


# ACADEMIA

Accelerating the world's research.

## Critical theory

Richard Devetak

### Related papers

[Download a PDF Pack](#) of the best related papers 



[Theories of International Relations Third edition](#)

Riquie Peres

[Critical Theory of International Relations](#)

Steven C Roach

[Obligations beyond the state: Andrew Linklater's 'Men and Citizens in the Theory of International Relations'](#)

Juliette Gout, Richard Devetak

# 7 | **Critical Theory**

RICHARD DEVETAK

One of the defining characteristics of critical theory is its insistence on self-reflection, including an account of how knowledge emerges out of and is situated in particular contexts. It should come as little surprise then that critical theory should cast a backwards glance not only at its intellectual origins and evolution, but also its achievements and failures in application to the study of international relations. In the years since 1981, according to these self-reflective accounts (Rengger and Thirkell-White 2007, Brincat, Lima and Nunes 2012), the discipline of International Relations has been transformed, not least because of the theory's critical interventions across a broad range of topics in the study of international relations.

While guided by the long-term project of an emancipatory politics, critical theories of international relations take problems and issues in the present as their point of departure. Among the most pressing issue areas addressed by critical theorists of international relations in recent years are: international security (Fierke 2007), ballistic missile defence (Peoples 2010), the war on terror (Burke 2004, 2005), humanitarian intervention (Bjola 2005; Devetak 2007; Head 2008) and the global trade regime (Kapoor 2004), just to name a few. On a broader scale, Andrew Linklater (2011c), one of the foremost proponents of critical theory in International Relations, has published the first of a projected three-volume study of harm in international relations, and has been joined by other critical theorists in pursuit of a cosmopolitan politics (Beardsworth 2011; Benhabib 2006; Fine 2007). Still others have restated and advanced the case for a critical theory of international relations in general (Anievas 2005; Haacke 2005; Roach 2010; Weber, 2002, 2005, 2007). Perhaps one of the most interesting developments over the past decade or so has been the increasing interest taken in international relations by the world's leading critical theorist, Jürgen Habermas. In his recent writings he has intervened in the debate on NATO's humanitarian war over Kosovo (1999), articulated a forthright critique of the Iraq War (2003a), reflected on the terrorist attacks of September 11 (2003b),

continued his support for Europe as a constitutional ‘counter-power’ (Habermas and Derrida 2003), and comprehensively outlined an alternative vision of cosmopolitan global governance (2006: chapter 8).

This chapter will show how critical theories of international relations have come to achieve this position in the discipline. The first part sketches the origins of critical theory; the second offers an examination of the political nature of knowledge claims in international relations; and the third details critical international theory’s attempt to place questions of community at the centre of the study of international relations. Differences will emerge among critical theorists, but if there is one thing that holds together the disparate group of scholars who subscribe to ‘critical theory’, it is the idea that the study of international relations should be oriented by an emancipatory politics.

### Origins of critical theory

Critical theory has its roots in a strand of thought which is often traced back to the Enlightenment and connected to the writings of Kant, Hegel and Marx. While this is an important lineage in the birth of critical theory it is not the only one that can be traced, as there is also the imprint of classical Greek thought on autonomy and democracy to be considered, as well as the thinking of Nietzsche and Weber. However, in the twentieth century critical theory became most closely associated with a distinct body of thought known as the Frankfurt School (Jay 1973). It is in the work of Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Herbert Marcuse, Erich Fromm, Leo Lowenthal and, more recently, Jürgen Habermas and Axel Honneth that critical theory acquired a renewed potency and in which the term *critical theory* came to be used as the emblem of a philosophy which questions modern social and political life through a method of immanent critique. It was largely an attempt to recover a critical and emancipatory potential that had been overrun by recent intellectual, social, cultural, political, economic and technological trends.

Essential to the Frankfurt School’s critical theory was a concern to comprehend the central features of contemporary society by understanding its historical and social development, and tracing contradictions in the present which may open up the possibility of transcending contemporary society and its built-in pathologies and forms of domination. Critical theory intended ‘not simply to eliminate one or other abuse’, but to analyse the underlying social structures which result in these abuses with the intention of overcoming them (Horkheimer 1972: 206). It is not difficult to notice the presence here of the theme advanced by Marx in his

164 *Theories of International Relations*

eleventh thesis on Feuerbach: ‘philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it’ (Marx 1977a: 158). This normative interest in identifying immanent possibilities for social transformation is a defining characteristic of a line of thought which extends, at least, from Kant, through Marx, to contemporary critical theorists such as Habermas and Honneth. This intention to analyse the possibilities of realizing emancipation in the modern world entailed critical analyses of both obstructions to, and intrinsic tendencies towards, ‘the rational organization of human activity’ (Horkheimer 1972: 223). Indeed, this concern extends the line of thought back beyond Kant to the classical Greek conviction that the rational constitution of the *polis* finds its expression in individual autonomy and the establishment of justice and democracy. Politics, on this understanding, is the realm concerned with realizing the just life.

There is, however, an important difference between critical theorists and the Greeks, which relates to the conditions under which knowledge claims can be made regarding social and political life. There are two points worth recalling in this regard: first, the Kantian point that reflection on the limits of what we can know is a fundamental part of theorizing and, second, a Hegelian and Marxian point that knowledge is always, and irreducibly, conditioned by historical and material contexts; in Mark Rupert’s words (2003: 186), it is always ‘situated knowledge’. Since critical theory takes society itself as its object of analysis, and since theories and acts of theorizing are never independent of society, critical theory’s scope of analysis must necessarily include reflection on theory. In short, critical theory must be *self-reflective*; it must include an account of its own genesis and application in society. By drawing attention to the relationship between knowledge and society, which is so frequently excluded from mainstream theoretical analysis, critical theory recognizes the political nature of knowledge claims.

It was on the basis of this recognition that Horkheimer distinguished between two conceptions of theory, which he referred to as ‘traditional’ and ‘critical’ theories. Traditional conceptions of theory picture the theorist at a remove from the object of analysis. By analogy with the natural sciences, they insist that subject and object must be strictly separated in order to theorize properly. Traditional conceptions of theory assume there is an external world ‘out there’ to study, and that an inquiring subject can study this world in a balanced and objective manner by withdrawing from the world it investigates, and leaving behind any ideological beliefs, values, or opinions which would invalidate the inquiry. To qualify as theory it must at least be value-free. On this view, theory is possible only on condition that an inquiring subject can withdraw from the world it studies (and in which it exists) and rid itself of all biases. This

contrasts with critical conceptions that deny the possibility of value-free social analysis.

By recognizing that theories are always embedded in social and political life, critical conceptions of theory allow for an examination of the purposes and functions served by particular theories. However, while such conceptions of theory recognize the unavoidability of taking their orientation from the social context in which they are situated, their guiding interest is one of emancipation from, rather than legitimation and consolidation of, existing social forms. The purpose underlying critical, as opposed to traditional, conceptions of theory is to improve human existence by abolishing injustice (Horkheimer 1972). As articulated by Horkheimer (1972: 215), this conception of theory does not simply present an expression of the ‘concrete historical situation’, it also acts as ‘a force within [that situation] to stimulate change’. It allows for the intervention of humans in the making of their history.

It should be noted that while critical theory had not directly addressed the international level until recently, this in no way implies that international relations is beyond the limits of its concern. The writings of Kant and Marx, in particular, have demonstrated that what happens at the international level is of immense significance to the achievement of universal emancipation. It is the continuation of this project in which critical international theory is engaged. The Frankfurt School, however, never addressed international relations in its critiques of the modern world, and Habermas made only scant reference to it until recently (see Habermas 1998, 2003a, 2006; Habermas and Derrida 2003). The main tendency of critical theory is to take individual society as the focus and to neglect the dimension of relations between and across societies. For critical international theory, however, the task is to extend the trajectory of Frankfurt School critical theory beyond the domestic realm to the international – or, more accurately, global – realm. It makes a case for a theory of world politics which is ‘committed to the emancipation of the species’ (Linklater 1990a: 8). Such a theory would no longer be confined to an individual state or society, but would examine relations between and across them, and reflect on the possibility of extending the rational, just and democratic organization of political society across the globe (Neufeld 1995: chapter 1; Shapcott 2001).

To summarize, critical theory draws upon various strands of Western social, political and philosophical thought in order to erect a theoretical framework capable of reflecting on the nature and purposes of theory and revealing both obvious and subtle forms of injustice and domination in society. Critical theory not only challenges and dismantles traditional forms of theorizing, it also problematizes and seeks to dismantle entrenched forms of social life that constrain human freedom. Critical

international theory is an extension of this critique to the international domain. The next part of the chapter focuses on the attempt by critical international theorists to dismantle traditional forms of theorizing by promoting more self-reflective theory.

### **The politics of knowledge in international relations theory**

It was not until the 1980s, and the onset of the so-called ‘third debate’, that questions relating to the politics of knowledge were taken seriously in the study of international relations. Epistemological questions regarding the justification and verification of knowledge claims, the methodology applied and the scope and purpose of inquiry, and ontological questions regarding the nature of the social actors and other historical formations and structures in international relations, all carry normative implications that had been inadequately addressed. One of the important contributions of critical international theory has been to widen the object domain of International Relations, not just to include epistemological and ontological assumptions, but to explicate their connection to prior political commitments.

This section outlines the way in which critical theory brings knowledge claims in international relations under critical scrutiny. First, it considers the question of epistemology by describing how Horkheimer’s distinction between traditional and critical conceptions of theory has been taken up in international relations; and second, it elaborates the connection between critical theory and emancipatory theory. The result of this scrutinizing is to reveal the role of political interests in knowledge formation. As Robert Cox (1981) succinctly and famously said, ‘theory is always *for* someone and *for* some purpose’. As a consequence, critical international theorists reject the idea that theoretical knowledge is neutral or non-political. Whereas traditional theories would tend to see power and interests as *a posteriori* factors affecting outcomes in interactions between political actors in the sphere of international relations, critical international theorists insist that they are by no means absent in the formation and verification of knowledge claims. Indeed, they are *a priori* factors affecting the production of knowledge, hence Kimberly Hutchings’ (1999: 69) assertion that ‘international relations theory is not only about politics, it also is itself political’.

#### *Problem-solving and critical theories*

In his pioneering 1981 article, Robert Cox distinguished critical from problem-solving theory. Despite appearances, Cox (2012: 18) insists that

he had been unaware of the Frankfurt School's work in general, or Horkheimer's distinction in particular, when he devised the distinction (see Leysens 2008 and Devetak 2012: 116). Nonetheless, parallels exist. Problem-solving theories, like Horkheimer's traditional theories, are marked by two main characteristic theoretical tendencies: by a positivist methodology, and by a tendency to legitimize prevailing social and political structures. Critical theories, again like Horkheimer's, oppose problem-solving theories by rejecting both these theoretical tendencies.

Heavily influenced by the methodologies of the natural sciences, problem-solving theories suppose that positivism provides the only legitimate basis of knowledge. Positivism is seen, as Steve Smith (1996: 13) remarks, as the 'gold standard' against which other theories are evaluated. There are many different characteristics that can be identified with positivism, but two are particularly relevant to our discussion. First, positivists assume that facts and values can be separated; second, that it is possible to separate subject and object. This results in the view not only that an objective world exists independently of human consciousness, but that objective knowledge of social reality is possible insofar as values are expunged from analysis.

Problem-solving theory, as Cox (1981: 128) defines it, 'takes the world as it finds it, with the prevailing social and power relationships and the institutions into which they are organized, as the given framework for action. It does not question the present order, but has the effect of legitimizing and reifying it'. Its general aim, says Cox (1981: 129), is to make the existing order 'work smoothly by dealing effectively with particular sources of trouble'. Neo-realism, *qua* problem-solving theory, takes seriously the realist dictum to work with, rather than against, prevailing international forces. By working within the given system it has a stabilizing effect, tending to preserve the existing global structure of social and political relations. Cox points out that neo-liberal institutionalism also partakes of problem solving. Its objective, as explained by its foremost exponent, is to 'facilitate the smooth operation of decentralized international political systems' (Keohane 1984: 63). Situating itself between the states-system and the liberal capitalist global economy, neo-liberalism's main concern is to ensure that the two systems function smoothly in their co-existence. It seeks to render the two global systems compatible and stable by diffusing any conflicts, tensions, or crises that might arise between them (Cox 1992b: 173). As critical theorist James Bohman (2002: 506) says, such an approach 'models the social scientist on the engineer, who masterfully chooses the optimal solution to a problem of design'. In summary, traditional conceptions of theory tend to work in favour of stabilizing prevailing structures of world order and their accompanying inequalities of power and wealth.

168 *Theories of International Relations*

The main point that Cox wishes to make about problem-solving theory is that its failure to reflect on the prior framework within which it theorizes means that it tends to operate in favour of prevailing ideological priorities. Its claims to value-neutrality notwithstanding, problem-solving theory is plainly 'value-bound by virtue of the fact that it implicitly accepts the prevailing order as its own framework' (Cox 1981: 130). As a consequence, it remains oblivious to the way power and interests precede and shape knowledge claims.

By contrast, critical international theory starts from the conviction that because cognitive processes themselves are contextually situated and therefore subject to political interests, they ought to be critically evaluated. Theories of international relations, like any knowledge, are necessarily conditioned by social, cultural and ideological influence, and one of the main tasks of critical theory is to reveal the effect of this conditioning. As Richard Ashley (1981: 207) asserts, 'knowledge is always constituted in reflection of interests', so critical theory must bring to consciousness latent interests, commitments, or values that give rise to, and orient, any theory. We must concede therefore that the study of international relations 'is, and always has been, unavoidably normative' (Neufeld 1995: 108), despite claims to the contrary. Because critical international theory sees an intimate connection between social life and cognitive processes, it rejects the positivist distinctions between fact and value, object and subject. By ruling out the possibility of objective knowledge, critical international theory seeks to promote greater 'theoretical reflexivity' (1995: chapter 3). Cox (1992a: 59) expresses this reflexivity in terms of a double process: the first is 'self-consciousness of one's own historical time and place which determines the questions that claim attention'; the second is 'the effort to understand the historical dynamics that brought about the conditions in which these questions arose'. Similarly, Bohman (2002: 503) advocates a form of theoretical reflexivity based on the 'perspective of a critical-reflective participant'. By adopting these reflexive attitudes critical theory is more like a meta-theoretical attempt to examine how theories are situated in prevailing social and political orders, how this situatedness impacts on theorizing, and, most importantly, the possibilities for theorizing in a manner that challenges the injustices and inequalities built into the prevailing world order.

Critical theory's relation to the prevailing order needs to be explained with some care. For although it refuses to take the prevailing order as it finds it, critical theory does not simply ignore it. It accepts that humans do not make history under conditions of their own choosing, as Marx observed in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1977e), and so a detailed examination of present conditions must necessarily be undertaken. Nevertheless, the order which has been 'given' to us is by no



means natural, necessary or historically invariable. Critical international theory takes the global configuration of power relations as its object and asks how that configuration came about, what costs it brings with it and what alternatives remain immanent in history.

Critical theory is essentially a critique of the dogmatism it finds in traditional modes of theorizing. This critique reveals the unexamined assumptions that guide traditional modes of thought, and exposes the complicity of traditional modes of thought in prevailing political and social conditions. To break with dogmatic modes of thought is to 'denaturalize' the present, as Karin Fierke (1998: 13) puts it, to make us 'look again, in a fresh way, at that which we assume about the world because it has become overly familiar'. Denaturalizing '[allegedly] objective realities opens the door to alternative forms of social and political life'. Implicitly, therefore, critical theory *qua* denaturalizing critique serves 'as an instrument for the delegitimation of established power and privilege' (Neufeld 1995: 14). The knowledge critical international theory generates is not neutral; it is ethically charged by an interest in social and political transformation. It criticizes and debunks theories that legitimize the prevailing order and affirms progressive alternatives that promote emancipation.

This immediately raises the question of how ethical judgements about the prevailing world order can be formed. Since there are no objective theoretical frameworks there can be no Archimedean standpoint outside history or society from which to engage in ethical criticism or judgement. It is not a matter of drafting a set of moral ideals and using them as a transcendent benchmark to judge forms of political organization. There is no utopia to compare to facts. This means that critical international theory must employ the method of immanent critique rather than abstract ethics to criticize the present order of things (Linklater 1990a: 22–3; Fierke 2007: chapter 8).

The task, therefore, is to 'start from where we are', in Rorty's words (quoted in Linklater 1998: 77), and excavate the principles and values that structure our political society, exposing the contradictions or inconsistencies in the way our society is organized to pursue its espoused values. This point is endorsed by several other critical international theorists, including Karin Fierke and Kimberly Hutchings. Immanent critique is undertaken in the absence of 'an independently articulated method' or 'an ahistorical point of reference' (Hutchings 1999: 99; Fierke 2007: 167). Following Hegel's advice, critical international theory must acknowledge that the resources for criticizing and judging can be found only 'immanently', that is, in the already existing political societies from where the critique is launched. The critical resources brought to bear do not fall from the sky, they issue from the historical development of concrete legal and political institutions and social movements. The task

## 170 *Theories of International Relations*

---

of the political theorist is therefore to explain and criticize the present political order in terms of the principles presupposed by and embedded in its own legal, political and cultural practices and institutions (Fierke 1998: 114; Hutchings 1999: 102).

Fiona Robinson (1999) similarly argues that ethics should not be conceived as separate from the theories and practices of international relations, but should instead be seen as embedded in them. In agreement with Hutchings she argues for a 'phenomenology of ethical life' rather than an 'abstract ethics about the application of rules' (Robinson 1999: 31). On her account of a 'global ethics of care', however, it is necessary also to submit the background assumptions of already existing moral and political discourses to critical scrutiny. Fierke, Hutchings and Robinson agree with Linklater that any critical international theory must employ a mode of immanent critique. This means that the theorist must engage critically with the background normative assumptions that structure our ethical judgements in an effort to generate a more coherent fit between modes of thought and forms of political organization, and without relying on a set of abstract ethical principles.

### *Critical theory's task as an emancipatory theory*

If problem-solving theories adopt a positivist methodology and end up reaffirming the prevailing system, critical theories are informed by the traditions of hermeneutics and *Ideologiekritik* (ideology critique). Critical international theory is concerned not only with understanding and explaining the existing realities of world politics, it also intends to criticize and transform them. It is an attempt to comprehend essential social processes for the purpose of inaugurating change, or at least knowing whether change is possible. In Hoffman's words (1987: 233), it is 'not merely an expression of the concrete realities of the historical situation, but also a force for change within those conditions'. Neufeld (1995: chapter 5) also affirms this view of critical theory. It offers, he says, a form of social criticism that supports practical political activity aimed at societal transformation.

Critical theory's emancipatory interest is concerned with 'securing freedom from unacknowledged constraints, relations of domination, and conditions of distorted communication and understanding that deny humans the capacity to make their future through full will and consciousness' (Ashley 1981: 227). This plainly contrasts with problem-solving theories which tend to accept what Linklater (1997) calls the 'immutability thesis'. Critical theory is committed to extending the rational, just and democratic organization of political life beyond the level of the state to the whole of humanity.

The conception of emancipation promoted by critical international theory is largely inherited from a strand of thought which finds its origin in the Enlightenment project. This was generally concerned to break with past forms of injustice to foster the conditions necessary for universal freedom (Devetak 1995b). To begin with, emancipation, as understood by Enlightenment thinkers and critical international theorists, generally expresses a negative conception of freedom which consists in the removal of unnecessary, socially created constraints. This understanding is manifest in Booth's (1991b: 539) definition of emancipation as 'freeing people from those constraints that stop them carrying out what freely they would choose to do'. The emphasis in this understanding is on dislodging those impediments or impositions which unnecessarily curtail individual and collective freedom. Emancipation is a quest for autonomy, for self-determination (Linklater 1990a: 10, 135), but one that 'cannot be gained at the expense of others' (Fierke 2007: 188). It is also an open-ended 'process rather than an end-point, a direction rather than a destination' (Fierke 2007: 190).

In Linklater's account of critical international theory two thinkers are integral: Immanuel Kant and Karl Marx. Kant's approach is instructive because it seeks to incorporate the themes of power, order *and* emancipation (Linklater 1990a: 21–2). As expressed by Linklater (1992b: 36), Kant 'considered the possibility that state power would be tamed by principles of international order and that, in time, international order would be modified until it conformed with principles of cosmopolitan justice'. Kant's theory of international relations is an early attempt to map out a critical international theory by absorbing the insights and criticizing the weaknesses – in what would later be called realist thought – under an interest in universal freedom and justice. While Linklater believes Marx's approach to be too narrow in its focus on class-based exclusion, he thinks it nevertheless provides the basis of a social theory on which critical international theory must build. As Linklater observed (1990b: 159), both Marx and Kant share 'the desire for a universal society of free individuals, a universal kingdom of ends'. Both held strong attachments to the Enlightenment themes of freedom and universalism, and both launched strong critiques of particularistic life-forms with the intention of expanding moral and political community.

To conclude this part of the chapter, critical international theory makes a strong case for paying closer attention to the relations between knowledge and interests. One of critical international theory's main contributions in this regard is to expose the political nature of knowledge formation. Underlying all this is an explicit interest in challenging and removing socially produced constraints on human freedom, thereby contributing to the possible transformation of international relations (Linklater 1990b: 1, 1998).

## Rethinking political community

Informing critical international theory is the spirit, if not the letter, of Marx's critique of capitalism. Like Marx, critical international theorists seek to develop a social theory with emancipatory intent (Haacke 2005; Linklater 2007a: chapter 11). Since the mid-1990s one of the core themes that has grown out of critical international theory is the need to develop more sophisticated understandings of community as a means of identifying and eliminating global constraints on humanity's potential for freedom, equality and self-determination (Linklater 1990b: 7). Linklater's approach to this task, which has set the agenda is first, to analyse the way in which inequality and domination flow from modes of political community tied to the sovereign state, second, to develop a social theory of the states-system, and third, to consider alternative forms of political community which promote human emancipation.

This section elaborates the three dimensions on which critical international theory rethinks political community (see Linklater 1992a: 92–7). The first dimension is normative, and pertains to the philosophical critique of the state as an exclusionary form of political organization. The second is sociological, and relates to the need to develop an account of the origins and evolution of the modern state and states-system and their accompanying harms. The third is the praxeological dimension concerning practical possibilities for reconstructing international relations along more emancipatory and cosmopolitan lines. The overall effect of critical international theory, and its major contribution to international relations, is to focus on the normative foundations of political life.

### *The normative dimension: the critique of ethical particularism and social exclusion*

One of the key philosophical assumptions that has structured political and ethical thought and practice about international relations is the idea that the modern state is the natural form of political community. The sovereign state has been 'fetishized', to use Marx's term, as the normal mode of organizing political life. Critical international theorists, however, wish to problematize this fetishization and draw attention to the 'moral deficits' that are created by the state's interaction with the capitalist world economy. In this section, I outline critical international theory's philosophical inquiry into the normative bases of political life and its critique of ethical particularism and the social exclusion it generates.

The philosophical critique of particularism was first, and most systematically, set out in Andrew Linklater's *Men and Citizens* (1990b). His

main concern there was to trace how modern political thought had constantly differentiated ethical obligations due to co-citizens from those due to the rest of humanity. In practice, this tension between 'men' and 'citizens' has always been resolved in favour of citizens. Even if it was acknowledged, as it was by most early modern thinkers, that certain universal rights were thought to extend to all members of the human community, they were always residual and secondary to particularistic ones. Indeed, as Linklater (2007a: 182) observes, this tension has often been exploited for the purposes of devaluing the 'suffering of distant strangers' and sometimes even celebrating their suffering.

*Men and Citizens* is, among other things, a work of recovery. It seeks to recover a political philosophy based on universal ethical reasoning which has been progressively marginalized in the twentieth century, especially with the onset of the Cold War and the hegemony of realism. That is, it seeks to recover and reformulate the Stoic-Christian ideal of human community. While elements of this ideal can be found in the natural law tradition, it is to the Enlightenment tradition that Linklater turns to find a fuller expression of this ideal. Linklater here is strongly influenced by the thought of Kant, for whom war was undeniably related to the separation of humankind into separate, self-regarding political units, Rousseau, who caustically remarked that in joining a particular community individual citizens necessarily made themselves enemies of the rest of humanity, and Marx who saw in the modern state a contradiction between general and private interests.

The point being made here is that particularistic political associations lead to inter-societal estrangement, the perpetual possibility of war and social exclusion. This type of argument underlies the thought of several Enlightenment thinkers of the eighteenth century, including Montesquieu, Rousseau, Paine and Kant among others, for whom war was simply an expression of *ancien régime* politics and a tool of state. Marx extended the critique of the modern state by arguing that, in upholding the rule of law, private property and money, it masks capitalism's alienation and exploitation behind bourgeois ideals of freedom and equality. Marx, of course, viewed the separation of politics and economics as a liberal illusion created to mask capitalism's power relations. In Rupert's words (2003: 182), one of Marx's enduring insights is 'that the seemingly apolitical economic spaces generated by capitalism – within and across juridical states – are permeated by structured relations of social power deeply consequential for political life'. From this Marxian perspective, modern international relations, insofar as they combine the political system of sovereign states and the economic system of market capitalism, are a form of exclusion where particular class interests parade themselves as universal. The problem with the sovereign state therefore is

174 *Theories of International Relations*

that as a 'limited moral community' it promotes exclusion, generating estrangement, injustice, insecurity and violent conflict between self-regarding states by imposing rigid boundaries between 'us' and 'them' (Cox 1981: 137; Linklater 1990b: 28).

Such arguments have led in recent times, and especially after a century which saw genocides and unprecedented flows of stateless peoples and refugees, to more general and profound questions about the foundations on which humanity is politically divided and organized. In particular, as Hutchings (1999: 125) notes, it has led critical international theory to a 'questioning of the nation-state as a normatively desirable mode of political organisation'. Consistent with other critical international theorists Hutchings (1999: 122, 135) problematizes the 'idealised fixed ontologies' of nation and state. Hutchings goes further than Linklater, however, by also problematizing the individual 'self' of liberalism. Her intention is to examine the status of all normative claims to self-determination, whether the 'self' is understood as the individual, nation, or state. But insofar as her critique is aimed at placing the 'self' in question as a self-contained entity, Hutchings' analysis complements and extends the philosophical critique of particularism undertaken by Linklater.

Richard Shapcott (2000b, 2001) also continues this critique by inquiring into the way different conceptions of the 'self' shape relations to 'others' in international relations. Shapcott's main concern is with the possibility of achieving justice in a culturally diverse world. Although more influenced by Hans-Georg Gadamer and Tzvetan Todorov than Habermas, Shapcott's critique of the self is consistent with Linklater's and Hutchings'. He rejects both liberal and communitarian conceptions of the self for foreclosing genuine communication and justice in the relationship between self and other. Liberal conceptions of the self, he says, involve a 'significant moment of assimilation' because they are incapable of properly recognizing difference (2000b: 216). Communitarians, on the other hand, tend to take the limits of political community as given and, as a consequence, refuse to grant outsiders or non-citizens an equal voice in moral conversations. In other words, 'liberals underestimate the moral significance of national differences, while communitarians overestimate them. Both, in short, fail to do justice to difference' (Shapcott 2001: chapter 1).

The common project of Hutchings, Linklater and Shapcott here is to question the boundedness of identity. A less dogmatic attitude towards national boundaries is called for by these critical international theorists, as national boundaries are recognized as 'neither morally decisive nor morally insignificant' (Linklater 1998: 61). They are probably unavoidable in some form. The point, however, is to ensure that national boundaries do not obstruct principles of openness, recognition and justice in

relations with the 'other' (Linklater 1998: chapter 2; Hutchings 1999: 138; Shapcott 2000a: 111).

Critical international theory has highlighted the dangers of unchecked particularism which can too readily deprive 'outsiders' of certain rights. This philosophical critique of particularism has led critical international theory to criticize the sovereign state as one of the foremost modern forms of social exclusion and therefore as a considerable barrier to universal justice and emancipation. In the following section we outline critical international theory's sociological account of how the modern state came to structure political community.

### *The sociological dimension: states, social forces and changing world orders*

Rejecting realist claims that the condition of anarchy and the self-regarding actions of states are either natural or immutable, critical international theory has always been a form of small-'c' constructivism. One of its essential tasks is therefore to account for the social and historical production of both the agents and structures taken for granted by traditional theories.

Against the positivism and empiricism of various forms of realism, critical international theory adopts a more hermeneutic approach, which conceives of social structures as having an inter-subjective existence. 'Structures are socially constructed' – that is, says Cox (1992a: 138), 'they become a part of the objective world by virtue of their existence in the inter-subjectivity of relevant groups of people'. Allowing for the active role of human minds in the constitution of the social world does not lead to a denial of material reality, it simply gives it a different ontological status. Although structures, as inter-subjective products, do not have a physical existence like tables or chairs, they nevertheless have real, concrete effects (1992b: 133). Structures produce concrete effects because humans act *as if* they were real (Cox 1986: 242). It is this view of ontology which underlies Cox's and critical international theory's attempts to comprehend the present order.

In contrast to individualist ontologies which conceive of states as atomistic, rational and possessive, and as if their identities existed prior to or independently of social interaction (Reus-Smit 1996: 100), critical international theory is more interested in explaining how both individual actors and social structures emerge in, and are conditioned by, history. For example, against the Westphalian dogma that 'the state is a state is a state' (Cox 1981: 127), critical international theory views the modern state as a distinctive form of political community, bringing with it particular functions, roles, and responsibilities that are socially and historically

176 *Theories of International Relations*

determined. Whereas the state is taken for granted by realism, critical international theory seeks to provide a social theory of the state.

Crucial to critical international theory's argument is that we must account for the development of the modern state as the dominant form of political community in modernity. What is therefore required is an account of how states construct their moral and legal duties and how these reflect certain assumptions about the structure and logic of international relations. Using the work of Michael Mann and Anthony Giddens in particular, Linklater (1998: chapters 4–5) undertakes what he calls an historical sociology of 'bounded communities'.

Linklater's *Beyond Realism and Marxism* (1990a) had already begun to analyse the interplay of different logics or rationalization processes in the making of modern world politics. But in *Transformation of Political Community* (1998), he carried this analysis further by providing a more detailed account of these processes and by linking them more closely to systems of inclusion and exclusion in the development of the modern state. His argument is that the boundaries of political community are shaped by the interplay of four rationalization processes: state-building, geo-political rivalry, capitalist industrialization and moral-practical learning (Linklater 1998: 147–57). Five monopoly powers are acquired by the modern state through these rationalization processes. These powers, which are claimed by the sovereign state as indivisible, inalienable and exclusive rights, are: the right to monopolize the legitimate means of violence over the claimed territory, the exclusive right to tax within this territorial jurisdiction, the right to demand undivided political allegiance, the sole authority to adjudicate disputes between citizens and the sole subject of rights and representation in international law (1998: 28–9).

The combining of these monopoly powers initiated what Linklater refers to as the 'totalizing project' of the modern, Westphalian state. The upshot was to produce a conception of politics governed by the assumption that the boundaries of sovereignty, territory, nationality and citizenship must be coterminous (1998: 29, 44). The modern state concentrated these social, economic, legal and political functions around a single, sovereign site of governance that became the primary subject of international relations by gradually removing alternatives. Of crucial concern to Linklater is how this totalizing project of the modern state modifies the social bond and consequently changes the boundaries of moral and political community. Though the state has been a central theme in the study of international relations there has been little attempt to account for the changing ways that states determine principles which, by binding citizens into a community, separate them from the rest of the world.

Linklater's focus on the changing nature of social bonds has much in common with Cox's (1999) focus on the changing relationship between



state and civil society. The key to rethinking international relations, according to Cox, lies in examining the relationship between state and civil society, and thereby recognizing that the state takes different forms, not only in different historical periods, but also within the same period.

Lest it be thought that critical international theory is simply interested in producing a theory of the state alone, it should be remembered that the state is but one force that shapes the present world order. Cox (1981: 137–8) argues that a comprehensive understanding of the present order and its structural characteristics must account for the interaction between social forces, states and world orders. Within Cox's approach the state plays an 'intermediate though autonomous role' between, on the one hand, social forces shaped by production, and on the other, a world order which embodies a particular configuration of power determined by the states-system and the world economy (1981: 141).

There are two fundamental and intertwined presuppositions upon which Cox founds his theory of the state. The first reflects the Marxist–Gramscian axiom that 'World orders ... are grounded in social relations' (Cox 1983: 173). This means that observable changes in military and geo-political balances can be traced to fundamental changes in the relationship between capital and labour. The second presupposition stems from Vico's argument that institutions such as the state are historical products. The state cannot be abstracted from history as if its essence could be defined or understood as *prior to* history (Cox 1981: 133). The end result is that the definition of the state is enlarged to encompass 'the underpinnings of the political structure in civil society' (Cox 1983: 164). The influence of the church, press, education system, culture and so on, has to be incorporated into an analysis of the state, as these 'institutions' help to produce the attitudes, dispositions and behaviours consistent with, and conducive to, the state's arrangement of power relations in society. Thus the state, which comprises the machinery of government, plus civil society, constitutes and reflects the 'hegemonic social order' (1983).

This hegemonic social order must also be understood as a dominant configuration of 'material power, ideology and institutions' that shapes forms of world order (Cox 1981: 141). The key issue for Cox, therefore, is how to account for the transition from one world order to another. He devotes much of his attention to explaining 'how structural transformations have come about in the past' (Cox 1986: 244). For example, he has analysed in some detail the structural transformation that took place in the late nineteenth century from a period characterized by craft manufacture, the liberal state and *pax Britannica*, to a period characterized by mass production, the emerging welfare-nationalist state and imperial rivalry (Cox 1987). In much of his recent writing, Cox has been preoccupied with

the restructuring of world order brought about by globalization. In brief Cox, and his colleague Stephen Gill, have offered extensive examinations of how the growing global organization of production and finance is transforming Westphalian conceptions of society and polity. At the heart of this current transformation is what Cox calls the 'internationalization of the state', whereby the state becomes little more than an instrument for restructuring national economies so that they are more responsive to the demands and disciplines of the capitalist global economy. This has allowed the power of capital to grow – 'relative to labour and in the way it reconstitutes certain ideas, interests, and forms of state' – and given rise to a neo-liberal 'business civilization' (Gill 1995, 1996: 210; see also Cox 1993, 1994).

Drawing upon Karl Polanyi, Cox and Gill see the social purposes of the state being subordinated to the market logics of capitalism, disembedding the economy from society, and producing a complex world order of increasing tension between principles of territoriality and interdependence (Cox 1993: 260–3; Gill 1996). Some of the consequences of this economic globalization are, as Cox (1999) and Gill (1996) note, the polarization of rich and poor, increasing anomie, a stunted civil society and, as a result, the rise of exclusionary populism (extreme right, xenophobic and racist movements).

The point of reflecting on changing world orders, as Cox (1999: 4) notes, is to 'serve as a guide to action designed to change the world so as to improve the lot of humanity in social equity'. After all, as both Cox (1989) and Maclean (1981) argue, an understanding of change should be a central feature of any theory of international relations. So it is with the express purpose of analysing the potential for structural transformations in world order that critical international theory identifies and examines 'emancipatory counter-hegemonic' forces. Counter-hegemonic forces could be states, such as a coalition of 'Third World' states which struggles to undo the dominance of 'core' countries, or the 'counter-hegemonic alliance of forces on the world scale', such as trade unions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and new social movements, which grow from the 'bottom-up' in civil society (Cox 1999; Maignaschca 2003; Eschle and Maignaschca 2005).

The point of critical international theory's various sociological analyses is to illuminate how already existing social struggles might lead to decisive transformations in the normative bases of global political life. This has prompted Linklater (2002a, 2011c) to undertake an ambitious three-volume study of the problem of harm in world politics. Linklater's objective in the first volume is to theorize harm by setting the foundations for sociologically informed historical enquiries in subsequent projected volumes. 'A central aim of the overall project',

Linklater (2011c: 5) explains, 'is to understand whether, or how far, the modern world has made progress in making harm a key moral and political question for humanity as a whole'. More specifically, Linklater wishes to compare states-systems across time on the basis of how they deal with international and transnational harms. What kinds of harm are generated in particular states-systems, and to what extent are rules and norms against harm built into these states-systems? Drawing upon the work of sociologist Norbert Elias, Linklater has explored the impact of the 'civilizing process' on the modern states-system. Changing attitudes to violence and suffering have generated greater sensitivity towards emotions such as embarrassment, guilt, shame and disgust (Linklater 2011c: chapter 5). This return to emotions is consistent with some early Frankfurt School writings, not least by Adorno, and with recent trends in post-structuralism, but it is a move away from the cold rationalism associated with Kant's Categorical Imperative. For Linklater, the larger point of returning to emotions is to place suffering and solidarity at the heart of the theoretical enterprise. It is an attempt to understand the way in which cosmopolitanism might be grounded in compassion, sympathy and other emotional attachments.

However, the civilizing gains made by the modern states-system may be under threat by developments since September 11. Though there have been different responses to the terrorist attacks perpetrated by al-Qaeda, Linklater (2002b, 2007b) was concerned that the dominant White House rhetoric of a civilizational war against evil and relaxation of the global anti-torture norm threatened to unleash 'de-civilizing' potentials. The US-led 'war on terrorism', by privileging military means, putting more innocent lives at risk, suspending the rule of international law and employing 'constitutional torture', raised the question of 'whether the vision of a world in which fewer human beings are burdened with preventable suffering has been dealt a blow from which it will not easily recover' (Linklater 2002b: 304). Implicit in Linklater, and explicit in the writings of others, is the argument that the greatest threat to world order may not be the terrorists who perpetrated such inexcusable harm, but the reaction by the United States. By placing itself outside the rules, norms and institutions of international society in its prosecution of its war on terrorism, the United States was not only diminishing the prospects of a peaceful and just world order, but undermining the very 'civilizing' principles and practices on which it was founded (Booth and Dunne, 2011; Devetak 2005; Habermas 2003a, 2006).

*The praxeological dimension: cosmopolitanism and discourse ethics*

One of the main intentions behind a sociology of the states-system is to assess the possibility of dismantling the modern state's totalizing project and moving towards more open, inclusive forms of community. This reflects critical international theory's belief that while totalizing projects have been tremendously successful, they have not been complete in colonizing modern political life. They have not been able to 'erode the sense of moral anxiety when duties to fellow-citizens clash with duties to the rest of humankind' (Linklater 1998: 150–1). In this section, I outline critical international theory's attempt to rethink the meaning of community in the light of this residual moral anxiety and an accumulating 'moral capital' which deepens and extends cosmopolitan citizenship. This involves not simply identifying the forces working to dismantle practices of social exclusion, but also identifying those working to supplant or at least supplement the system of sovereign states with cosmopolitan structures of global governance. For Thomas Diez and Jill Steans (2005: 132) this means facilitating institutional developments that concretize the dialogic ideal; for Hauke Brunkhorst and Habermas it means facilitating 'global governance without global government', and 'post-national democracies without post-national states' (Scheuerman 2008 and 2011).

Linklater's work forms the most sustained and extensive interrogation of political community in international relations. In *Transformation of Political Community* (1998), Linklater elaborates his argument in terms of a 'triple transformation' affecting political community. The three transformational tendencies Linklater identifies are: a progressive recognition that moral, political and legal principles ought to be universalized, an insistence that material inequality ought to be reduced and greater demands for deeper respect for cultural, ethnic and gender differences. The triple transformation identifies processes that open the possibility of dismantling the nexus between sovereignty, territory, citizenship and nationalism and moving towards more cosmopolitan forms of governance. In this respect, the praxeological dimension closes the circle with the normative dimension by furthering the critique of the modern state's particularism. However, we should note a slight revision of this critique. Modern states are not just too particularistic for Linklater's liking, they are also too universalistic (Linklater 1998: 27). He here finesses his earlier critique of particularism by acknowledging the feminist and post-modern arguments that universalism runs the risk of ignoring or repressing certain marginalized or vulnerable groups unless it respects legitimate differences. Nonetheless, it remains consistent with the Enlightenment

critique of the system of sovereign states, and the project to universalize the sphere in which human beings treat each other as free and equal.

If critical international theory's overall objective is to promote the reconfiguration of political community, not just by expanding political community beyond the frontiers of the sovereign state, but also by deepening it within those frontiers, then it must offer a more complex, multi-tiered structure of governance. Ultimately, it depends on reconstituting the state within alternative frameworks of political action that reduce the impact of social exclusion and enlarge democratic participation.

The key to realizing this vision is to sever the link between sovereignty and political association which is integral to the Westphalian system (Devetak 1995a: 43). A post-exclusionary form of political community would, according to Linklater, be post-sovereign or post-Westphalian. It would abandon the idea that power, authority, territory and loyalty must be focused around a single community or monopolized by a single site of governance. The state can no longer mediate effectively or exclusively among the many loyalties, identities and interests that exist in a globalizing world (see Devetak 2003). Fairer and more complex mediations can be developed, argues Linklater (1998: 60, 74), only by transcending the 'destructive fusion' achieved by the modern state and promoting wider communities of dialogue. The overall effect would thus be to 'de-centre' the state in the context of a more cosmopolitan form of political organization.

This requires states to establish and locate themselves in overlapping forms of international society. Linklater (1998: 166–7) lists three forms. First, a pluralist society of states in which the principles of co-existence work 'to preserve respect for the freedom and equality of independent political communities'. Second, a 'solidarist' society of states that have agreed to substantive moral purposes. Third, a post-Westphalian framework where states relinquish some of their sovereign powers so as to institutionalize shared political and moral norms (see Habermas 2006). These alternative frameworks of international society would widen the boundaries of political community by increasing the impact which duties to 'outsiders' have on decision-making processes and contribute to what Linklater (1998) and Shapcott (2001) call 'dialogical cosmopolitanism'.

Linklater and Shapcott make the case for what they refer to as 'thin cosmopolitanism'. A 'thin cosmopolitanism' would need to promote universal claims yet do justice to difference (Shapcott 2000b, 2001). Within such a setup, loyalties to the sovereign state or any other political association cannot be absolute (Linklater 1998: 56; Devetak 2003). In recognizing the diversity of social bonds and moral ties, a 'thin cosmopolitan' ethos seeks to multiply the types and levels of political community (for critical engagements with Linklater's 'thin; cosmopolitanism, (see Geras

182 *Theories of International Relations*

1999 and Walker 1999). It should be noted, however, that this does not mean that duties to humanity override all others. There is no fixed 'moral hierarchy' within a 'thin cosmopolitan' framework (Linklater 1998: 161–8, 193–8). This version of 'thin cosmopolitanism' places the ideals of dialogue and consent at the centre of its project, and, to use Habermas' (2006) language, seeks to *juridify*, rather than moralize, international relations. That is, Habermas' cosmopolitan critical international theory wants to extend the progressive 'constitutionalization of international law' so as to realize a 'global domestic politics without a world government' (Habermas 2006: 135–7). The purpose of this multilevel global framework would be limited to securing international peace and protecting human rights (Habermas 2006: chapter 8; see also Beardsworth 2011: 32–40).

Another version of cosmopolitanism has been advanced, individually and collectively, by David Held and Daniele Archibugi (Archibugi and Held 1995; Archibugi 2002, 2004a). Their work stems from an appreciation of the dangers and opportunities globalization presents to democracy. It seeks to globalize democracy even as it democratizes globalization (Archibugi 2004a: 438). The thrust of *cosmopolitan* democracy is captured by the question Archibugi asks (2002: 28): 'why must the principles and rules of democracy stop at the borders of a political community?' As he explains, it is not simply a matter of 'replicating, *sic et simpliciter*, the model we are acquainted with across a broader sphere' (2002: 29). It is a matter of strengthening the rule of law and citizens' participation in political life through differentiated forms of democratic engagement. Archibugi (2004b) has gone so far as to outline cosmopolitan principles governing humanitarian intervention. This controversial proposal stems from post-Cold War developments and a growing willingness on the part of international society to suspend sovereignty when extreme, large-scale cases of human suffering occur. Though difficult practical questions remain about 'who is authorized to decide when a humanitarian intervention is needed', Archibugi (2004b) strongly rejects the idea that states can unilaterally intervene under the humanitarian cause (see also Devetak 2002, 2007).

In this final section I outline briefly how the emphasis on dialogue is utilized in critical international theory. Linklater employs Habermas's notion of discourse ethics as a model for his dialogical approach. Discourse ethics is essentially a deliberative, consent-oriented approach to resolving political issues within a moral framework. As elaborated by Habermas (1984b: 99), discourse ethics builds upon the need for communicating subjects to account for their beliefs and actions in terms which are intelligible to others and which they can then accept or contest. It is committed to the Kantian principle that political decisions or norms

must be generalizable and consistent with the normative demands of public scrutiny if they are to attain legitimacy. At such moments when an international principle, social norm, or institution loses legitimacy, or when consensus breaks down then, ideally, discourse ethics enters the fray as a means of consensually deciding upon new principles or institutional arrangements. According to discourse ethics, newly arrived at political principles, norms, or institutional arrangements can be said to be valid only if they can meet with the approval of all those who would be affected by them (Habermas 1993: 151).

There are three features worthy of note for our purposes. First, discourse ethics are *inclusionary*. It is oriented to the establishment and maintenance of the conditions necessary for open and non-exclusionary dialogue. No individual or group which will be affected by the principle, norm, or institution under deliberation should be excluded from participation in dialogue. Second, discourse ethics are *democratic*. It builds on a model of the public sphere which is bound to democratic deliberation and consent, where participants employ an 'argumentative rationality' for the purpose of 'reaching a mutual understanding based on a reasoned consensus, challenging the validity claims involved in any communication' (Risse 2000: 1–2). Combining the inclusionary and democratic impulses, discourse ethics provide a method that can test which principles, norms, or institutional arrangements would be 'equally good for all' (Habermas 1993: 151). Third, discourse ethics are a form of *moral-practical reasoning*. As such, it is not simply guided by utilitarian calculations or expediency, nor is it guided by an imposed concept of the 'good life'; rather, it is guided by *procedural fairness*. It is more concerned with the method of justifying moral principles than with the substantive content of those principles.

It is possible to identify three general implications of discourse ethics for the reconstruction of world politics which can only be briefly outlined here. First, by virtue of its consent-oriented, deliberative approach, discourse ethics offers procedural guidance for democratic decision-making processes. In light of social and material changes brought about by the globalization of production and finance, the movement of peoples, the rise of indigenous peoples and sub-national groups, environmental degradation and so on, the 'viability and accountability of national decision-making entities' is being brought into question (Held 1993: 26). Held highlights the democratically deficient nature of the sovereign state when he asks: 'Whose consent is necessary and whose participation is justified in decisions concerning, for instance, AIDS, or acid rain, or the use of non-renewable resources? What is the relevant constituency: national, regional or international?' (1993: 26–7). Under globalizing conditions it is apt that discourse ethics raise questions not

only about 'who' is to be involved in decision-making processes, but also 'how' and 'where' these decisions are to be made. The key here, in Linklater's (1999: 173) words, is 'to develop institutional arrangements that concretize the dialogic ideal' at all levels of social and political life; or, in Hauke Brunkhorst's (2002) words, to facilitate multiple levels of deliberative democracy by developing strong public spheres framed by norms of global constitutionalism. Apart from the constitutionalization of international law, this directs attention to an emerging global or international public sphere where 'social movements, non-state actors and "global citizens" join with states and international organizations in a dialogue over the exercise of power and authority across the globe' (Devetak and Higgott 1999: 491). As Marc Lynch (1999, 2000) has shown, this network of overlapping, transnational publics not only seeks to influence the foreign policy of individual states, it seeks to change international relations by modifying the structural context of strategic interaction. The existence of a global public sphere ensures that, as Risse (2000:21) points out, 'actors have to regularly and routinely explain and justify their behaviour'. Neta Crawford (2009) has corroborated this argument by demonstrating that 'talk', as the dominant characteristic of world politics, has contributed to further institutionalization and the growth of venues where argument and persuasion may take the place of coercive force. In other words, the institutionalization of talk – arguing, persuading and other forms of communicative action – enable global governance institutions to attain greater legitimacy by providing 'voice opportunities to various stakeholders' and improved 'problem-solving capacity' through deliberation (Risse 2004). The growing interest in Axel Honneth's work on 'struggles for recognition' is salient here. Jürgen Haacke (2005) and Martin Weber (2007) have argued convincingly that Honneth's account of the sources of social conflict, social identity and solidarity may be fruitfully explored for the study of international relations. His approach offers one way of thinking about how experiences of denigration, domination and exclusion may spur struggles for recognition which carry inherent moral claims.

Second, discourse ethics offer a procedure for regulating violent conflict and arriving at resolutions which are acceptable to all affected parties. The cosmopolitan democratic procedures are geared towards removing harm from international relations as far as possible. The invasion of Iraq by the United States and United Kingdom in March 2003 led Habermas (2003: 369) to pronounce that 'multilateral will-formation in interstate relations is not simply one option among others'. By giving up its role as guarantor of international rights, violating international law and disregarding the United Nations, Habermas (2003: 365) says, 'the normative authority of the United States of America lies in ruins'. Even

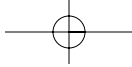


though the fall of a brutal regime is a great political good, Habermas condemned the war and rejected comparisons with the Kosovo war to which he and other critical theorists lent their qualified support as a humanitarian intervention. Habermas' reasons for condemning the Iraq War are that it failed to satisfy any of the criteria of discourse ethics. Not only did the United States and United Kingdom base their arguments on questionable intelligence, they also contravened established norms of dispute resolution and showed a less than convincing commitment to 'truth-seeking' aimed at mutual understanding and reasoned consensus.

Third, discourse ethics offer a means of criticizing and justifying the principles by which humanity organizes itself politically. By reflecting on the principles of inclusion and exclusion, discourse ethics can reflect on the normative foundations and institutions which govern global political life. From the moral point of view contained within discourse ethics, the sovereign state as a form of community is unjust because the principles of inclusion and exclusion are not the outcome of open dialogue and deliberation where all who stand to be affected by the arrangement have been able to participate in discussion. Against the exclusionary nature of the social bond underlying the sovereign state, discourse ethics have the inclusionary aim 'to secure the social bond of all with all' (Habermas 1987: 346). In a sense, it is an attempt to put into practice Kant's ideal of a community of co-legislators embracing the whole of humanity (Linklater 1998: 84–9). As Linklater (1998: 10) argues, 'all humans have a *prima facie* equal right to take part in universal communities of discourse which decide the legitimacy of global arrangements'. In sum, discourse ethics promotes a cosmopolitan ideal where the political organization of humanity is decided by a process of unconstrained and unrestricted dialogue.

## Conclusion

There can be little doubt that critical theory has made a major contribution to international relations theory since its emergence in the early 1980s. One of these contributions has been to heighten awareness of the link between knowledge and politics. Critical international theory rejects the idea of the theorist as objective observer or detached bystander. Instead, the theorist is enmeshed in social and political life, and theories of international relations, like all theories, are informed by prior interests and convictions, whether they are acknowledged or not. A second contribution critical international theory makes is to rethink accounts of the modern state and political community. Traditional theories tend to take the state for granted, but critical international theory



## 186 *Theories of International Relations*

---

analyses the changing ways in which the boundaries of community are formed, maintained and transformed. It not only provides a sociological account, it provides a sustained normative analysis of the practices of inclusion and exclusion. Critical theory's aim of achieving an alternative theory and practice of international relations rests on the possibility of overcoming the exclusionary dynamics associated with the modern system of sovereign states and establishing a cosmopolitan set of arrangements that will better promote peace, freedom, justice, equality and security across the globe. It is thus an attempt to rethink the normative foundations of international relations for the purpose of enhancing a global emancipatory politics.

