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Critical Theory and World Politics: Citizenship, Sovereignty and Humanity by Andrew Linklater

Review by Stephanie L. Talbut¹

Andrew Linklater's *Critical Theory and World Politics: Citizenship, Sovereignty and Humanity*, provides an excellent deconstruction of the idea of universal morality and global citizenship. The work is both timely and necessary. As Linklater states, "The problem of community, citizenship and harm deserve to have a central place in the critical theory of international relations."² What is impressive about Linklater's work is its committed, honest and substantive response to the critics of universal morality, particularly with respect to the failure of the international community to respond to human rights violations, such as the Rwandan genocide.³ Despite this, *Critical Theory and World Politics* is open to criticism. Linklater's work fails fully to consider the possibility that global citizenship and universal morality may act, with harmful consequences, as vehicles for the domination of world politics by a powerful minority. My critical focus, in this review, will lie in the application of the theory of Carl Schmitt, and his own reading of Kant, to the central concepts of Linklater's work.

The first issue with Linklater's work is that he may, unintentionally, be committed to a form of cultural imperialism because of the means by which universal morality is developed. This is despite a rigorous attempt by Linklater to separate his theorising from the negative connotations associated with cultural imperialism and the hierarchical effect it can have on order. Indeed, paraphrasing Schmitt, Rasch argues that "Order, no matter how structured, comes with a price. Hierarchical order brings with it a domination/subordination structuring principle."⁴ For individuals to accept a global conception of morality and citizenship requires a consensus that what is stipulated corresponds to conceptions of the 'fundamental good'. More importantly, this 'fundamental good' must represent more than an articulation of the whims of the powerful. Hedley Bull, whom Linklater cites repeatedly throughout his work, embraces the Marxist belief that morality is more symbolic of the interests of the few Great Powers than the common interests of all they serve.⁵ Linklater consistently underestimates the ability of the Great Powers in enforcing their own idea of morality by virtue of the insistence that their values are the only universal ones.⁶

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² Linklater, A. (2007) *Critical Theory and World Politics: Citizenship, Sovereignty and Humanity*, London: Routledge. Page 12

³ *ibid.*, page 84

⁴ Rasch, W. (2003) "Human Rights As Geopolitics Carl Schmitt And The Legal Form Of American Supremacy" *Cultural Critique*, **54**:1, page 126

⁵ Bull, H. (1977) *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*, London: Macmillan., page 52-53

⁶ The most glaring example of this can be found when the then Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice argued "American values are universal. People want to say what they think, worship as they wish, and

Considering global conceptions of both morality and citizenship immediately creates questions of what exists beyond the space to which they are applied. Linklater's definition of citizenship is a comprehensive and informative starting point:

At the most fundamental level, citizenship refers first of all to the primary legal rights that all persons have as members of a particular state. In the second place, citizenship refers to the rights of participation in the political life of the community as a whole. In the third place, citizenship refers not only to rights but to fundamental duties as well.⁷

Clearly, Linklater sees citizenship as a reciprocal relationship between individuals on a global level. To consider global citizenship is to award the individual responsibilities, duties and rights to others outside their own state. However, this acquires a somewhat pernicious tone when we consider Linklater's assertion that citizenship "entails a willingness to place constraints on self-interest because of duties to promote a more general good."⁸ Indeed, a remarkable leap of faith is required to believe that this 'general good' is genuinely universal and not merely an aspect of domination from self-serving great powers.

The development of universal morality and global citizenship is best articulated through Linklater's extremely interesting account of Norbert Elias's 'civilising process'. He defines this as "the process by which modern European societies have been pacified over approximately the last five centuries, and in which emotional identification between the members of each society has increased."⁹ This 'civilising process' bears striking similarities to the highly significant work of the English School theorist Gerrit Gong, *The Standard of Civilisation*, (1984). Gong defines the standard of civilisation as "an expression of the assumptions, tacit and explicit, used to distinguish those that belong to a particular society from those that do not."¹⁰ Gong highlights the potential problems faced by states not deemed as within the 'standard': their "progress towards 'civilized' status was necessary and possible for the less 'civilized' to achieve, *but complete and perfect equality was not*"¹¹ (My emphasis). This indicating that, within most global structures of morality and citizenship, equality is hard for some to attain.

The writings of Carl Schmitt offer a more pessimistic insight into Linklater's propositions.¹² Indeed, Rasch suggests that once a concept like 'humanity' has been

elect those who govern them; the triumph of these values is more assuredly easier when the international balance of power favours those who believe in them... and in the meantime, it is simply not possible to ignore and isolate other powerful states that do not share those values." Rice, C. (2000) "Promoting the National Interest, *Foreign Affairs*, 79:1, page 49.

⁷ Bull, H. (1977) *The Anarchical Society: A Study in World Order*, page 65

⁸ Linklater, A. (2007) *Critical Theory and World Politics: Citizenship, Sovereignty and Humanity* page 65

⁹ Linklater, A. (2007) *Critical Theory and World Politics: Citizenship, Sovereignty and Humanity* page 160

¹⁰ Gong, G. W. (1984) *The Standard of 'Civilization' in International Society*, Oxford: Clarendon Press. Pg 3

¹¹ Linklater, A. (2007) *Critical Theory and World Politics: Citizenship, Sovereignty and Humanity*, page 63

¹² Aradau, C. (2007) "Law Transformed: Guantánamo and the 'Other' Exception" *Third World Quarterly*, 28:3, page 492

made the defining factor of a global morality or citizenship; “‘humanity’ has to be opposed to its other, and, simply, that other cannot be human.”¹³ Any actor that rebels or disagrees with the factors which constitute global citizenship is in danger of removing themselves from the conception of citizenship. Consequently, they would lose any claim to equality with those around them. As Schmitt argues “The concepts of “humanity” and “civilisation” that defined the system as a whole were exclusively Eurocentric...Non-European space was considered to be either uncivilised to half-civilised, leaderless, even empty.”¹⁴ This suggests that a universal conception of humanity, morality or citizenship constitutes a dangerous identity for the outsider. “After all, only an unregenerate barbarian could fail to recognize the irrefutable benefits of the liberal order.”¹⁵

Despite such opportunities for the construction of inequality within a global conception of morality and citizenship the notion of equality is vital to Linklater’s work. In an encouraging and thought-provoking analysis, Linklater suggests that citizenship initially

*Involves moral responsibilities to ensure that others enjoy the benefits of belonging to the same moral community; second, the idea that citizenship gives force to basic rights to freedom and security...and third, the contention that citizenship embodies the right to participate in the public sphere.*¹⁶

Schmitt’s arguments can be utilised to support this point. He argued that when actors of equal status have hostilities, they do so as *Justus Hostis*, or Just Enemy.¹⁷ Schmitt identified battles in this context as being duels between equal parties.¹⁸ However, this encourages the scholar again to consider the position of the outsider or the, seemingly inevitably, unequal actor. If those within global citizenship and universal morality can find “the right balance between the universal and the particular”,¹⁹ then peaceful *modus vivendi* can exist. However, if an actor is conceived in terms of difference and non-membership, then Campbell’s words seem appropriate and highly potent:

*The mere existence of an alternative mode of being, the presence of which exemplifies that different identities are possible and thus de-naturalises the claim of a particular authority to be the true identity, is sometimes enough to produce the understanding of a threat.*²⁰

¹³ Rasch, W. (2000) “Conflict as a Vocation: Carl Schmitt and the Possibility of Politics” Theory, Culture and Society, **17**: 6, page 13

¹⁴ Schmitt, C. (2006) The Nomos of the Earth: In the International Law of the Jus Publicum Europaeum. New York: Telos Press Publishing. Page 11

¹⁵ Rasch, W. (2003) “Human Rights As Geopolitics Carl Schmitt And The Legal Form Of American Supremacy” Cultural Critique, **54**:1, page 136

¹⁶ *ibid.*, page 7

¹⁷ Schmitt, C. (2006) The Nomos of the Earth: in the International Law of the Jus Publicum Europeum. New York: Telos Press Publishing. Page 52

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, page 52

¹⁹ Linklater, A. (2007) Critical Theory and World Politics: Citizenship, Sovereignty and Humanity, page 35

²⁰ Campbell, D. (1998) Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy; David Campbell, Manchester: University of Manchester Press. Page 3

Like Linklater, Schmitt draws on Kant's theorising about the relationships between states and individuals within an international order. Schmitt analyses Kant's conception of the *Hostis Injustus*, describing the unjust enemy as one "whose publicly expressed will (whether by word or deed) reveals a maxim by which...any condition of peace among nations would be impossible and, instead, a state of nature would be perpetuated."²¹ Schmitt develops this idea,²² citing Kant's belief that "the 'unjust enemy' is especially dangerous, because the law has no 'limits' for anyone threatened by him."²³ An actor outside the global conception of morality, as portrayed by Linklater, is always in danger of being conceived as *Hostis Injustus*. Consequently, Kant argues that, "when the freedom of the people is threatened by the unjust enemy's words or acts, thereby they 'are called upon to unite against such misconduct in order to deprive the state of its power to do it [to threaten peace].'"²⁴ Members of a universal morality or a global citizenship can do what they deem necessary to eradicate this threat. The possibility of such inequality and the potentially heinous consequences of it undermine Linklater's claims that a universal morality would ultimately encourage peaceful relations and not imperialist domination. Instead, a Schmittian analysis suggests it would bring peaceful relations for some and complete discrimination against others. Consequently, this brings the scholar back to concerns that a conception of universal morality or global citizenship can be a tool for imperialist domination, especially if it can vanquish those it perceives as different.

These challenges to Linklater's accounts of global citizenship and universal morality point to a single and critical meta-problem: the implicit assumption that global morality is a force for good. Although concerns about the imperialism of a global morality are not new, the inclusion of the insight of Schmitt's thoughts on the matter raises new points of reference for the study of the ideas found in Linklater's highly important and interesting work.

²¹ Kant, E. "Metaphysical First Principles of the Doctrine of Right" in *The Metaphysics of Morals* page 119 as quoted in Schmitt, C. (2003) *The Nomos of the Earth*, page 169.

²² It is worth noting that Schmitt was not a supporter of Kant's ideas around the *Injustus Hostis* but the analysis he provides is wholly insightful and relevant to this review.

²³ Schmitt, C. (2003) *The Nomos of the Earth*, page 169.

²⁴ Kant quotation taken from "Metaphysical First Principles of the Doctrine of Right" in *The Metaphysics of Morals* page 119 as quoted in Schmitt, C. (2003) *The Nomos of the Earth*, page 170