



Publication details, information for authors and referees and full contents available at: <http://global-discourse.com/>

ISSN: 2043-7897

Suggested citation:

Yearwood, R. R. F. (2010) 'Review of "Critical Theory and World Politics: Citizenship, Sovereignty and Humanity" by Andrew Linklater', *Global Discourse* [Online], 1: 1, available from: <<http://global-discourse.com/contents>>.

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

Review by Ronnie Yearwood¹

1. I want to start with a declaration that writing in itself is a difficult process but too often we may tend to forget that reading is also a difficult process. In that you are trying to read or understand through the community of the writer -- and at the same time trying to escape your own community -- while simultaneously being trapped inside your own community because it is what provides you with *a* world of meanings, categories and interests. If it seems that I am suggesting that we all end up in a mire of (*mis*)understanding, which is really a continuous management of conflict -- politics -- may be it is because, we do. Conceivably this brief review of *Critical Theory and World Politics*, is as much a review of Linklater's work, as it is a suggestion that our community -- our meanings, categories, and interests -- *always* binds us. Community hence provides a way for us to see *our* world. It is a byword for a specific way of understanding the world around us, with potential for misuse, but without community we could not make sense of our world. I deploy these assertions in examining Linklater's central theme that by weaving universal moral principles into the State, we can transcend the tension between man (universal humanity) and citizenship (community).^[1]

2. Our communities and the definitions which they enable 'occupy an epistemological space that is prior to [our] thought'.^[2] In that way, 'left unguarded... our categories [communities] could collapse, and *our* world would dissolve in chaos', given that 'all social action flows through boundaries determined by [these] classification schemes....'^[3] Furthermore, we cannot escape our communities which we set up to understand the world because it is the basis from which we make sense of the world.^[4] It is the ability to include, and perhaps more importantly, to exclude on which understandings of the world are constructed. Freud puts it into context when he says that, 'It is always possible to bind quite large numbers of people together in love, provided that *others* are left out as targets for aggression.'^[5] It seems what it is to be included in a community is always prefix for the 'other', which is excluded. Underlining that is the fact that every meaning, category and interest carries with it uncertainty. Through community its members can bring to bear a particular agreed understanding of the world around them, so as to facilitate some form of order and communicative exchange. It carries with it, an inability to give meaning to all things and cover all eventualities of the past, present and future. This makes claims to universality marginal at best, aspirational at worse.

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3. Communities lock individuals into -- institutional (cultural, legal, social, economic etc.) frameworks that define -- a way of thought and action as a community. In leaving the state of nature man became locked into a community. This restricts his individual 'scope for satisfaction' whereas previously he would know 'no such restriction'.^[6] Freud writes that 'the power of the community then pits itself, in the name of 'right', against the power of the individual, which is condemned as 'brute force'.^[7] The power of the individual is replaced by that of the community as a 'decisive step towards civilisation'.^[8] He argues that the next step towards this civilisation is the assurance of a legal order which 'once established shall not be violated again in favour of the individual'.^[9] Hence those 'who qualify as members of that community' by 'partly forgoing the satisfaction of their drives' will not be a victim of brute force.^[10] It is critical here that Freud links the benefits of the order that a community can bring with the fact that its members forgo their individual drives to be subjugated by that of the community. The point as Linklater writes is that individuals in leaving the state of nature granted each other 'determinate rights and duties, the rights and duties of citizens'.^[11] The problem Linklater thinks is that the state of nature continued between their respective political associations, as 'individuals were not parties to contracts with outsiders, there were free from specific international moral responsibilities'.^[12] Linklater, like Freud, argues that States (communities) thus had binding 'obligations to those who had consented to their establishment but not to other persons'.^[13] This is at the crux of the tension that Linklater identifies as between man as a citizen (community) and a wider humanity of civilisation.

4. It is a tension that Freud in his seminal piece, *Civilisation and Its Discontents* captures well when he writes that

Much of mankind's struggle is taken up with the task of finding a suitable, that is to say a happy accommodation, between the claims of the individual and the mass claims of civilisation. One of the problems affecting the fate of mankind is whether such an accommodation can be achieved through a particular moulding of civilization or whether the conflict is irreconcilable.^[14]

In what appears as an echo, if not a direct channelling, of Freud's observation, Linklater writes that the 'chapters in this collection are united by a particular interest in the ties that bind together the members of political communities and simultaneously separate them from the remainder of the human race'.^[15] It is at this point that I wish to advance that in this review I take concern with how Linklater's work addresses and seeks to resolve this tension, between the individual as part of community rooted in the institutional mechanism of the State, as to claims of the universal humanity of civilisation. It is what Linklater calls the tension between man and citizen.^[16] That is, the tension between the 'duties that individuals have to one another as citizens of separate states and the obligations they have to all other persons as members of humanity'.^[17] He argues that this conflict between 'citizenship and humanity is fundamental to the experience of the modern states-system'^[18] and is 'predicated on the assumption that the individual's moral obligations are not exhausted by duties to the state but must allow scope for at least some cosmopolitan responsibilities'.^[19] In focusing on this central theme, which Linklater fleshes out particularly in Chapters 1 - 3, I make two connected arguments. Perhaps not only does Linklater not appreciate

that there is no necessity to transcend the tension or overlay the Westphalian State with a universal cosmopolitan community. But politics as the craft of managing the conflict of competing communities makes the idea of transcending somewhat impossible. Especially given that our community not only binds us as Linklater (and also Freud) would agree, but those fences also provide a basis from which we communicate and understand the 'other'.^[20] On these presumptions, the fences need not be seen as a prison but as boundaries in the craft of politics as to how the 'other' is defined as to those who are members of a community. That does not affect the obligations that man can have towards a wider humanity but a realisation that those obligations emanate from the narrow community of man as citizenship. In other words, the humanity Linklater wants may be possible only through community.

5. If we want a post-Westphalian cosmopolitan State where universal moral principles are put into the State, as Linklater seems to suggest, then the community that allows us to understand everything outside of that community (the world around us) would have to disappear. But in doing so, we then will have no basis as to understand, unless we create 'new' communities -- meanings, categories and interests -- which means we end up where we began. Communities do not seem to disappear or have universalising moral tenants simply added onto them, because communities create specific points of contact or ways of making sense of the world around us. Schmitt says it well,

As long as a state exists, there will thus always be in the world more than just one state. A world state which embraces the entire globe and all of humanity cannot exist. The political world is a pluriverse, not a universe... The political entity cannot by its very nature be universal in the sense of embracing all of humanity and the entire world.^[21]

In order to create the post-nationalist concept of citizenship, and to destroy the tension between man (community) and citizen (universal humanity) that Linklater wants, we probably have to create an 'other' that is not human. But in creating that other than is not human we are probably destroying the very idea of what humanity means, which is to include everyone, and not have the 'other'. As Schmitt says

Humanity as such and as a whole has no enemies. Everyone belongs to humanity... 'Humanity' thus becomes an asymmetrical counter-concept. If he discriminates within humanity and thereby denies the quality of being human to a disturber or destroyer, then the negatively valued person becomes an unperson, and his life is no longer of the highest value: it becomes worthless and must be destroyed. Concepts such as 'human being' thus contain the possibility of the deepest inequality and become thereby asymmetrical.^[22]

6. Therefore, when Linklater ponders about the failures of the international community to respond to the genocide in Rwanda, conceivably it is because they have been denied humanity and so have become 'unpersons'. And perhaps there is no real international community as such, but for a collection of States that decide when to collectively act and when to disband. The aspiration for individual universal obligations to humanity may actually be counter-productive to protect individuals when they need it most, because claims of humanity inevitably and consequently create the 'other' in the form of the unperson. In fact, any claim of community

whether at the level of the State or as a universal aspiration, carries the seed of the other, which can be excluded or denied by that community. It makes me somewhat sceptical of the use and deployment of the idea of humanity because if violations of that humanity happen, in a way it happens because we are able to somehow define some people as having less humanity. Because every community will carry with it, the 'other', in essence there can be no universal humanity. However, Linklater argues that,

Scepticism about the motivational power of common humanity is weakened significantly if at least some human beings in different historical eras have thought it was right to help a stranger..., if others have endorsed their course of action, and if they have sanctioned the failure to rescue. Distrust of the ties of humanity is dented if certain basic forms of solidarity with the suffering led at least some moral agents to assist others more or less automatically in different historical eras.^[23]

Scepticism is not dented. For even if we accept Linklater's view that some strangers in the 'name' of humanity will offer some form of automatic help to alleviate human suffering, some will not because that suffering in no way resonates or is understood within or as part of their community. Such occurrences are perhaps as likely to occur, with equal measure, as to those of the Good Samaritan.^[24] I can make the opposite argument to Linklater in that 'it does [not] seem preposterous to speculate that complete strangers have [not] been compelled to act by the ties of humanity in very different times and places.'^[25] In fact it can seem very real that strangers, probably outside of the most disastrous of circumstances may not feel compelled or only feel a marginal allegiance with the suffering of a community outside their own.

7. Linklater may respond to this assertion with the argument that the interconnectedness of our economic relations means that we have become more 'exposed to greater pressures to detach [ourselves] from the immediate needs of [our] particular ways of live in order to reflect on the possible fate of the entire species [humanity].'^[26] Yet there is something I also find sceptical about this, that in order to detach ourselves, we would have to somehow leave our community and yet it is that community which is the basis for providing us with meaning of the thing we wish to reflect upon. So how do we leave our community? Communities allow us to understand and make sense of the world that surrounds us. If we cannot that means we exist in differing and competing communities. Is that a world of conflict? I think so. Is that a world where like Linklater would hold that the logic of conflict and competition cannot be regarded as unalterable?^[27] I would tend to agree but I also think in that statement Linklater may be misplacing the idea of conflict in his attempt to resolve the tension between the obligations of men and citizens by weaving 'universal moral principles into the affairs of states.'^[28] Linklater argues that 'The distinction between men and citizens created an important problem for international political theory: the problem of how to reconcile the actual diversity and division of political communities with the newly discovered belief in the universality of human nature.'^[29] Linklater seems to be of the view that there can be a 'moral community' more inclusive than the state, which we can defend on the basis of 'collective self-determination.'^[30] This logically leads Linklater to argue that 'it may be contended that only within an international political association, which aims at maximising

human freedom, can the species express its unique capabilities while recapturing morally integrated lives'.^[31]

8. The idea of an international political association to me is akin to the story of the *Wizard of Oz*. One is gestured to a yellow brick road, with a merry tune and a band of friends (your community) in the hope of finding a magical wizard that can solve problems. However, you discover that not only is there no magic, but that the wizard is merely a human in all his fragilities frantically pulling levers, sometimes if not most of the time, unsure of the effects. The analogy of the Wizard of Oz goes further because those seeking the Wizard realised that they had what they were looking for all along. Possibly we do not need to go beyond the State to create an international political association into which to pour or rather to exercise moral obligations towards humanity. The reason being that our communities provide the basis from which we access and understand the world outside that community. The solution is not to solve the tension between man and citizen, as Linklater argues, but to make use of that tension as the craft of politics.

9. Let us suppose that man owes no moral or any other obligations to universal humanity because as I argued earlier, it can often be political code for actually denying some people their very humanity. Now, on the flip side, let us suppose we do owe those obligations, the tension between an individual's obligations to humanity and those as a citizen to his community may end up being somewhat artificial. The reason being that if our communities provide us with meaning, then we are bound to them, so we cannot escape them, hard as we try. I am not making an argument that communities are self-contained^[32] or presume that rival communities are incommensurable. Rather, Linklater misses a chance to make use of the fact that communities are bounded and as he rightly notes, 'human beings learn how the social bond that unites them in one community simultaneously divided them from outsiders.'^[33] I think this is where Linklater and I differ because where he tends to see the bounded or closed nature of communities as a problem, part of what creates the tension between man and citizen that needs to be resolved, I see that closure as a way of how communities learn. I take that to mean that that we do not need to create meta or universal moral principles to ensure that individuals also have regard for their fellow citizens as part of humanity. What we need to do is create common mediating principles between communities. The point is that no one mediating principle may work for all communities. These principles would allow different communities to enter, at least conceptually, other communities. The bounded nature of the community becomes a platform from which it can engage, based on some mediating principle, with another community who would also be using a similar mediating principle.

10. My final point is that communities can subjugate the will of the individual to that of the community. So why do we not simply extrapolate the community of the State to that of the world? This goes back to the problems I identified in concepts such as universal humanity that inherently carry the postulate of the other. Possibly the better way of securing humanity is not with a broad aspirational universal project but through the State. Maybe instead of beating up the idea of community, it is time to revisit the idea of community as a means to wield the craft of politics for human good (whatever that good is decided to be). Conceivably the best we do is manage conflict between communities, finding mediating principles, a basis on which one community

will use its bounded or closed nature to try to access the world outside itself, and vice versa. Taking small steps along the yellow brick road, discovering that there is no grand universal solution, and frantically pulling more levers in the hope that something useful comes out on the other side. If this is so, then the job of critical theory is not as Linklater seems to envisage, to aid in ‘the reconstruction of the state as a bounded community and the introduction of post-nationalist conceptions of citizenship’^[34] but something perhaps much more modest. That is to help us figure out which lever to pull, all the while pretending that it is a smooth seamless operation of Wizardly magic.

^[1] Linklater A, *Critical Theory and World Politics: Citizenship, Sovereignty and Humanity*, (Oxford: Routledge, 2007) 1- 13. (See generally Chapter 1.)

^[2] Darton R, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1984) 192, See also 3 – 7, 191 – 209 (See generally Chapter 5: Philosophers Trim the Tree of Knowledge: The Epistemological Strategy of the Encyclopedie). For further reading see also Searle J, *The Construction of Social Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1995).

^[3] Darton *supra* note 2, at 193. Cf. Linklater *supra* note 1, at 50-51 appears to have the contrasting view.

^[4] For an expansion of this point in relation to the operational closure and cognitive openness of systems, see generally Teubner G, ‘How Law Thinks: Toward A Constructivist Epistemology of Law’, (1989) 23 (5) *Law and Society Review*, 727.

^[5] Freud S, *Civilisation and Its Discontents*, trans. D. McLintock ,(London: Penguin, 2004 (1941)) 64, 65. My emphasis in italics.

^[6] Freud *supra* note 5, at 41.

^[7] *Ibid.* 41.

^[8] *Ibid.* 41.

^[9] *Ibid.* 41

^[10] *Ibid.*, 41,42.

^[11] *Ibid.*, at 18.

^[12] *Ibid.*

^[13] *Ibid.*

^[14] *Ibid.*, 42.

^[15] Linklater *supra* note, 1 at 1.

^[16] *Ibid.* (See generally Chapter 1)

^[17] *Ibid.*

^[18] *Ibid.*, 16.

^[19] *Ibid.*, 11.

^[20] *Supra* note 4.

^[21] Schmitt C, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. G. Schwab (London: The University of Chicago Press, 2007 (1929), 53.

^[22] *Ibid.*, xxii. (Originally from Schmitt C, ‘The Legal World Revolution’, (1987) 72(Summer) *Telos* 88.)

^[23] Linklater *supra* note 1, at 179.

^[24] *Ibid.*, 180.

^[25] *Ibid.* (‘Not’ is my insertion)

^[26] *Ibid.*, 1.

^[27] *Ibid.*, 48.

^[28] *Ibid.*, 20.

^[29] *Ibid.*, 16.

^[30] *Ibid.*, 29.

^[31] *Ibid*, 29.

^[32] For a similar point, see Linklater *supra* note 1, at 35, 36, 48.

^[33] Linklater *supra* note, 1 at 51.

^[34] *Ibid*, 58.