Global civilizing processes and the ambiguities of human interconnectedness

Andrew Linklater

The online version of this article can be found at:
http://ejt.sagepub.com/content/early/2010/04/21/1354066109350796

A more recent version of this article was published on - Jun 4, 2010

Published by:
⑤SAGE

http://www.sagepublications.com

On behalf of:

ecpr
european standing group on
**internati🌍nal
rela🌍us**

Standing Group on International Relations of the ECPR

Additional services and information for *European Journal of International Relations* can be found at:

Email Alerts: http://ejt.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts

Subscriptions: http://ejt.sagepub.com/subscriptions

Reprints: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav

Permissions: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav

Version of Record - Jun 4, 2010

>> OnlineFirst Version of Record - Apr 26, 2010

What is This?

Article

Global civilizing processes and the ambiguities of human interconnectedness

Andrew Linklater
Aberystwyth University, UK

Abstract

Increased social power over the millennia has led to remarkable achievements in varied spheres of endeavour while introducing new possibilities for more destructive forms of harm over greater distances. Efforts to create moral frameworks to protect persons from senseless harm have been critical replies to the ambiguities of human interconnectedness. Over the millennia, societies have become entangled in global 'civilizing processes' such as the systems of communication that now encompass humanity as a whole, enabling different peoples to become better attuned to each other. Societies of states have immense significance for that long-term development. They have been arenas in which independent communities have discovered the prospects for, as well as the constraints on, agreements on norms that can be anchored in the most readily available points of solidarity between strangers — those vulnerabilities to mental and physical suffering that are shared by human beings everywhere. The recovery of 'universal history from a cosmopolitan point of view' can examine the contribution that international societies have made to global civilizing processes that harness such solidarities to restrain the human capacity to cause violent and non-violent harm to distant peoples. It can support the normative project of promoting global civilizing processes that employ unprecedented levels of collective power to reduce the tragic effects of the ambiguities that have accompanied long-term trends towards higher levels of human interconnectedness.

Keywords

economic interdependence, historical sociology, international history, International Relations, society of states

Corresponding author:
Andrew Linklater, Department of International Politics, Aberystwyth University, Ceredigion, SY23 2AX, UK.
Email: adl@aber.ac.uk

Introduction

In the course of asking whether 'the oceans make a community of nations impossible', Kant argued that the growth of interconnectedness demonstrated the existence of the unique human capacity for establishing systems of cooperation across larger territorial areas and for making human suffering, wherever it occurs, a moral problem for the world as a whole. However, social and political evolution had also created new opportunities for 'doing evil and violence to some place on our globe that will be felt everywhere' (Kant, 1965: 126). That conception of the ambiguities of human interconnectedness was part of the broader Enlightenment discussion of how social and political life could be brought under collective control with the aim of reducing needless suffering (Muthu, 2003). In Kant's thought, it led to the question of how humans could not only be 'civilized' through the refinement of manners, and 'cultivated' by art and science, but also 'morally mature' by closing the gulf between ethically insular forms of life and the realities of global interconnectedness (Kant, 1991: 49).

Kant's stress on the tragic dimensions of rising levels of human interdependence has an ancient pedigree. Thucydides' analysis of the Peloponnesian War traced the long evolution of Hellenic civilization, showing how the growth of territorial concentrations of power had unleashed 'decivilizing' potentials within enlarged theatres of warfare. New possibilities for destructive violence led to offences against the gods and atrocities against fellow Greeks that degraded Hellas. Modern discussions of similar ambiguities have shifted the level of analysis to their implications for humanity, emphasizing the urgency of creating universal systems of cooperation that can steer the future development of the species. In some formulations, the analysis of the ambiguities of global interconnectedness has given rise to a grand narrative or universal history that examines the contemporary era and its political problems in long-term perspective. Marx's discussion of how capitalist systems of production had promoted the mastery of natural forces while simultaneously subjecting subordinate classes to new forms of global exploitation was the leading exploration of that theme in the 19th century. An important counterpart in the 20th century was Elias's claim that the gulf between human accomplishments in controlling 'natural processes' and the relatively low level of mastery of relations between groups has never been as great as it is today (Elias, 2001a: 126). Long-term trends had incorporated larger numbers of human beings in highly pacified social systems that enabled millions of people to concentrate on 'peaceful pursuits' (Elias, 2007a: 129). But they became subject to new insecurities as the dominant 'annihilation units' acquired the capacity to eradicate a large proportion of the human race and destroy the biosphere in a fragment of time (Elias, 2001a: 209). More recent variations on the general theme have revived interest in grand narratives with the aim of understanding the development of the human capacity to harm the environment and reflecting on the national and global transformations that may be essential to manage economic and other processes that are in danger of spiralling out of control. In Elias's writings, which provide the framework for the following discussion, the central question is whether humans can undergo a global 'civilizing process' in which the widening of the 'scope of emotional identification' keeps pace with any further lengthening of the webs of material interconnectedness.[1]

All such variations on the idea of how progress can be undone by its own instruments (McLeod, 1979: 125) highlight the question of whether human groups can agree on universal moral frameworks that keep pace with the enlargement of the scale and scope of harmful interaction. The fate of 'those general laws of humanity which are there to give a hope of salvation to all who are in distress' was a central theme in Thucydides' account of the unprecedented violence of the wars between Athens and Sparta (1928: Book 3.84). Kant's universal history revolved around the question of whether potentials for a global confederation of world citizens can triumph over menacing increases in the ability to wage more destructive interstate war. For Marx, the question was whether universal attachments to freedom and equality can end global capitalist exploitation. In Elias's approach, the central issue is whether human beings can extend 'the scope of emotional identification' beyond the nation-state and bring unplanned social processes under collective control.

Those avenues of inquiry invite further discussion of how civilizing processes in particular societies are interlocked with developmental patterns that affect humanity as a whole (Goudsblom, 1992: 8; Mennell, 1998: 201ff). A point of clarification is necessary here. In Eliasian sociology, the notion of civilizing processes does not assume that some societies are clearly superior to others. Its guiding idea is that all societies have civilizing practices that, with different levels of success, enable their members to coexist without injuring, demeaning and in other ways harming each other (Elias, 1996: 31). Of course, some societies, such as European nation-states from the late 18th century, have placed confidence in their cultural superiority at the heart of their image of the civilizing process. That was one reason why 'contradictory' moralities that outlaw particular forms of harm in relations within the group while licensing them in relations with outsiders have been prevalent in human history (Elias, 2007b: 145). From that perspective, global civilizing processes that replicate the patterns of self-restraint within pacified domestic realms have rarely influenced the conduct of international relations, but they have not been entirely without influence. The expansion of 'frameworks of communication' through which social systems coordinate longer chains of interdependence, and become attuned to one another over greater distances, is evidence of a global civilizing process that has its source in the human ability to develop shared meanings that span diverse cultural horizons (McNeill, 1995a; van Vree, 1999). At least in that limited sense, it is legitimate to claim that 'despite numerous back-eddies and local breakdowns of civilized complexity, [there] has been an ineluctable expansion of the portions of the globe subjected to or incorporated within civilized social structures' (McNeill, 1983: 10).

Building on those introductory remarks, the remainder of the discussion first summarizes Elias's perspective on long-term processes of change that affect the species in its entirety. At the heart of that inquiry was the 'monopoly mechanism', a concept that was used to explain the material realities of increasing interconnectedness in the shape of wider territorial concentrations of power along with trends towards extending the 'scope of emotional identification' from the small kin-based groups that were the prevalent forms of social organization for most of human history to the modern states of today. The approach emphasized the limited but not insignificant growth of identification with humanity in the recent period, adding that major advances in that domain are imperative if societies are to succeed in meeting the challenges of current and future levels of global

integration. It was stressed, however, that the absence of a worldwide monopoly power makes it probable that 'survival units' will continue to become entangled in conflicts that often produce exaggerated and destructive egocentric responses to external threats as well as the rapid dissolution of restraints on the use of force — and which, in the longer term, could lead to future 'elimination contests' that may only end with the establishment of a world political authority (Elias, 2000: 254).

The account did not reject the possibility that the 'long learning process' in which humanity is involved might result in higher levels of self-restraint, even in the context of anarchy, that mark the rise of a very 'advanced civilization' (Elias, 2007b: 141). Parallels with Kant's approach to universal history, moral learning and the feasibility of perpetual peace will be considered in that context. Their overlapping concern with the tragic qualities of lengthening chains of interdependence can inform an investigation of global civilizing processes that combines investigations of long-term directions with an emancipatory interest in attaining a greater understanding of how humans can coexist without the levels of violent and non-violent harm that have shaped and scarred the growing entanglement of social systems.

Global civilizing processes

First published in 1939, Elias's account of European patterns of social and political development between roughly the 15th and 20th centuries recovered long-term horizons for sociological analysis (Elias, 2000). Reciprocal relations between the rise of stable monopolies of power, internal pacification and rising levels of human interconnectedness as a result of urbanization, marketization and monetarization were central themes in the investigation of the process of civilization over those centuries. Transformations of emotions such as shame and embarrassment were analysed as the 'psychogenetic' accompaniment to 'sociogenetic' or social-structural transformations. Central to the analysis was the belief that growing revulsion towards violence and cruelty distinguishes the 'habitus' of modern societies from those found in many earlier periods (Elias, 2000: 102; 2001b: 2–3, 48).

Elias's later writings broadened the scope of investigation to focus on long-term patterns of change that have shaped 'the totality of societies' (Goudsblom, 1990: 174; Mennell, 1998: Ch. 9). Those works considered civilizing processes that ranged from the biological and social evolution of the first human groups with populations of a few dozen to the evolutionary learning processes that have led to global structures and processes that now incorporate over six billion people (Elias, 1991). The concept of 'symbol emancipation' stressed the changing power ratio between cultural and biological evolution, and underlined the increased importance of intergenerational learning, 'during mankind's long formative period' (Elias, 2001a: 171). Symbol emancipation referred to the emergence over millions of years of the linguistic capability of acquiring, storing and transmitting accumulated knowledge across generations. Elias and others have argued that language gave the human species the evolutionary advantage of levels of cognitive detachment from reality that precipitated a sequence of largely unplanned transformations of the planet (see also McNeill, 1995a). They include the emergence of longer chains of interdependence that increased collective power over nature and the 'growing

pacification of the animal world' (Elias, 1991: 113); the rise of complex forms of social organization, and specifically patterns of state-formation, that were cause and effect of the changing power balance between different species; the growth of the ability to inflict harm in previously unknown and distant places; and, particularly in response to modern extensions of global integration, the emergence of global steering mechanisms and universalistic orientations that raise the question of whether the species may yet succeed, despite great obstacles, in undergoing forms of cultural adaptation and learning that enable it to control universalizing pressures and reduce potential dangers to its survival.[2]

As already noted, Elias argued that history has been driven by a 'monopoly mechanism' that has resulted in forms of internal pacification which provided the setting for growing social and economic interdependence within the territories involved. The coexistence of several stable monopolies of power permitted the rise of longer-distance social and economic relations in what archaeologists have called wider 'interaction zones' (Yoffee, 2006: 204ff). State-formation and interstate rivalries have been one of the main driving forces behind 'the globalization of society' (Mennell, 1990: 364). As a result, Elias (2001a: 163) argued that humanity, albeit 'split up into states', has become the site for 'developmental processes and structural changes' that require a shift from national to 'global frames of reference'. In particular, sociology as a largely 'natiocentric' discipline had to extend its 'field of vision' beyond 'intra-state relationships' as part of a larger 'breakthrough to greater detachment' that aims to understand the evolution of 'humankind' through the multiple phases of its integration (Elias, 1991: 138ff). The argument that the processes that have affected, and are affecting, the species as a whole should be the main object of sociological analysis was linked with the recognition that the idea of humanity is 'a blank area' on the 'emotional maps' of most people (Elias, 2001a: 203). Echoing Comte and Marx, Elias (2007a: 142ff) maintained that the achievement of 'high-level syntheses' in the social sciences and more detached perspectives on the human past are critical for the achievement of successful political responses to mounting worldwide challenges.

It would be misleading to suggest that Elias saw only logics of global integration in history. The stress on competition between states emphasized that interwoven logics of integration and disintegration had shaped, and would continue to shape, long-term trajectories (Elias, 1998a: 225). A recurrent theme was that there has been little change in the dominant patterns of world politics over the millennia. The dominant moral codes continued to approve acts of violence against outsiders that are largely proscribed within highly pacified realms (Elias, 1996: 461). At least on that level', it was argued, 'we are basically still living exactly as our forefathers did in the period of their so-called "barbarism"' (Elias, 1996: 176).[3]

Elias (2007b: Part 3) referred to the 'double-bind process' to describe the general failure to break out of such cycles of violence. That term, which has affinities with the idea of the 'security dilemma', called attention to the tragic circumstances that can result whether states try to match one another's accumulation of the instruments of violence or choose not to emulate them in the belief that increased military capability may neither be prompted by, nor lead to, an aggressive foreign policy (Booth and Wheeler, 2007). The double-bind process referred to the marked tendency for societies

to be so emotionally involved in immediate threats and dangers that they cannot acquire 'reality-congruent' knowledge. The argument was that a lack of detachment leads to 'unrealistic practice' that presses others to make equally distorted 'emotive' responses and to adopt related policies that generate cycles of distrust and suspicion that are hard to disrupt and increase the likelihood of war.[4] That mode of analysis was designed to account for the persistence of 'insider–outsider dualisms' in world history. It was also integral to Elias's realist contention that there is often little to prevent great powers from 'threatening, exploiting, invading and enslaving, driving out or killing the inhabitants of another state, if they are so minded' (Elias, 2007b: 139–140). The approach stressed not only the lack of external restraints on unbalanced great powers but also the extent to which behaviour has been influenced by 'highly emotive' responses to assaults on collective self-images as well as the need to find 'rational' strategic answers to challenges to their military and political power.

Such comments reveal considerable doubt that endeavours to pacify world society can keep up with further developments in the capacity to participate in violent interaction over larger areas. But the analysis of long-term processes was not designed to foreclose discussion about what humans may accomplish in the future. In various works, Elias described ways in which the revulsion against unnecessary violence and cruelty, which is a core feature of the European civilizing process, has left its impression on international affairs. Comparisons with antiquity suggested that 'moral' repugnance against what has come to be known as genocide, and the 'level of internalized inhibitions against physical violence' more generally, were 'lower … than they are in the relatively developed nation-states of the twentieth century' (Elias, 1986: 144ff). In particular, the rise of the universal human rights culture was evidence of a tangible, if precarious, global civilizing process (Elias, 2001a: 232). It might be added that developments in international criminal law and support for humanitarian intervention in some quarters are an attempt to increase the influence of 'civilized' sensibilities on how power monopolies treat their citizens and behave towards one another. One dimension of current levels of global interconnectedness, namely the greater awareness of distant suffering and the increased capacity to assist in some fashion, is evident in those developments. But Elias was always quick to point out that such restraints on killing can be expected to crumble rapidly should violence erupt once again (Elias, 2001b: 51). As in the past, the double-bind process would consolidate loyalties to specific 'survival units' and intensify 'insider–outsider dualisms' that block the path to higher cooperative endeavours.

Those observations led Elias to pose what may be the central question about the long-term moral and political significance of recent advances in globalization, namely whether they are likely to widen 'the scope of emotional identification' to embrace other societies and the whole of humanity. Despite the dismal historical record, conclusive lessons were hard to draw from the past. Current levels of interconnectedness exist in what is still, after all, an 'early stage in the development of humanity' — in what might be called 'humankind's prehistory' (Elias, 2007a: 128). The period in which human life may continue on the planet could give the species ample time to learn how to live peacefully (Elias, 1991: 146ff). Hope for humanity's future could be found in the evidence that affluent societies are increasingly troubled by the knowledge that millions of other human beings live on the edge of starvation, even though little is done about it (Elias, 2001a:

167ff, 202–203, 232; see also Elias, 1996: 26). Future generations may conclude that widespread indifference to global poverty marked out modern peoples as 'late barbarians' (Elias, 1991: 146–147). Major advances in global civilizing processes might result from unease about the ways in which humans are bound together as well as from a deeper understanding of common interests in mastering social processes that are beyond human control. But no one could discount the possibility that further advances in the level of human interconnectedness could lead to 'counter-thrusts' that aim to preserve local power structures and group autonomy (Elias, 1991: 139; 2001a: 222). Age-old tensions between integrative and disintegrative tendencies underlined the need to analyse the relationship between global civilizing processes and the ambiguities of interconnectedness in long-term perspective, recognizing that further increases in the level of global integration are probable but far from inevitable. From Elias's perspective, there is no teleological guarantee that any increase in the level of interconnectedness will be accompanied by a significant widening of the scope of emotional identification.

Reviving grand narratives

The claim that the 'predominant' movement over the last few millennia is the rise of more extensive territorial concentrations of power along with longer webs of human interdependence and changes in loyalty and identification is a major contribution to the 'revival of the grand narrative' (Sherratt, 1995; see also Elias, 2001a: 135). This is hardly fashionable territory. Sherratt (1995) adds that those who aim to summarize the dominant social and political directions of the last six millennia (the timescale with which he is concerned) risk 'embarrassment'. Others have argued that efforts to recover the grand narrative risk 'incurring contempt' (Elias, 2001b: 175). Attempts to produce the long overview have been discouraged by the failings of the speculative histories that were advanced by Hegel, Marx and Comte. The training of academic historians strongly favours highly specialized inquiries clearly anchored in reliable source material, implying that the quest for 'high-level synthesis' is 'unsound' (Elias, 2007a: 152ff). The human sciences are saddled with the burdensome legacy of associating grand narratives with notions of progress and teleology that repeatedly 'block the ascent' to synoptic approaches to the investigation of long-term social processes (Elias, 2007a: 152ff). Only now is it possible to see how the liabilities of that heritage can be overcome (see also Christian, 2004; Gellner, 1991: 14).

Efforts to comprehend what Sherratt calls the 'coherent unfolding' of history over several thousand years strive to avoid the errors of earlier approaches. The great metanarratives constructed the past as a journey that culminated in the modern 'civilized' West. Recent surveys of long-term processes stress the contribution that many different civilizations, including their waves of outward expansion, have made to human social and political development, emphasizing that the Western 'promontory of Asia' lagged behind neighbouring civilizations in several domains until recent times (Christian, 2004; Diamond, 1997; Fernandez-Armesto, 1995; Hobson, 2004). Breakthroughs to post-European representations of the past constitute progress in recognizing that more detached perspectives that incorporate advances in understanding the world from radically different cultural standpoints are imperative if humans are to learn how to live

together harmoniously in the coming phases of global integration (Elias, 2001a: 163). Nineteenth-century meta-narratives that fostered collective perceptions of a 'superior' European civilizational identity might therefore be regarded as an important but deeply flawed bridge between two approaches to the past. On one side stand national histories that create flattering self-images and encourage 'group charisma' — on the other stand universal histories that have the capacity to transmit knowledge about the past to all participants in world society at a critical juncture in human history when global integrative processes outpace cognitive standpoints and strategies that can maximize the benefits of increased collective social power without the snares and entanglements that befall highly complex social systems (Elias, 2001a: 165ff).

Diverse approaches to world history are unified by an interest in understanding how human societies have become interconnected over the last few millennia (Manning, 2003: 5). Indeed, the emergence of world history in the modern period can be regarded as a stage in a longer-term process of trying to understand lengthening chains of interconnectedness that stretch back to the first city-states and empires (Butterfield, 1981). The sheer variety of grand narratives raises large questions about whether their underlying theoretical assumptions are compatible or clash in fundamental ways, but the discussion here concentrates on points of convergence. A unifying point is that the journey to higher levels of interconnectedness began with the ecological and social transformations that occurred around 11,000 years ago when the last Ice Age came to an end. Climate change at the start of the Holocene Era created the conditions in which the revolutionary transition from small hunting and gathering groups to sedentary, agricultural societies took place. The agricultural revolution that first occurred in the Levant circa 9600 BC expanded the food supply, promoting a rapid increase in human numbers and population density.[5] Greater social complexity created problems of coordination that were addressed by establishing power hierarchies that augmented the authority of military and religious specialists, and by creating stark gender and other inequalities that were largely absent from hunting and gathering communities. Around 6000 years after the agricultural revolution, state-organized societies appeared in the Ancient Near East, and then in at least five other regions. Thus began the phase of 'primary state-formation', followed by 'secondary state-formation' as other groups responded to new dangers by imitating existing centres of coercive power (Gat, 2006).[6] Through 'autocatalytic' processes, complex social and political structures and increased agricultural production and population growth interacted to generate the upward spiral of interlocking economic, ecological, demographic, socio-political and other transformations that have shaped the history of the species down to the present day, but now with the added danger of potentially disastrous consequences for the global environment (Diamond, 1997).[7]

The transition 'from village to supravillage integration' was a momentous event that altered the entire course of human history (Carneiro, 1970: 736). Within about two millennia, sprawling empires and civilizations emerged to stamp themselves on subsequent phases of social and political development (Carneiro, 1978). Violent struggle between groups increased as complex societies competed to secure territory to meet the needs of growing populations and to resist external threats, a trend that was deepened by the need to repel predatory neighbours that aimed to appropriate their accumulated resources. Tributary systems (the dominant mode of political organization during the five millennia

before the rise of modern capitalism) expanded by displacing 'barbarian' neighbours in the period between 500 BC and 1500 AD (McNeill, 1979: Ch. 7). Victims of their success, the former had to protect food supplies and other material goods from the scavenging nomadic peoples that were the scourge of more 'civilized' peoples from the second millennium BC to the second millennium AD (Stavrianos, 1990: 185). Conflicts between imperial Rome and the Huns, and between China and the Mongols, are examples of how the 'nomad–settler, push–pull tension' became the 'central mechanism in several thousand years of human history', of how the military dynamics along the 'pastoral–civilized frontier' brought settled and marauding groups within larger spheres of interaction (Stavrianos, 1990: 84ff).

Analyses of those developmental patterns debate whether warfare in that period surpassed 'primitive war' in its cruelty and destructiveness.[8] Leaving aside questions about the frequency of pre-state warfare, the evidence suggests that 'primitive' conflict often led to levels of human destruction that would not be rivalled until the modern epoch of total warfare. But this is highly controversial territory (Carman and Harding, 1999; Gat, 2006). On many accounts, early groups often moved from sites of violent conflict, an exit strategy that agricultural societies did not possess. How frequent movement was continues to be debated (Gat, 2006). In the main, hunting and gathering societies were unable to absorb conquered peoples and territories. The monopoly mechanism rarely operated between them. But advances in learning how to acquire, organize and use coercive power had the result of making conquest and enslavement the familiar fate of subjugated societies. For that reason, state-formation was 'a fateful turning point in human history' that changed 'the nature of war as fundamentally as [it] changed the basis for social relations' (Stavrianos, 1990: 81ff). Warfare was transformed from 'episodic personal duels, raids and skirmishes to the mass activity that has enmeshed entire societies and bedevilled the human species for the past several thousand years' (Stavrianos, 1990: 82). The ambiguities of interconnectedness are no more evident than in the question of whether the species can extricate itself from the modes of violence that have been endemic ever since ancient societies and civilizations crossed the military threshold.[9]

Much here depends on the future of insider–outsider dualisms that are probably as old as the earliest forms of linguistic and cultural differentiation, which increased as humans spread from Africa, adjusting to the opportunities and constraints of diverse environmental niches through what archaeologists have called 'adaptive radiation'.[10] The 'Tower of Babel effect', that unified specific communities and divided the species more profoundly than ever before, appears to have acquired greater political significance with the advances in collective power that were mentioned earlier. Distinctions between the 'civilized' and the 'barbaric' intensified with the agrarian revolution, the major changes that legitimated higher levels of violence taking place from around 5000 BC, no doubt as a result of double-bind processes (Spier, 1996: 39, 67).

Whether cultural convergence now has the upper hand over the forces of divergence is contested. Some argue that the decline of languages, religions and 'political formats' since around 1000–1 BC marks the reversal of earlier processes of diversification (McNeill and McNeill, 2003: 322; Northrup, 2005). Hallpike (1986: Ch. 5) comments on the long-term 'tendency for modes of government to become more similar: early states have more in common than do chiefdoms or tribes, and industrial states resemble one

another more than do early states'. The point is equally applicable to international relations. Analyses of the transition from the European to the first universal society of states have shown how the principal civilizations largely shed their hierarchical conceptions of human society and attuned themselves to organizing their relations around Western principles of international order (Bull and Watson, 1984). The construction of the current global framework of diplomatic communication supports the view that recent times have witnessed an expansion of the areas of the globe that have become incorporated in 'civilized' structures (McNeill, 1983: 10). It is essential to add that patterns of convergent social evolution owe as much to imitative strategies that have led to the diffusion of the nation-state model and its war-fighting capabilities across the world. In the main, attachments to 'survival units' that stand in the way of identification with other persons *qua* humans have not weakened significantly, raising the question of how far transnational solidarities can develop in the absence of a worldwide monopoly power. Past extensions of shared meanings in larger territorial groups indicate that there is no biological impediment to cultural transformations that can result in the incorporation of social systems in a universal moral and political community that furthers the 'project of modernity' (understood as progress towards higher levels of cooperation to control the largely unplanned developments that were triggered by the advances in the scale of social organization and in the capacity to cause harm over wider areas that emerged along with fortified cities in the Fertile Crescent over five millennia ago). But the historical record reveals that future achievements in that domain will not be rapid or immune from sudden, dramatic and conceivably permanent reversal.

Scaling up/reaching down

One call for the revival of grand narratives contends that the 'scaling up' of political organization led to tensions with traditional modes of thought that had to be overcome if more complex social systems were to survive (Sherratt, 1995: 25). The point has considerable importance for those forms of analysis that stress that 'the general principle of cultural development' since the Neolithic Revolution has resulted in 'a *decrease* in the number of autonomous political units and an *increase* in their size' (Carneiro, 1978: 206; emphasis in original). Although there is 'evidence of a developmental process' that may yet culminate in a world state (Wendt, 2003), elimination struggles between 'survival units' have not led to automatic increases in the size of territorial concentrations of coercive power (Elias, 2000: 254). The frequency with which amalgamated political units succumbed to centrifugal forces indicates that no mechanical chain reaction guaranteed that societies would evolve in that direction. The disintegration of political associations because of internal conflicts provides a reminder of the difficulties of promoting 'domestic' civilizing processes in Elias's sense of the term. However, the fact that many overcame the powerful tendencies towards fragmentation that characterized Paleolithic societies underlines the need to understand the tipping points that led to the formation of stable territorial concentrations of force in many regions and which has posed the question of how far those political structures can promote a global civilizing process in the absence of a worldwide monopoly of power (Diamond, 1997: 281ff).[11]

The survival of early states invariably depended on the ability to construct convincing wider frameworks of thought and action that could check the centrifugal tendencies that were inherent in the disjunctures mentioned earlier. Warfare in itself was insufficient to guarantee a dominant role for the monopoly mechanism, although it was often the key to the emergence of higher levels of social cohesion and cultural distinctiveness. As Elias (2007a: 146) argued, a central part of the development of monopolizing tendencies was the appearance of conceptual systems involving the ascent to higher levels of synthesis that were essential for 'the cognitive mastery of connections over longer distance in time and space'. An example was the emergence of more complex systems of time measurement that were controlled by priests or state officials during the transition to agricultural modes of production (Elias, 2007a: 44ff). Literally ensuring that humans succeeded in 'keeping in time with each other' (McNeill, 1995a), new technologies for calculating time promoted social coordination on a larger scale and increased collective power over nature. Through such processes, early complex societies reduced the dangers that emanated from the natural world only to increase the threats that human beings posed to each other for the reasons given earlier (Elias, 2007a: 146).[12] The revolutionary character of those changes is easily overlooked by the inhabitants of large monopolies of power that provide high levels of security for millions of people. Early states had a limited capacity to impose their will on remote zones of resistance. The failure to invent binding symbolic systems and unifying organizing principles — and that appears to have been widespread — was one reason why many social systems expanded 'only to fracture and fragment' at a later time (Scarre, 2005: Ch. 5; see also Crone, 1989: 52ff). In short, 'scaling up' depended not just on the centralization of coercive power but also on success in 'reaching down' to lower social strata or in creating a 'high culture' that bound the most powerful groups to emergent state structures (Crone, 1989: 64ff; Yoffee, 2006: Ch. 2). Achievements in that domain were essential to reduce the 'drag effect' of the general tendency to preserve a familiar and reassuring 'local' habitus when fears for individual and/or collective security and survival run high.[13]

Various accounts of the role of 'ideological power' in the organization of larger monopolies of power have addressed related issues. Examples are the reflections on the rise of 'abstract identities' as states replaced tribal societies, and commentaries on the 'rationalization of the symbolic sphere' as governing elites from the third millennium BC onwards used 'universalistic' codes to legitimate imperial domination (Goody, 1977: Ch. 1; Habermas, 1979, 1984; Mann, 1986). Analyses of the social functions of world religions in the so-called 'axial age' have explored ways in which humans became attuned to one another over longer distances in the context of the psychological unease or turmoil that forced many to conclude that the traditional gods had abandoned them (McNeill, 1979: 66ff, 175ff; Toynbee, 1978: Ch. 38). Such breakthroughs to cultural universality were often interrelated with the quest for new modes of social solidarity and new sources of emotional satisfaction on the part of traders and merchants who came to regard cultural parochialism as a liability.[14]

Those observations lead to the larger point that long-term patterns of changes cannot be explained as simply the product of changes in material production and in the organization of coercive power. Stressing that 'controls over nature, social control and self-control'

develop in tandem, Elias (2001a: 138–139) maintained that changes in personality structures always occur alongside transformations of social structures. In the case of the European civilizing process, the monopoly mechanism and the compulsions of interdependence created possibilities for 'non-violent coexistence' that found expression in the rising importance of internal restraints on force and in such 'positive characteristics' as widening 'the extent and depth' of 'mutual identification' and cultivating the 'capacity to feel for and sympathize' with other people (Elias, 1996: 109, 460). Those compulsions initiated a 'civilizing trend towards more even and more thorough control over the emotions', as expressed in the general lowering of the 'threshold of repugnance' towards aggressive and violent outbursts (Elias, 1978: 155). At least amongst the most powerful groups, similar changes affecting basic drives must have occurred as humans were forced to become more attuned to one another in the 'interaction zones' that early states and empires had pacified. They were among the principal ways in which disjunctures between customary patterns of thought and changing social compulsions were overcome in larger monopolies of power that were relatively secure from the forces of disintegration (Yoffee, 2006: Ch. 9).

Broadly similar changes in the patterns of internal and external restraint are necessary if efforts to control global integration are to succeed in the face of persistent insider–outsider dualisms. In the past, all breakthroughs to greater universality were significantly incomplete. The other side of the extension of 'the circle of persons within which the infliction of injuries [was] prohibited' was the invention of new boundaries between compatriot and foreigners (Westermarck, 1908: 743). Monotheistic religions made it possible for culturally diverse co-believers to become more attuned to one another, only to create new barriers between insiders and outsiders that often fuelled intolerance, persecution and force (Moore, 2000).

Such dualisms have been constant throughout all the fundamental changes in the ways 'in which people [have been] bonded to each other' since the emergence of the first state-organized societies (Elias, 2000: 255, 402). They are one of the main reasons why 'the social habitus lags behind the process of global integration' in the current era (Elias, 2007b: 67). That problem is now compounded by the fact that more and more people are 'dependent on each other for their security and the satisfaction of their needs in ways' that 'surpass the comprehension of those involved'. First people in their hundreds and thousands, and now in their millions and billions, have found 'their hands and feet … chained together by invisible ties' (2007b). Deep involvement in 'the urgent, narrow and parochial problems which each of them has to face' distracts them from seeing 'the whole patterns they form together' (2007b), as if from the 'outside'. Largely because of attachments to the social habitus that served human purposes when levels of interconnectedness were lower than they are today, populations have faced great difficulties in acquiring levels of detachment that can improve their chances of controlling unregulated processes. The upshot of double-bind processes that erupt with such ease in relations between communities is the absence of shared understandings about how to regulate 'the movements of the whole' (Elias, 2007b: 77). It remains to be seen whether the constraints of the current pace of global interconnectedness will generate levels of detachment from national frames of reference that have often eluded societies in recent times.

Moral development and international relations

As noted earlier, the focus on the monopoly mechanism, double-bind processes and insider–outsider dualisms placed struggles between 'survival units' at the centre of Elias's account of human development, which was unusual, if not unique, in analysing the interplay between material, ideational *and* emotional forces over long-term horizons. A central theme was that civilizing processes in highly pacified social systems have rarely made much impression on their external relations. It is surprising that international relations have rarely had a central place in pioneering accounts of world history more generally, and that efforts to overcome that lacuna have appeared only in the last three decades. Significant is the argument for moving beyond approaches such as Toynbee's that explained world history in terms of dominant logics of development within largely autonomous civilizations (McNeill, 1995b: 14). The alternative standpoint starts with the premise that 'encounters between strangers' have been central to long-term processes of societal change (McNeill, 1983: 10). The initiatives that early mercantile and religious groups took in creating 'a bare bones moral code' that reduced 'the risks of cross-civilization contact to bearable proportions' are an intriguing example of how inter-cultural encounters broadened ethical horizons (McNeill, 1995a). But such phenomena should be regarded as part of the longer development of global political structures that have had a critical role in constructing principles of coexistence that bridge diverse cultures and secure breakthroughs to more universalistic conceptions of morality.

Elias (2007b: 101) recognized that states-systems have been 'the highest level of integration and organised power' with the 'capacity to regulate [their] own course', but those steering capacities have been hampered because they are 'less highly organized' and 'less well-integrated' than sovereign states, and because they are easily weakened by the effect of double-bind processes on levels of detachment from cultural parochialism. As noted elsewhere, Elias's schematic observations about world politics can be criticized for failing to appreciate the role that societies of states have played in developing practices and principles that maintain international order and protect peoples from unnecessary harm (Linklater, 2004). Societies of states deserve particular attention because they have addressed a political problem that is at the heart of the ambiguities of human interconnectedness, namely how to control the violent consequences of upward pressures on the size of states and accompanying increases in the level of coercive power that are believed to be necessary for security and survival (Deudney, 2000). They have been the arenas in which states have explored the prospects for civilizing processes in the Eliasian sense of the term, that is, for creating arrangements that enable humans to live together without killing, injuring, demeaning and in other ways harming each other over and over again.[15] To stress a pivotal theme in Elias's discussion of human orientations to the natural and social world, international societies represent limited progress in acquiring a sufficient degree of detachment from short-term goals and interests to make the long-term reproduction of international order a priority, not least by encouraging observance of patterns of self-restraint under conditions of increasing human interconnectedness.

Elias drew attention to the enormous challenges that have been involved in acquiring detached world views in the natural sciences. An immense labour was involved in moving to a heliocentric universe that clashed with dominant views about the earth's central

place in the solar system; the same was true of the Darwinian dethroning of the species that clashed with religiously-sanctioned views of human centrality (Elias, 2007b: 133–134). A prominent theme in his writings is that equivalent advances in levels of detachment from beliefs in the centrality of one's own group have often escaped social systems because of the 'fantasy' content of double-bind processes. When viewed from that angle, societies of states are especially interesting experiments in embedding the results of processes of detachment in practices and principles that bridge cultural horizons, dominant ideologies and political projects. They represent advances in thinking from the standpoint of others, and in creating forms of accommodation and compromise that enable communities to escape 'a state of war'.

The English School's analysis of the transition from the European to the first universal society of states contributes to understanding the influence of the relationship of detachment and civilizing processes on world politics. Of particular interest is the fate of 'the standard of civilization' that was constructed by Europeans in the 19th century to legitimate their domination of non-European peoples and to formalize the conditions that the latter had to satisfy before membership of the society of states could be contemplated (Bull and Watson, 1984; Gong, 1984). The standard was a striking illustration of what Elias set out to explain, namely the processes of change that led Europeans over roughly five centuries to convince themselves that they were innately superior to the non-European peoples whom they had the right or responsibility to civilize. It is also a clear example of how the highest global steering mechanisms acquire their distinctive constitutional frameworks and civilizing patterns, just as the transcendence of that standard marked an advance in detachment from parochial world views that was a necessary cognitive response to the imperatives of rising levels of human interdependence. The expansion of international society was the outcome of multiple learning processes in which diverse civilizations that placed themselves at the centre of the world until quite recently, and saw others as uncivilized or as infidels, recognized one another as formal sovereign equals in a global communicative framework that creates the possibility of further learning in how to become better attuned to each other in the face of disputes and misunderstandings that are anchored in cultural and political differences (Bull and Watson, 1984; Toynbee, 1978: Ch. 75). The unfinished transition to a universal society of states that responds to the interests and needs of non-European peoples reveals how cross-cultural learning processes have contributed to global 'civilizing structures' that can enable the species to steer future developments.

Elias's writings are open to the criticism that they did not provide an account of the evolution of the moral and political ideas that emerged alongside lengthening chains of interdependence. There is no parallel with Habermas's discussion of the forms of moral-practical learning that led some societies from egocentric codes where moral agents believe that their way of life enjoys a monopoly of truth to universalistic ethical systems where agents recognize the validity of different forms of life and regard dialogic procedures as essential for resolving critical differences. But it will be apparent that there are parallels between Habermas's discussion of the evolution of 'decentred' world views and Elias's analysis of the development of detached standpoints involving advances in 'self-distancing' (Elias, 2007b: 66). Exploring the constraints on universalistic movements, Elias noted the troubled history of internationalism where laborious efforts to promote

detachment from national forms of life have aroused the opposition of groups that cannot break the umbilical cord that ties them to their particular community and that may lead them to view outsiders with hostility or suspicion. On that argument, humanity may be at the beginning of a 'long learning process' in understanding how to adapt state- or nation-centred perspectives to the compulsions of global interdependence.

The analysis of 'moral-practical' learning stresses the importance of abstract principles of social organization for reproducing complex social systems (Habermas, 1979, 1984). A related approach to the moral resources that were developed during the 'scaling up' of social organization emphasizes the increased role during that transition for abstract principles that were deemed to be 'independent of time and space', and that have, through various incarnations, provided the foundations for 'a morality of humanity' (Durkheim, 1993: 100–101). A modern variant is the 'affected by' principle, which holds that all persons have an equal right to be consulted about decisions that affect them, and which maintains that 'transnational public spheres' are essential for realizing that ethical ideal (Fraser, 2007; Linklater, 1998). Such cosmopolitan standpoints have raised concerns about the extent to which they respect human differences. However, the 'affected by' principle, which is designed to promote the highest levels of answerability to all others through open dialogue, has strong claims to be regarded as fundamental to any future global civilizing process that is designed to reduce the ambiguities of human interconnectedness (Linklater, 2007).

That principle has a special relationship with the civilizing process in the Eliasian sense. A key element of his approach to comparing civilizing processes in different societies, and to comparing different stages in the history of the process of civilization in the same society, is that all human beings have the same departure point in life. All depend on prolonged early care for the satisfaction of elementary 'animalistic' needs (eating, drinking and so forth), and for learning how to live with the most basic biological necessities (urinating, defecating and so forth) according to the norms of propriety in their societies. Extending the point, all humans are born with the same vulnerability to certain forms of mental and physical harm from which their societies must protect them, and with the capacity for inflicting harm on others that they must learn to control from the period of their infancy. When viewed in that context, the 'affected by' principle is not the manifestation of the workings of an abstract reason that is regarded as the natural possession of all human beings, but a central dimension of learning how to control processes that bind people together in global forms of interconnectedness with their attendant relations of power and vulnerability. Moral learning in that domain rests on nothing more complex than the mutually-intelligible aversions to suffering and pain that create the possibility of global civilizing processes that combine new patterns of self-restraint with major extensions of solidarity and sympathy.

Insider–outsider dualisms can be so stark that humans attach no moral significance to shared mental and physical vulnerabilities; they can be so profound that they reject any notion of moral universals that stem from conditions that all persons have in common. The prevalence in human history of laws of war that have had the purpose of protecting civilians from unnecessary harm is a clear illustration of how similar concerns about suffering can cross borders with relative ease, contributing to the armoury that defends humans from the negative effects of interconnectedness. In the modern states-system,

related commitments to the 'harm principle' inform international legal conventions that affirm each person's right to be free from 'serious mental and bodily harm' (Linklater, 2001). International environmental law is the clearest indicator of how the 'affected by' principle is being freed from conventional national spheres of application, and applied to the relations between all interconnected persons. That is the domain where the species, organized into an international society of states, continues to feel its way towards greater detachment from short-term national concerns, and towards greater foresight about the possible effects of continued ecological devastation on future societies; it is the realm in which social systems are working through the implications of the growing realization of the need for new patterns of internal and external restraint that can protect humans, non-human species and the biosphere from the unprecedented increases in collective power that have their origins in the (relatively recent) transition from agriculturalism to industrialization. In a related development, the evolution of international criminal law provides evidence of how specific features of the European civilizing process (national trends towards higher levels of interconnectedness, followed by the centralization of coercive power and changing emotional responses to violence and suffering) have forced their way onto the global arena.

World history from a 'cosmopolitan point of view'

The trend towards moral theories that ground universals in sentience and vulnerability may provide an interesting clue to the possible ethical configuration of any future global civilizing process (see Butler, 2004; O'Neill, 1996; Rorty, 1989). But the sociological analysis of how far such orientations have shaped moral and political responses to the overall trend towards widening 'zones of interaction' is underdeveloped.[16] Comparative investigations of that process inevitably raise what Goody (1977: 2) calls 'the evolutionary issue'. Controversies will continue about whether there is any place for the idea of progress in such analyses and, more specifically, about whether the modern states-system displays unprecedented achievements in that domain or possesses ethical reserves that may make unrivalled developments possible.

Elias's response to such controversies was that humanity had advanced in that support for improving 'the social order and human living conditions has never been greater than it is today' (quoted in van Krieken, 1998: 69–70). Less sharp 'gradients' between established and outsider groups provided evidence of specific progressions but not of overall progress.[17] Even the relatively unchanging world of international politics had been influenced by 'civilized' attitudes to violence and suffering. Modern European wars have been relatively limited regressions to barbarism because 'identification' with enemies and a measure of 'compassion' for their 'suffering' as fellow human beings have usually not collapsed entirely (Elias, 1998b: 114). The 'spontaneous repugnance' that was aroused by the violence of the Nazi era revealed how the civilizing process had shaped emotional responses to systematic cruelty (Elias, 1996: 16, 445). Those developments were part of the larger trend in which more people have become aware of how their actions can affect more people adversely, and how they are often in a position to alleviate distant suffering with little personal cost. The rise of modern humanitarianism reveals how commitments to the improvement of social arrangements transcend national

frameworks. Notwithstanding the continuing importance of loyalties to 'survival units', and their likely intensification in future conflicts, there is a general trend towards extended social networks of interconnected people organized around 'interlocking layers' of identification including universal symbols of attachment (Mennell, 1984). The 'habitus' still lags behind 'global integration' but, more profoundly than in the past, the members of different societies are enmeshed in social and economic webs that require a moral response to what may be unintended involvement in long-distance (and intergenerational) harm. Of course, there are no guarantees that the modern states-system will succeed in ending the 'tragedy' of civilization, which is that, thus far, none has 'succeeded in raising human nature to [a] permanently higher level' (Toynbee, quoted in McNeill, 1989: 111). But the possibility of more radical measures to overcome the negative effects of further advances in human interconnectedness is apparent in the slow process of collective learning in the ethical sphere.

Whether the study of long-term processes should be wedded to explicit normative commitments is an intriguing issue. Various themes in Elias's thought seem perfectly compatible with a Kantian approach to 'universal history from a cosmopolitan point of view'. Echoing Comte and Marx, he argued that sociology could enable human beings to end the ways in which 'the civilizing of human beings and the standards of civilization [had] developed completely unplanned and in a haphazard manner'; it could also permit them 'to judge more closely what kind of restraints are required for complicated societies to function and what type of restraints have been merely built into us to bolster up the authority of certain ruling groups' (Elias, 1998c: 145). There was no attempt to conceal the normative commitment to the view that social inquiry should provide 'reality-congruent' knowledge that can support collective efforts to understand how to pacify the totality of social relations during the species' remaining time on earth (Elias, 1978: 152ff; 2007b: 13).

An obvious criticism of Elias's position is that it is curious to maintain that sociology should possess those objectives but then fail to distinguish between ethically acceptable and unacceptable applications of accumulated knowledge. However, Elias opposed partisan inquiry on the grounds that sociology can best support the quest for controlling social forces by providing a detached understanding of long-term developments, and by enabling humans to transcend the fantasy content of world views that are often forged in the heat of double-bind processes.[18] Rough parallels can be found in approaches to world history that eschew overt normative commitments while adding that 'world history might be expected to diminish the lethality of group encounters by cultivating a sense of individual identification with the trials and tribulations of humanity as a whole' (McNeill, 1986: 16). It is hardly surprising that world historians have held back from locating empirical analysis in a more explicit normative framework. Confronted with major objections to long-term approaches, expressing ethical claims would simply intensify doubts about the objectivity and accuracy of their inquiries, inviting 'ridicule' or contempt for the larger collective enterprise (Sherratt, 1995). One must nevertheless ask if muted references to the 'cognitive interest' in the future well-being of humanity have missed an opportunity for outflanking the critics of world history (McNeill, 1986: Ch. 1). The main points are that the high levels of specialization or 'overspecialization' (on which world histories depend) invariably run ahead of efforts to reach higher levels of

synthesis; that the insistence on focusing on the most 'reliable source material' can become an impediment to the analysis of long-term trajectories; and that the retreat into analyses of short-run phenomena damages the prospects of using collective energies to master unregulated and unstable social processes (Elias, 2007b: 176). From that angle, a critical approach to long-term developments can counterbalance the ways in which 'overspecialization' can contribute (albeit unwittingly) to the ambiguities of interconnectedness; the former can support measures to 'widen the scope of emotional identification' in a context in which the tendency to focus on the production of highly specialized knowledge can have the largely unintended negative political consequences that were mentioned earlier.

The ambiguities of interconnectedness were never far from Kant's conception of a 'universal history from a cosmopolitan point of view'. Its central purposes were to locate the contemporary era in long-run trajectories and to encourage modes of social learning in which moral cosmopolitanism shapes dominant attitudes to the problems of the global age. In an interesting parallel with Elias's comments that future generations may regard moderns as the 'late barbarians' who were passive in the face of large-scale poverty, Kant argued that the levels of detachment that long-term perspectives provide were essential for confronting legacies to future generations and for reflecting on how 'posterity' will 'cope with the burden of history as … transmitted to them after a few centuries' (Kant, 1970: 190). Universal history from a cosmopolitan point of view had the double task of understanding what earlier generations contributed to the evolution of *human* capacities, and of prompting reflections on how current generations could use their inheritance to 'leave an honourable memorial of themselves' (Kant, 1970: 190).

Kant's observations have greater force if it is the case that the human race is in the midst of global transformations that are as profound as the transition from hunting and gathering societies to settled agricultural systems that occurred in the Holocene period, transformations that are captured by the claim that the species has already entered a new era, the Anthropocene period. That being the case, the central political issue is whether the products of moral-practical learning can alter the future course of human development through combined social-structural and psychological changes that are as radical as anything that has occurred in the past, and that make demands on humans that are as great as those that accompanied the transition from early societies to the first states (de Swaan, 1995: 27ff). Central here is what past states-systems contributed to the evolution of universal principles based on shared vulnerabilities to forms of mental and physical suffering that are intelligible everywhere and form the most accessible points of solidarity between strangers. Long-term processes can be analysed to promote requisite levels of detachment from national frames of reference as well as concerns about posterity that improve the prospects that accumulated moral reserves will be harnessed effectively to create a 'tolerable future for humanity' (McNeill, 1995b: 26).

Conclusion

The last 6000 years of history have displayed an overall trend towards the formation of larger monopolies of power accompanied by increasing human interconnectedness and the widening of the scope of emotional identification. Those long-term processes have

generated unprecedented forms of collective social power and attendant ambiguities. Problems with developing frameworks of thought that meet complex political challenges have arisen repeatedly. Contemporary manifestations of tests of the human capacity to enlarge the circle of cooperation are evident in the gulf between parochial loyalties and the levels of detachment, restraint and foresight that are necessary if the species is to control the various dimensions of interconnectedness.

More abstract identities and detached world views underpin global frameworks of communication that have the task of designing principles of coexistence between human groups that have been forced against their will to live together. As the highest global steering systems, international societies have had a major role to play in moderating the effects of insider–outsider dualisms so that wider systems of cooperation can emerge. They have been the principal mechanisms for exploring the possibility of embodying basic forms of human solidarity in, for example, the laws of war. But they have also provided abundant evidence of the difficulties involved in institutionalizing cosmopolitan conventions that protect all humans from pointless suffering. The influence of insider–outsider dualisms on the course of world history can hardly be overestimated; however, societies of states reveal that social learning does not find expression only in the development of ever larger territorial concentrations of power or in the creation of more inventive ways of extracting resources from nature. But whether global civilizing processes can keep pace with further advances in human interconnectedness is still unclear. Closer links with the study of world history can shed light on past achievements in controlling violent and non-violent harm during 'humanity's pre-history'. They can also inform the analysis of the ongoing quest for levels of detachment and foresight that can enable the species to undergo a global civilizing process that frees the coming phases of human interconnectedness from earlier tensions and ambiguities. All contemporary political projects and platforms need to be measured against that ethical yardstick.

Notes

1 Since Elias is not a familiar name in International Relations, it is perhaps worth adding that he was born in Breslau, Germany in 1897. He studied philosophy and medicine prior to specializing in sociology. In 1933, shortly after Hitler's rise to power, Elias left Germany for Paris and then London where he completed *The civilizing process*, which was first published in Switzerland in 1939. Over the next 25 years, Elias continued to refine the argument of that work, but published little. He was appointed in 1954, at the age of 57, to his first permanent academic position, which he held in the Sociology Department at the University of Leicester. Between his retirement and his death in August 1990, Elias published 15 books on many dimensions of the civilizing process but increasingly focusing on long-term processes of development that had affected humanity as a whole. His work is now widely regarded as one of the most original contributions to 20th-century sociology.

2 On the specific relationship between literacy and detachment, see Goody (1977: 37) and Elias (2001a: 190ff). Elias (2001a: 230ff) discusses the gap between global integration and attachments to the national habitus that 'are amongst the most dangerous structural features of the transitional stage at which we now find ourselves'. On the other hand, the emergence of the human rights culture, which marks a 'higher plane of integration' revolving around new relationships between the individual and society, revealed that humans might yet use

their unique biological capacity for cultural adaptation to develop higher levels of emotional identification with the species as a whole.

3   Elias (2007a: 128–129) contended that there is very little to 'choose between the torment which people threaten to inflict on each other as a result of radiation poisoning — the slow and painful death in the aftermath of an atomic battle — and the torment American Indians in the heyday of their independence continuously threatened to inflict upon each other'. What changes 'in the way in which people maim, kill and torture each other in the course of their power struggles' are 'the techniques used and the numbers of people concerned' (Elias, 2007b: 175). A central theme in Elias's writings is that the industrialization of war is associated with a general decline in the pleasure in killing that was so pronounced in many earlier eras.

4   Elias acknowledged that societies have recognized in different eras that they need 'certain common rules of conduct and … corresponding restraints upon themselves' if they are to live together 'without fear' (Elias, 1996: 137–138). But levels of success have lagged behind such shared understandings. As noted later in this article, a shortcoming of Elias's approach is the neglect of how societies escape such relations. The development of resident ambassadors, concerts of great powers and 'contrived' balances of power are all consequences of breakthroughs to more detached perspectives on the forces that push states in unplanned and undesirable directions. In those cases, the movement beyond 'highly emotive' responses to national threats was designed to produce 'realistic practice' that could bring unmastered processes under control. It is important to add that Elias also used the 'double-bind process' to describe failures to acquire detached knowledge that could yield greater control over the natural world. A central theme is that human societies and the social sciences have yet to achieve the levels of detachment that have resulted in 'reality-congruent' knowledge and mastery of nature.

5   Similar developments occurred in the Americas and China circa 6000 BC, in the Mediterranean by 5000 BC and in Africa circa 2000 BC (see Scarre, 2005: Ch. 5).

6   It is important to add that the rise of agriculturalism did not always lead to state-formation and, when it did, states took several millennia to emerge. However, that trend was sufficiently strong to become the pacemaker of social and political development.

7   It is important to guard against notions of historical inevitability. Diamond (1997) maintains that some societies chose not to follow others down the path to agricultural systems of production, or embarked on that course only to decide that hunting and gathering techniques could satisfy their needs without incurring the labour and other costs associated with agriculturalism. Some groups tried to keep one step ahead of the dominant processes by continually moving away from the main centres of state-building. But the overall trend would spell the end of hunting and gathering societies that had been the dominant forms of social organization since the emergence of anatomically modern human beings around 150,000–200,000 years ago.

8   How peaceful early societies were remains a controversial area (on war casualties, see Keeley, 1996; see also Carman and Harding, 1999; Gat 2006). Less controversial is the fact that agrarian society 'was doomed to violence' (Gellner, 1991: 154).

9   Keegan (1994: 389ff) maintains that the Ancient Greeks were the first to cross the military threshold because they organized to maximize injury to enemy forces, sacrificing in the process ethico-religious constraints on violence that were often recognized by other civilizations that would eventually be forced to adapt to 'the Western way of warfare' (see also Dawson, 1996).

10 The evidence is that cultural diversity was higher in the Upper Paleolithic Era (circa 40,000–10,000 years ago) than in the previous 200,000 years of the Middle Paleolithic Era; but the pace of change seems to have quickened in the subsequent Epipaleolithic period in tandem with cultural adaptation and learning (Scarre, 2005: 205). Estimates are that the number of languages in Europe alone increased from around 20–40 to about 400 in the period between 4500 and 2500 BC (Buzan and Little, 2000: 143).

11 'Fission' usually occurred when population growth strained the carrying capacity of the natural environment. Estimates of world population between 10,000–8000 BC suggest that there were around 200,000 village communities in that period. There may have been about 600,000 social systems circa 1000 BC. By 500 AD, the number of political units had already fallen to 200 (Carneiro, 1978). Of course, fewer than a dozen sovereign states have dominated the modern world.

12 As analysts of the rise of historical consciousness have argued, that conceptual revolution was largely the result of transformations in the scale of social organization that required advances in 'the reality-congruence of knowledge' (Butterfield, 1981; Elias, 2007a: 146ff).

13 There is no space to consider the role of trade and commerce in promoting such transformations of consciousness. The growth of state power and patterns of domestic and international pacification secured the environment in which those additional transformations could occur. Indeed, from the rise of merchant classes in the Sumerian world, state managers have often been the driving force behind the widening of economic networks (McNeill, 1979: 63–64). Autocatalytic processes meant that state-formation was both cause and effect of lengthening commercial relations. Curtin (1984) has drawn attention to the part that trade diasporas and trading settlements played in cross-cultural brokerage. The development of lingua franca such as the Akkadian script around the third millennium BC in the Ancient Near East is often stressed as an early example of success in widening frameworks of communication.

14 At different points in human history, such cultural transmission belts may have been as much a cause as an effect of the development of long-distance trade, at times fostering common moral codes that facilitated the widening of the sphere of commercial exchange (see Curtin, 1984).

15 Linklater (2004) discusses references to civility and civilizing processes in English School writings to denote global efforts to control the capacity to injure. Linklater and Suganami (2006) consider the emphasis that the English School has placed on the diplomatic agreements that are designed to institutionalize commitments to an international 'harm principle'. There is no evidence that an engagement with Elias's writings influenced the choice of terminology. But the parallels draw attention to major potentials for future theoretical synthesis.

16 There is no space here to consider the large issues that surround what world historians call the problem of historical periodization.

17 I am grateful to Stephen Mennell for this formulation. On changing gradients in relations between men and women, parents and children, the European societies and the former colonies and in relations between rulers and ruled, see Elias (1996: 25).

18 Elias believed that detached inquiry can mediate between primary or everyday involvement in social processes and 'secondary involvement' that harnesses advances in 'reality-congruent' knowledge in order to enable humans to 'muddle their way out of several blind alleys and to learn how to make their life together more pleasant, more meaningful and worthwhile' (Elias, 1991: 146). I am indebted to Eric Dunning for drawing my attention to the notion of secondary involvement.

References

Booth K, Wheeler NJ (2007) *The Security Dilemma: Fear, Cooperation and Trust*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

Bull H, Watson A (eds) (1984) *The Expansion of International Society*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Butler J (2004) *Precarious Lives: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London: Verso.

Butterfield H (1981) *The Origins of History*. London: Eyre Methuen.

Buzan B, Little R (2000) *International Systems in World History: Remaking the Study of International Relations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Carman J, Harding A (eds) (1999) *Ancient Warfare: Archaeological Perspectives*. Stroud: Sutton.

Carneiro RL (1970) A theory of the origin of the state. *Science* 169: 733–738.

Carneiro RL (1978) Political expansion as an expression of the principle of competitive exclusion. In: Cohen R, Service ER (eds) *Origins of the State: The Anthropology of Political Evolution*. Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Institutions.

Christian D (2004) *Maps of Time: An Introduction to Big History*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Crone P (1989) *Pre-Industrial Societies: Anatomy of the Pre-Modern World*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Curtin PD (1984) *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Dawson D (1996) *The Origins of Western Warfare*: *Militarism and Morality in the Ancient World*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

De Swaan A (1995) Widening circles of identification: Emotional concerns in sociogenetic perspective. *Theory, Culture and Society* 12 (2): 25–39.

Deudney D (2000) Regrounding realism: Anarchy, security and changing material contexts. *Security Studies* 10 (1): 1–42.

Diamond J (1997) *Guns, Germs and Steel: A Short History of Everybody for the Last 13,000 Years*. London: Jonathan Cape.

Durkheim E (1993) *Ethics and the Sociology of Morals*. New York: Prometheus Books.

Elias N (1978) *What is Sociology?* New York: Columbia University Press.

Elias N (1986) The genesis of sport as a social problem. In: Elias N, Dunning E (eds) *The Quest for Excitement: Sport and Leisure in the Civilizing Process*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Elias N (1991) *The Symbol Theory*. London: Sage.

Elias N (1996) *The Germans: Power Struggles and the Development of Habitus in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*. Cambridge: Polity.

Elias N (1998a) Technization and civilization. In: Goudsblom J, Mennell S (eds) *The Norbert Elias Reader*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Elias N (1998b) The breakdown of civilization. In: Goudsblom J, Mennell S (eds) *The Norbert Elias Reader*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Elias N (1998c) An interview in Amsterdam. In: Goudsblom J, Mennell S (eds) *The Norbert Elias Reader*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Elias N (2000) *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Elias N (2001a) *The Society of Individuals*. London: Sage.

Elias N (2001b) *The Loneliness of the Dying*. London: Continuum.

Elias N (2007a) *An Essay on Time*. Dublin: University College Dublin Press.

Elias N (2007b) *Involvement and Detachment*. Dublin: University College Dublin Press.

Fernandez-Armesto F (1995) *Millennium: A History of Our Last Thousand Years*. London: BCA.

Fraser N (2007) Transnationalizing the public sphere: On the legitimacy and efficacy of public opinion in a post-Westphalian world. *Theory, Culture and Society* 24 (4): 7–30.

Gat A (2006) *War in Human Civilization*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gellner E (1991) *Plough, Sword and Book: The Structure of Human History*. London: Paladin.

Gong G (1984) *The 'Standard of Civilization' in International Society*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Goody J (1977) *The Domestication of the Savage Mind*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Goudsblom J (1990) Norbert Elias, 1897–1990. *Theory, Culture and Society* 7 (4): 169–174.

Goudsblom J (1992) *Fire and Civilization*. London: Penguin.

Habermas J (1979) History and evolution. *Telos* (39): 5–44.

Habermas J (1984) *Communication and the Evolution of Society*. London: Heinemann.

Hallpike CR (1986) *The Principles of Social Evolution*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Hobson J (2004) *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kant I (1965) *The Metaphysical Elements of Justice*. New York: Bobbs-Merrill.

Kant I (1970) Idea for a universal history from a cosmopolitan point of view. In: Forsyth M, Keens-Soper M, and Savigear P (eds) *Theory of International Relations: Selected Texts from Gentili to Treitschke*. London, Allen and Unwin.

Kant I (1991) Idea for a universal history from a cosmo-political point of view. In: Reiss HS (ed) *Kant: Political Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Keegan J (1994) *A History of Warfare*. London: Pimlico.

Keeley LH (1996) *War Before Civilization: The Myth of the Peaceful Savage*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Linklater A (1998) *The Transformation of Political Community: Ethical Foundations of the Post-Westphalian Era*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Linklater A (2001) Citizenship, humanity and cosmopolitan harm conventions. *International Political Science Review*, special issue, 22(3): 261–277.

Linklater A (2004) Norbert Elias, the civilizing process and international relations. *International Politics* 41 (1): 3–35.

Linklater A (2007) Public spheres and civilizing processes. *Theory, Culture and Society* 24(4): 25–31.

Linklater A, Suganami H (2006) *The English School of International Relations: A Contemporary Reassessment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

MacLeod CW (1979) *Collected Essays*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

McNeill WH (1979) *A World History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

McNeill WH (1983) *The Great Frontier: Freedom and Hierarchy in Modern Times*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

McNeill WH (1986) *Mythistory and Other Essays*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

McNeill WH (1989) *Arnold Toynbee: A Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

McNeill WH (1995a) *Keeping Together in Time: Dance and Drill in Human History*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

McNeill WH (1995b) The changing shape of world history. *History and Theory* 34 (2): 8–26.

McNeill JR, McNeill WH (2003) *The Human Web: A Bird's Eye View of World History*. London: W. W. Norton.

Mann M (1986) *The Sources of Social Power*, *Volume One: A History of Power from the Beginning to AD 1760*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Manning P (2003) *Navigating World History: Historians Create a Global Past*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

Mennell S (1984) The formation of we-images: A process theory. In: Calhoun C (ed) *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Mennell S (1990) The globalization of human society as a very long-term social process: Elias's theory. *Theory, Culture and Society* 7 (2): 359–371.

Mennell S (1998) *Norbert Elias: An Introduction*. Dublin: University College Dublin Press.

Moore B (2000) *Moral Purity and Persecution in History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Muthu S (2003) *Enlightenment Against Empire*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Northrup D (2005) Globalization and the great convergence: Rethinking world history in the long-term. *Journal of World History* 16 (3): 249–268.

O'Neill O (1996) *Towards Justice and Virtue: A Constructive Account of Practical Reason*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rorty R (1989) *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Scarre C (ed) (2005) *The Human Past: World Prehistory and the Evolution of Human Societies*. London: Thames and Hudson.

Sherratt A (1995) Reviving the grand narrative: Archaeology and long term change. *European Journal of Archaeology* 3 (1): 1–32.

Spier F (1996) *The Structure of Big History: From the Big Bang to Today*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Stavrianos LS (1990) *Lifelines from Our Past*. London: I.B. Tauris.

Thucydides (1928) *History of the Peloponnesian War*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Toynbee A (1978) *Mankind and Mother Earth*. London: Paladin.

van Krieken R (1998) *Norbert Elias*. London: Routledge.

van Vree W (1999) *Meetings, Manners and Civilization: The Development of Modern Meeting Behaviour*. Leicester: University of Leicester Press.

Wendt A (2003) Why a world state is inevitable. *European Journal of International Relations* 9 (4): 491–542.

Westermarck E (1908) *The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas: Volume 2*. London: Macmillan.

Yoffee N (2006) *Myths of the Archaic State: Evolution of the Earliest Cities, States and Civilizations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Biographical note

Andrew Linklater is Woodrow Wilson Professor of International Politics at Aberystwyth University in Wales. He has published extensively in the area of international relations theory. His current research focuses harm in world politics, a project that involves building new connections between international relations theory and process sociology. The first of three projected books on that subject, *Theorising Harm: Volume One of the Problem of Harm in World Politics*, will be published by Cambridge University Press in 2011.