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

*Review by Shannon Brincat<sup>1</sup>*

This book is a compendium of Andrew Linklater's most significant papers written between 1982 and 2007. The volume is arranged into distinct themes, the problems of community, citizenship and harm respectively. Each division is representative of the three key areas that have continued to animate Linklater's thought on world politics throughout the last three decades. As such, the volume captures well the theoretical development of one of the most important theorists in IR whose work is marked by its incredible consistency of focus, namely, the overriding concern with expanding the boundaries of moral community in world politics. So while many of us may have read some or all of these papers before, the benefit of the volume is not only that it places them in easy reach but because the pieces were chosen by Linklater himself. The selection has been well made, with Linklater obtaining advice from a number of colleagues (Richard Devetak, Richard Shapcott and Toni Erskine in particular) on which papers to include and how to best organise them. One could interrogate the reasons behind his selectivity however, as the inclusions and exclusions of the book throw up interesting insights into the future tasks of Critical International Relations Theory (CIRT), at least, as one of its leading theorists views them. Pursuing the question of why certain influential pieces were omitted from the volume, such as "Hegel, the State and IR" (1996: 193-209) or "Dialogue, Dialectic and Emancipation in International Relations" (1994: 119-131), help reveal the intentions and concerns underlying Linklater's focus today; less with philosophical and normative concerns, and more with sociological and historical questions, or what he refers to as the "cosmopolitan approach to the sociology of states-systems" (2008d: 159).

Part I of the book looks at the nexus between moral obligations and political community, probably the most well-known aspects of Linklater's thought which stemmed from his ambitious doctoral research published as *Men and Citizens* (1982). Part II offers a survey of Linklater's thought on citizenship, particularly the notions of uncoupling citizenship from the state, and transforming the boundaries of political community to what Linklater has referred to as the post-Westphalian state. Here we see Linklater's concern with the 'good international citizen' and the basis of his dialogic community in Habermasian discourse ethics. Part III is an attempt to lay the foundation for a sociology of the state-system that analyses the dominant attitudes to harm and suffering in history and the prospects for extending community. Of interest here is that these four chapters largely foreshadow the nature of Linklater's current project; his soon to be completed magnum opus, contained in three volumes, that will focus on the principle of harm in world politics.

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Of key importance is the Introduction to *Critical Theory and World Politics*, which does not just preface the book but is in fact an excellent summation of the long trajectory of Linklater's thought; its basis is in the problem of the separation between 'men' and 'citizens', its praxeological interest in the transformation of political community and citizenship, and its current focus on the reduction of harm and 'distant suffering' in world politics. Here Linklater expresses a Kantian view that the entangled global relationships have forced communities to reflect on the moral consequences of relations with 'strangers' (2008a: 1). Due to this increased awareness, the central question of the process of globalisation seems to be how the relationships between the dimensions of interconnectedness and particularism in social and political life will develop in the future (2008a: 2). The transformation of Europe suggests to Linklater that the "time is ripe" to complete the Copernican Revolution in political thought initiated by Kant more than two centuries ago. What is necessary however are "appropriate visions" of what such a post-Westphalian state could be (2008b: 90).

Linklater claims that there have been some conceptions of post-national citizenship that envisage new forms of political community in which state powers are shared with 'higher' and 'lower' authorities and where traditional 'national' loyalties yield to both local and cosmopolitan attachments (2008a: 7). Similarly, Linklater refers to a vision of the 'supranationalisation' of citizenship through worldwide democratic structures and radical global political innovations (2008a: 8). Together these form the general foundation from which Linklater defends the idea for stronger cosmopolitan moral orientations that are coupled with radical institutional innovations (2008a: 8). This is not presented as mere idealist caprice however. Rather, it is viewed as a struggle to create a "worldwide public sphere" as a crucial means in which cosmopolitan citizenship can exist without a world state (2008c: 122). So despite his open acknowledgement of the world's weariness with "utopian experiments" and disenchantment in the belief that political action can secure universal emancipation, for Linklater it is nevertheless premature to abandon the quest to embed cosmopolitan moral ideals in the organisation of world society (2008a: 12). The key area through which Linklater hopes to establish a commitment to cosmopolitan ethics is through a practical and sociological focus on the issue of harm – and hence Linklater's sustained examination of this area in recent years.

Yet Linklater's turn towards a study of the sociology of states-systems that focuses on harm as means to ground cosmopolitan politics, is not without its limitations or detractors. Griffiths for example has suggested that there exists an ambiguity in Linklater's writings between the need to transcend the state-system and a tendency to accept the state as the "medium of change and reform" (Griffiths 1999: 142). As such, he has advocated for the recovery of Linklater's early emphasis on political theory rather than the later emphasis on the philosophy of history and sociology (Griffiths 1999: 142). However, focusing on harm, which has important philosophical *and* practical implications for world politics, may circumvent other criticisms of Linklater's ongoing project in CIRT. Some critics have asserted that a continued focus on the traditions of Habermas or Foucault by Linklater would still not bestow a philosophical foundation for mediating cases of conflict between cultures (Jackson 1992: 274). To counter this perceived limitation, one could contend that a commitment to the reduction of harm and suffering of others could provide some standard to determine the forms of conduct that ought be recognised and respected in world politics.

However, going back to Linklater's acknowledgement of the need for "appropriate visions" of the post-Westphalian state, a focus on harm does not seem, *prima facie*, to advance this to a great degree. While we can logically deduce that the harm principle would be a component of a just and moral world-order, it remains only one aspect of that order – and a negativist aspiration at that. Yet, it is important here to not speculate on the basis of the four chapters presented in this volume alone. These papers essentially constitute the preliminary analysis which informs Linklater's current and expansive project. It is also important to note that Linklater does not seem to advance a minimalist account of the harm principle, such as one consistent with the liberal principles of J.S. Mill. From the injunction 'do no harm' could flow fundamental and radical change to the existing world order; political, social, environmental and economic. We can only anticipate what Linklater's focus on harm will lend to the critical tradition and its theory of world politics with an emancipatory intent but its potential cannot be doubted.

***Critical Theory and World Politics* is available in Australia from Manohar Publishers for \$10.63 (Paperback).**

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