they may signify an, albeit unwitting, acceptance of the status quo. It is not entirely clear whether the critics of universalism believe that the quest for universals should be abandoned entirely, or whether it is worth persevering in the search for them (fully aware of the problems that are likely to arise *en route*). In any event, the critics of universalism need to state what their response is to problems of a transnational as opposed to an international character – to the problems associated with transnational harm, transnational injustice, transnational exploitation and so forth (the issues are discussed in more detail in a work on theorising harm which is nearing completion – Linklater forthcoming).

It is important to add that international political theory, which barely existed in the early 1970s, is still in its infancy. Its flourishing reflects the existence of theoretical and practical interests in reflecting on the relationship between state and humanity, or between community and cosmopolis. Traditional political theory is slowly being weaned away from its obsession with the state or with questions that arise in relationship between the state and its citizens (as if those could be considered in isolation from questions that arise in relations between societies). There has been an element of 'catch-up' in those developments. Levels of global interconnectedness increased while political theory remained locked into a statist mentality, and while the dominant perspectives in International Relations largely ignored normative issues).

Preparing for the next phase of interconnectedness will need more work that escapes statist limits. That will involve continuing to agonise over, for example, the relationship between state and humanity, as well as continuing to reflect on the dangers that reside in humanitarian discourse. Those who appeal to Schmitt in order to draw attention to the dangers of domination cannot simply ignore questions about how to govern and control the patterns of interconnectedness that force more and more people into a single stream of world history. There is an obligation to grapple with the central ethical issues, to balance the critique of many existing forms of

universalism with philosophical reflections on future possibilities. Perhaps different parties can agree with Judith Butler (2002) that a complex 'labour of translation' lies ahead and is already under way, and with her comment that we not yet know 'what form universality will take'. That observation captures the idea that universality is not already present in the individual's rational consciousness – as Kant seems to have thought - but has a history which invariably reflects particular interests and preferences. Recognition of those biases is perhaps critical to working towards a conception of universality that is not just a device for promoting dominant interests. Whether any conception will ever succeed in entirely escaping such relations must be doubted – but some versions of humanity may nevertheless be regarded as better than others, and as positive contributions to a long-term process (one that will stretch over countless generations) in which people may yet learn to live together with minimum violent and non-violent harm.

The State

It may seem odd for someone who seems to be wedded to the state to criticise traditional political theorists of statism (see Brincat). The argument of part two of CTWP – admittedly this is implicit rather than explicit – is that states are part of the problem and part of the solution (the same might be said of commitments to any specific community, as Yearwood argues). Or, to borrow from Foucault's famous comment about the Enlightenment, there is no need to be either for or against the state (Foucault 1986). The real issue is how to reform it.

It is important to make some comments about the nature of the organisation that needs to be reformed. Hedley Bull's essay on the state's positive role in world affairs is as good place to start as any. Many states – clearly not all of them – maintain domestic order and that, Bull argued, benefits humanity. States pacify territories with some mixture of coercion and consent. The fact that some maintain order at a terrible human cost does not alter the fact that, in many parts of the world, the challenge is to establish viable states that can protect people from threats that occur when, for example, particular social groups take responsibility for protecting 'their' people from 'outsiders', and may behave with extreme cruelty in the process. That is not to suggest that the more consensus-orientated states do not pose problems to their own peoples. Recent debates about the erosion of civil liberties as a result of the 'war against terror' are a reminder that no state can be trusted with the monopoly control of the instruments of violence. Recent debates about the post-2001 conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan have provided a reminder that the use of force against outsiders can very easily lead to atrocities and violations of the laws of war – indeed, such outcomes should be expected and guarded against by responsible leaders. Reforming the state therefore involves, amongst other things, checking highly centralised power structures both domestically and internationally. Recent developments in international criminal law are a hugely important innovation as far as the process of working towards a more global standpoint in the decades and centuries that lie ahead is concerned (as are the ideas of 'crimes against humanity' and 'universal jurisdiction'). To return to points that were raised in the previous section, concerns about double standards inevitably arise in the wake of such international legal developments. But the latter establish the principle that sovereigns can be held accountable in international institutions that defend certain rights that all people can be thought to have simply by virtue of their humanity. Their establishment is an important step towards working out ways in

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which humans can co-exist without the levels of violent harm that have shaped international relations for millennia.

The larger point is that such innovations point to far-reaching ways in which local attachments can be combined with higher levels of identification. Part two of CTWP attaches great importance to combining loyalties at different levels. It argues that the point is not simply about going 'higher' than the state but about going 'lower' as well, thereby ensuring that 'higher level' organisations that will be essential in the coming phase of interconnectedness do not ride roughshod over the different loyalties that people have, and that give them individual and collective satisfaction. Theories of the state and international relations have only recently begun to wrestle with the central questions which are, as stated earlier, about reforming states or transforming political community – about ensuring that, for example, through partnerships with public international organisations and international non-governmental organisations, they are less of a problem and more than a solution. No realistic alternatives seem to be available.

Harm

'The problem of harm' which is central to part three of CTWP is worth turning to at this point. Rising levels of interconnectedness have made it possible for people to cause more destructive forms of harm over greater distances – not only the harm that can be caused because of the ability to bombard distant societies with the most devastating instruments of violence, but also because of the (until recently) largely unnoticed capacity to harm the physical environment simply by following the routines of everyday life. Humans are also aware of distant suffering – they can, as Kant argued, publicise violations of human rights in distant places with a view to working towards a condition in which all people can live without basic threats to their security and survival. Members of the more affluent societies are aware of how they are often entangled in structures and processes that harm distant strangers – for example, as a result of profiting from the ways in which national governments protect domestic producers, or from global institutions that are biased towards the interests of the dominant economic and political strata. That awareness of 'the problem of harm' may yet become central to a world-wide political consciousness (Linklater 2009).

It is also significant that most people have broadly similar conceptions of what counts as harmful and, more fundamentally, of what counts as unacceptable harm. The point is simple enough but not trivial. Not that along in the modern West, the enslavement of other peoples was widely regarded as entirely acceptable, as was their transportation across the Atlantic in appalling conditions. There is at least some agreement in many parts of the world that such violent harm is no longer permissible (although some groups are actively involved in sexual and other forms of slavery, and would undoubtedly be stronger but for state power and transnational policing).

It is not just ideas about cruelty and unacceptable violence that underpin 'cosmopolitan harm conventions' that address such problems. As noted above, with unprecedented levels of interconnectedness, more people have become more aware of how they can harm others, and be harmed by them, in less overt ways. The distinction between concrete and abstract harm in part three of CTWP reflects the fact that certain forms of harm have a structural quality or are a result of the dominant routines of everyday life (no assumptions are made about whether abstract forms of harm are

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less important than concrete forms – see the discussion in Heath). Recognition of the invisible nature of some forms of harm underpins concerns about unjust enrichment (and support for fair trade) or attitudes to socially responsible investment, or anxieties about unfair burdens on the environment that influence what are still relatively weak commitments to inter-generational justice. Such sentiments do not shape world politics, and they may never be more than incidental to the main event which neo-realists regard as geopolitical rivalries between great powers. They are nevertheless interesting responses to global interconnectedness and important steps towards restructuring the relationship between the individual, the state and humanity.

The emphasis on harm in part three of CTWP is in part a response to exhaustion with efforts to realise one or other notions of the good life. Attempts to re-organise the political order that affects all people can proceed from more modest and more realistic assumptions, namely that most people have a similar interest in living without physical suffering, or economic exploitation, or humiliation, or impediments to choosing ways of life that provide satisfaction and meaning. Some progress has taken place in weaving cosmopolitan harm conventions into the state and the society of states – into domestic and world law. There is significant support for the view that all people have an equal right to a life that is free from the burden of violent and non-violent harm. Admittedly, a cosmopolitan harm principle is contradicted in practice time and time again, but it may be one of the best foundations on which some future world order that provides justice for all people can be built.

Community and Civilization

Part three of CTWP explored that line of argument as way of developing the more philosophical discussion of citizenship and humanity in part one, and the discussion of new forms of community and citizenship in part two. None of the reviewers discussed the connections in much detail, which may simply reflect a certain bias towards more theoretical topics of investigation, but that may also reflect the low level of interest in historical sociology and world history in the contemporary study of international relations (see however Heath on the problems associated with developing a sociology of harm in world politics). Some further comments on the shift from the 'problem of citizenship' to the 'problem of community' and the 'problem of harm' require some comments about what those areas of investigation contribute to the issues discussed above.

As already noted, there is no doubt that many people find satisfaction in their membership of a specific bounded political community with its collective identity, shared historical narratives that celebrate joint achievements by recalling former struggles with enemies, and so forth – though many recognise that the community is riddled with troubling inequalities of power and wealth. It is nevertheless understandable that many believe that the challenge is one of finding principles that allow communities to live together, although the argument here maintains that is too narrow a conception of international ethics in the light of the dominant trends towards ever more extensive and intensive forms of global interconnectedness.

Even so, the argument that universality could only be realised through community is undoubtedly correct (see Yearwood). Such a sentiment is common to Butler's conception of the necessary labour of translation and to my earlier work on transforming political community (Linklater 1998). Communities usually bind people together by simultaneously driving them apart. They create the sense that the rules

that govern relations between communities can be much less demanding than the rules that govern relations within any state. Such standards civilize on one front – they create restraints on force and some degree of emotional identification between members of the same community – and, at the same time, license violence against outsiders, or indifference to their interests, or pleasure in outmanoeuvring or gaining advantages over them (see Talbut on the role of the 'standard of civilization' in defending European domination of the non-European world in the nineteenth century). The central theme in CTWP is that it is necessary to weaken the influence of the 'double standard of morality' that makes some forms of violent and non-violent harm permissible in relations with other groups but impermissible in relations within the group – that is regarded as a categorical imperative in the first section, and linked with the idea of the civilizing process in the final chapters of the book.

Insightful comments on community and civilization can be found in Freud's comments about the tension between community and civilization – comments that suffered however from assuming that humans may have an ineradicable appetite for violence, and may be condemned forevermore to live with violent ways of resolving disputes and differences (see also Yearwood on Freud on the relationship between community, 'civilization', and the construction of the 'other'). The horrors of the First World War led Freud to stress the existence of common ground between communities that could underpin civilized measures to tame violence. Corresponding with Einstein in 1932, he maintained that war 'is in the crassest opposition to the psychical attitude imposed on us by the process of civilization'; the result is that 'sensations which were pleasurable to our ancestors have become indifferent or even 'intolerable to ourselves'. He added that war now seems repugnant to many because 'everyone has a right to his own life, because war puts an end to human lives that are full of hope, because it brings individual men into humiliating situations, because it compels them against their will to murder other men, and because it destroys precious material objects which have been produced by the labours of humanity'. He continued that modern warfare no longer provides 'an opportunity for achieving the old ideals of heroism', and added that the time is fast approaching when war might involve 'the extermination of one or perhaps both of the antagonists' (Freud 1998: 145-6).

Such comments offer support for the view that the civilizing process need not end at the water's edge but can permeate, in response to new pressures and compulsions, the relations between states. The discussion was taken up by later accounts of civilization that were influenced by Freud, and specifically by Elias's investigation of the civilizing process. The most important line of argument emphasises the ways in which human societies had been thrown together by globalising forces that now threaten their very existence (Elias 2010). But, the argument was, there is nothing in human nature that prevent societies from learning over very long-term periods how to live together more harmoniously (or less inharmoniously). Admittedly, from that perspective, the social and political obstacles are immense, and include continued loyalties to bounded communities, competitive relations with outsiders, and the belief in group superiority that often prevents people from becoming better orientated to the conditions in which they live and better attuned to each other's needs and interests through reliance on forms of dialogue that eschew any 'standard of civilization' (see Linklater 2005). It might therefore be reasonable to think that humanity is still at the beginning of a very long-term process that may lead to the significant pacification of relations between political communities

– though not to the suspension of all forms of violent competition and rivalry (Elias 1991). Moreover, and here there is agreement with the critics of philosophical universalism, that process is unlikely to be smooth and irreversible, and free from the dangers of domination – but the question is how to influence the further development of universalism (its almost inevitable future evolution as political actors grapple with challenges on an world-wide scale) so that the dangers are reduced.

Various themes that run through CTWP are connected with that standpoint in the final chapter – the problem of moralities that privilege obligations to the state over obligations to the rest of humanity; the need for new forms of political community and citizenship; and the importance of cosmopolitan harm conventions that protect all people from unjustifiable forms of violent and non-violent harm irrespective of nationality, citizenship, race and so forth. It then becomes possible to harmonise what I have called the normative, sociological and praxeological dimensions of critical international theory – the quest for ethical principles that can lead to a better life, the search for an explanation of the long-term processes that have led to particular 'civilizing' processes and to tensions with 'decivilizing' processes; and reflections on moral and political resources that lie to hand and can enable people to make some progress in living together in conditions that are acceptable to all. Such orientations arise in thinking about humanity not as a philosophical ideal, but as a concept that refers to social and political forces that are driving all people together and demand collective responses that seem fair to all people. We are not yet at the stage when debates in international relations are fought out against that background of shared assumptions. I do not know if any of the reviewers of CTWP would agree that they should be conducted in that way; some would almost certainly reject that supposition. But that is perhaps the basis for a new round of discussion and debate.

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